

How to take better care of your clients

Now the 'back office' of old should be quickly converted into the 'front office'

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BUSINESS skills facilitators are coming across new demands in the learning solutions requested by companies, a demand for engagement skills to be taught to those workers who, traditionally, have not had to engage with customers.

Vanessa Bluen of the Consultant Powerhouse explains this in terms of emerging trends which show that the "back office" of old is quickly becoming the front office.

"There used to be a gap between the client relationship people and the technical and operational experts in a company," she says. "Not anymore. There are new clients out there now. They have greater demands and less time, and they want



Vanessa Bluen

their problems thoroughly understood and quickly solved.

"This requires interaction with company people who can handle client contact situations competently, and who have the skills and competence to implement a solution to whatever problems the

client may have."

Bluen's experience is that these new demands apply to technical service, as well as the professional services arenas.

"There was a time when banks, for example, had their back office people who understood the intricacies of the financial products but had no contact with clients, while frontline staff would interact with the customers.

"The new clients don't have the time or patience to wait for the frontline person to find out what's required and come back to them. They demand a quick solution."

So, what's required, according to Bluen, are technical experts who have the people skills, and client relationship people who have an understanding of the operational complexities.

"We find the key skill is the ability to listen," she says.

"The technical experts often don't have the skills to decode what the client is saying.

"To provide a timeous, effective solution, you need to read the signs

and hear what the real problem is."

Bluen refers to what Australian sales training guru Keith Dugdale calls placing yourself in the client's world.

"Dugdale says service people, whatever world they may be in, need to have an insight into the client's world. It's no good being an expert in your own world if you cannot do that."

According to research, she says, only 28 percent of those surveyed say they want a relationship with a brand.

"They say they want a relationship with people – people who understand them and who can solve their problems. It's not about brand values, it's about relevant communication."

So, the trends are showing, there is a demand for training along the lines of "client service skills for non-client service teams".

"It's all in line with the new approach that everyone in the organisation is a client service person," Bluen says.

"In these economic times it's

becoming increasingly difficult to grow businesses by increasing the number of customers, so you have to grow revenue by taking better care of those you have.

"That's the only way you can retain them, and it's only through building personal relationships that you can be sure of repeat business in the years to come," she says.

"Training interventions have to be based on this principle. And there's no longer time for long, drawn-out processes.

"Learning and development processes must be short, focused and very relevant. Our clients want from us a tool kit that they can apply effectively and see immediate results from."

"And at the moment, what they want are programmes that turn operational teams into the new business leaders, that make the back office the front office, all in the cause of satisfied customers.

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