

FLORIDA BLUE:

Improving Business With Onboarding

The Situation

From the Affordable Care Act to the evolution of pay for performance, the world of healthcare is no stranger to shake-ups and transitions. As a player in the health insurance industry for more than 70 years, Florida Blue is always looking for innovative, customer-focused healthcare solutions. Florida Blue aims to provide affordable plans, offer personal support, and build strong communities that promote health and wellness for all.

In 2010, Florida Blue served 4 million of its own healthcare members and covered another 15.5 million people in 16 states through affiliated companies. Florida Blue needed a steady flow of knowledgeable call center sales agents to respond to business growth in the consumer segment as a result of healthcare reform. This demand called for a talent initiative that would give new call center sales agents the sales skills and product knowledge needed to meet the changing needs of the healthcare industry.

The sales training team initiated the Sales Talent Management Program (STMP), a program that represented a major update and relaunch of the existing training program

for call center sales agents. SMTP's goals were to: reduce the time for new call center sales representatives to reach competency levels, increase revenue, increase customer satisfaction, and increase first-time call resolution.

More Than Just Another Training Program

A Holistic Approach

The sales training team consistently works with leadership across the enterprise to align training goals with annual business objectives. In 2010 one goal for the company was to "prepare for the future strategically" by getting ahead of the competition. STMP's goals clearly aligned with this organizational objective because SMTP prepared Florida Blue's business-to-consumer sales call center for the increase in calls that would come with growth.

To meet their goals, the sales training team and the sales leadership team wanted to update new hire training because:

- It took 12 weeks to complete the existing program.
- Students needed an average of six to nine months to reach full competency.
- The number of inbound calls was increasing and they needed to get new hires up to speed faster.

Taking a holistic approach, the sales training team developed a profile of a successful sales call center agent. They looked at high-performing agents and created a list of competencies that were associated with success. They used this information to develop a pre-hire evaluation form to identify candidates who had the right qualities.

To decrease the amount of time new hires spent in the program, the sales training team looked at the existing program and identified ways to streamline content. They were able to compress the program from 12 weeks to six. These updates transformed the original new hire program into STMP.

Sales Talent Management Program

Each new hire cohort (15-20 people) goes through STMP, which is led by instructors who have sales call center experience and are able to share best practices and real-life examples. In addition to completing live training sessions, participants' complete virtual classroom training, online learning, call observation, and role-playing activities.

The content includes preparation for questions and situations that sales agents may encounter during their phone conversations. Additionally, they receive instruction on enterprise information (mission, vision, and values), health product knowledge, consultative services knowledge, enterprise systems and tools, effective communication

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skills, the ability to listen and handle calls, and regulatory and compliance requirements. Throughout the program, participants must complete “performance gates.” In other words, to advance to the next part of the program, participants need to “pass” knowledge assessments.

Once participants have completed all the required training modules, a four-week “nesting period” begins; prior to STMP, new hires went straight to working in the call center after training. During the “nesting” phase, trainees take live calls and receive just-in-time coaching following each call to address any issues and performance gaps. New hires are held to the same standards and performance goals as all other call center agents.

To track employee improvement, weekly goals are set for each individual and data submitted by clients are analyzed to measure performance. The “nesting period” reinforces correct behaviors and habits and enhances knowledge retention from the earlier training.

The Results

While data are not available to compare STMP-trained new hires with those trained using the old curriculum, the training department set its own programmatic goals. Since STMP started, approximately 225 new hires have completed the program. Below is an outline of the training department’s goals and the actual outcomes.

Goal 1: 70 percent of new hires would reach full competency in 60 days following training.
Actual: 86 percent of new hires met this goal, with 35 percent reaching full competency in just 30 days.

As a result of increased productivity, the company added $80 million in revenue.

Goal 2: Customer “highly satisfied” rate of 66 percent.
Actual: Customer “highly satisfied” rate of 93 percent.

Goal 3: First-time call resolution 73 percent of the time.
Actual: First-time call resolution 77 percent of the time.

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Lessons Learned

- Prior to developing training initiatives, make sure that they are in line with business objectives. Florida Blue's sales training team would wait each year for the senior leadership team to determine strategic goals for the business. After this meeting, the sales training team met to identify actions they could take, such as adding new programs or changing existing ones, that would help advance the business.

- Provide new hires with real-time feedback on the work they are doing. Being immediately praised or corrected helps to solidify strong work behaviors and divert incorrect actions. Florida Blue provided all new call center agents with coaches who worked with them after calls to identify what went well and areas for improvement. This increased time to competency and reinforced lessons from earlier training.

Additional ATD Resources

- *10 Steps to Successful Strategic Planning*
- *2016 State of Sales Training*
- *Measuring the Success of Sales Training*
- *Sales Training Basics*
- *Success in Selling*

Submit Your Story

Can you tell us about a challenge your talent development function faced, a solution your team implemented, a program your team created, and the results your organization has seen? Organizations of all sizes are encouraged to apply. Submit your story today!

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