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Calling on Coaching at Rogers Communications

A diversified communications and media company, Rogers Communications is Canada's largest provider of wireless communications services and one of the country's leading providers of cable television, high-speed Internet and telephone services. Through Rogers Media, they are engaged in radio and television broadcasting, televised shopping, magazines and trade publications, sports entertainment, and digital media.

Like most telecom companies, Rogers maintains a nationwide network of call centers as the primary point of contact for customers. Providing outstanding service in this setting is the highest priority.

In 2013, Rogers set out to ensure high-quality customer service by integrating coaching directly into its call center operations. "The best way to improve customer service was to build a coaching culture within our call centers. We wanted to democratize coaching by using the best coaching skills to engage and empower our employees," says Fadel Chbihna, senior vice president, customer care.

In recognition of Rogers' work toward building a robust coaching culture, the International Coach Federation (ICF) awarded the organization the 2015 ICF International Prism Award. The Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, fulfill rigorous professional standards, address key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture. (Learn more about the award at Coachfederation.org/prism.)

A Distinct Difference

The program's cornerstone is the training and support it offers to Rogers' 400 front-line call-center managers, all of whom receive coach-specific training based on the ICF Core Competencies. In addition to learning coaching skills, these managers are trained to understand the distinctions between coaching, teaching, directing and performance management conversations. Their job descriptions stipulate that they spend 30 minutes per week in coaching conversations with each member of their team (for each manager, this equals approximately eight to nine hours per week). This coaching time is protected, not discretionary.

"We wanted to define coaching for managers and give them a strong base of training and practice," says Josee Bourdages, vice president customer care. "We know it's been successful because we see the results."

Additionally, the call centers have leveraged internal coach practitioners across the broader Rogers enterprise. Starting in 2012, Rogers partnered with Essential Impact to deliver ICF-approved coach-specific training to 600 directors and 145 human resources professionals.

"We introduced coaching as an enabler of the cultural transformation that would position Rogers to win. We knew we could change culture, one team at a time, and that's what we've seen in our call centers," says Jim Reid, chief human resources officer. Essential Impact's commitment to ICF standards helped lay the foundation for building an internal coaching competency: Rogers now has 24 internal coach practitioners, including the organization's Prism Award nominating coach and director of coaching, Silvia Lulka, ACC—a former Rogers HR director who now works in the company's call center operations team. To date, more than 50 call center managers have received coaching from internal coach practitioners.

Results Worth Broadcasting

Rogers has isolated the business impact of managers using coaching skills. As coaching was deployed at each call center, the site would outperform its historical performance and the performance of other sites where coaching had not yet been deployed. Overall call center revenue had a double-digit increase across comparable periods year over year, and engagement across 4,000 call center employees increased by seven percent over 24 months. Rogers also cites double-digit improvement

across its call centers in several key leading indicators, including increased customer satisfaction and decreased customer escalations. Since implementing coaching, Rogers has also seen a 72 percent improvement in retention among call center employees over 24 months.

Qualitative findings demonstrate that the tone and style of call center representatives' conversations with customers have changed, as well. "Coaching was the natural enabler of our customer-centric model that focuses on quality and on the emotional connection between call center agents and customers," says Andres Piderit, vice president consumer care.

In addition to feeling greater empowerment and accountability, agents are applying coaching skills modeled by their managers to their interactions with customers. "Our customers have noticed a difference because our employees have noticed a difference," Lulka says. "We were in a place three years ago where, if you'd asked us to point to good feedback from our customers, we would have really had to look for it. We are in a place now where we have call centers that decorate their walls with positive customer feedback."

Changing the Game

In addition to yielding positive business impacts, coaching has helped enhance the lives of call-center leaders and employees. In a program evaluation, one leader who'd completed coach-specific training reported, "I've used coaching as a parent in helping my daughter overcome her fears. I

beamed with pride recently when she saw me get nervous and helped me by reminding me of how I had [using coaching skills] with her." Meanwhile, call-center agents report that, as a result of coaching conversations with their managers, they feel more accountable for their work and have a better perception of their relationship with their managers. One agent said, "During coaching conversations, my manager doesn't tell me what I need to work on. He asks me what I want to work on."

The coaching culture at Rogers has also strengthened the organization's approach to change management. "Coaching is now built into how we introduce change," Lulka says. "Anytime we communicate a change with a significant behavioral or skill component, we provide a toolkit that helps managers use coaching skills and questions to help manage the change."

As Rogers' coaching offerings evolve, the coaching program's leaders and champions say that they'll continue to identify opportunities to enhance the organization's emerging coaching culture. For them, ensuring that call-center managers and agents have the skills they need to cultivate an atmosphere of openness, trust and learning is a very personal goal indeed. "As an ICF coach, I get up every day, and all I think about is how to integrate coaching into the fabric of the organization," Lulka says.

Formed in 1995, today the International Coach Federation (ICF) is the leading global organization, with more than 23,000* members, dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high professional standards, providing independent certification, and building a network of credentialed coaches. We exist to support and advance the coaching profession through programs and standards supported by our members and to be an authoritative source on coaching information and research for the public.

**Numbers as of October 2015. Numbers are subject to change month to month.*



Coachfederation.org