EIGHT "SIZZLING" SUMMER LEADERSHIP TIPS

Focus on what you can control: End-of-summer back-burner activities for leading in these unique times.

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Summer doesn't "end" this year until September 22nd! Ahhh... It brings back memories of lazy days, no school, taking it easy and playing with friends. I guess you can see that I am longing for those carefree days. This summer has left us lazy days fraught with anxieties, there is no school (may not be any either!) and longing to play with friends freely again.

Regardless, I am committed to overcoming the threatening realities of living through a pandemic by focusing on what I CAN do: offer support, a sense of possibility and some encouragement in creating an alternative reality for those we lead. I'd like to inject some "sizzling" approaches to include in your leadership lineup during these unique times.

Although we have all grown up, summer remains the classic time of year for vacations, family time and perhaps a bit of a slowdown in day-to-day business activities (unless, of course, this IS your busy season). Summer also opens up opportunities to engage in quick and thoughtful analysis of your organization, your leadership and the future of both.

I think of the following tips as "SIZZLERS." These are things normally considered to be "back burner" that are brought forward to prepare for fall, budgets, holidays, the "new normal," etc.

1. Take Off

Inventory your staff's vacation time. *Who has some? Who hasn't used any?* Remind your folks to get a vacation scheduled. I witnessed the power of vacations in a client engagement where the unit leader went to all his people and reminded them of the vacation days they had left. (The HR policy was use or lose). He began this task early in the spring and proactively saw to it that his team had scheduled their vacations. He also saw to it that they actually TOOK them. Often this is not a problem for hourly workers. They have excellent time-off inventory skills. But it may be worth looking at your management team and, of course, yourself. There is no glory in not taking your vacation. If you feel that your organization cannot get along without you that is a MUCH bigger problem.

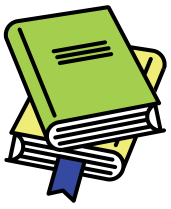


2. Have Fun

Sponsor something "spirited" and fun. Ask the front line to come up with an activity, contest, game or theme for an event and then GO FOR IT. If your first thought is, "We have no budget for that," shame on you!

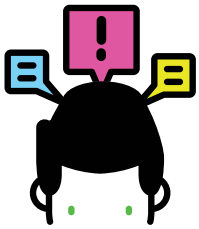
Creativity is the name of the game in hard times. Think in terms of "*what we can do*." Create a TAKE OFF board on your intranet, electronic newsletter or in the break room if you're in the office. Ask staff to post pictures, funny stories, etc., about what they did during their TAKE OFF. You never know what you may learn about people! Create a *fun* distraction. Ask for suggestions to BEAT THE HEAT. Often, people have great ideas. Who knows... this could be something you publish to the rest of the enterprise.

3. Read Up



Summer is always known for reading. What are your favorite beach books or summer reads? Read something fun about business... maybe some new slant on customer service skills or how customers are changing. Discover new ways to thrill and delight those you serve. Be the leader who sponsors growth in a multitude of ways that are not always strictly job related. Round Robin podcasts or industry articles get folks educated about the contact center industry.

4. Remove the Rose-Colored Glasses



Take a good hard look around your operation. Deliberately separate yourself from your business unit to get a new perspective. Ask some of your colleagues to give you an honest view of how they see your operation. Pretend you are in the acquisition business. Would you buy your department? If not, why not? If so, why? What do you offer? What are you really good at? Are you able to articulate the contact center's "value proposition"? Are you able to identify the weaknesses? What needs to be improved? I believe that the number one issue in operational improvement is leadership blindness... being blind to issues and operational realities and enjoying sublime beliefs that differ greatly from reality.

What is the reality when you "catch" an agent hanging up on callers? Blind leaders celebrate their brilliance at rooting out this evil, rather than consider the possibility that the calls-handled target is being met by fraudulent means. The agent was trying to give what was asked of them. Both parties are wearing rose-colored glasses. Leaders believe that it is a fair objective and agents believe that hanging up on caller is the only way to meet that objective. Belief and certainty can be so strong they blind us to areas of weakness. So in this case, it would be TAKE OFF the rose-colored glasses; force yourself to take a "real-life" view and adjust to modern times—ranges NOT targets.

5. Be Specific

The time has come to master the *art of specificity*. We are surrounded by the hollow ring of objectives, desires, goals and the like that are organized around concepts such as "provide a great customer experience." Often, ZERO work has been done to clearly define what that means and what that requires from a process, technology, financial, training, hiring and (most importantly) behavioral perspective.

When definition is lacking, folks are free to make up their own minds about what the experience ought to be and to act accordingly. How well defined are your objectives? Are they specific enough? Check again!

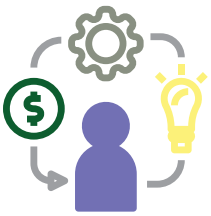
6. Don't Jump... to Solutions

We recently chose to decline two potential engagements because the requests to implement "solutions" did not emerge from a well-defined and specific problem. Both requests had to do with developing training solutions for what we deemed to be process and operational issues. One engagement had the goal to "change the culture" of the contact center via a training program. We felt very strongly (and even more so after some due diligence) that the upfront work was incomplete. The determination that this was a training issue was made way too early and with too little information. My experience told me that whoever took on this assignment was doomed to failure because it is very unlikely that any stand-alone training program would have the desired impact. Despite these challenging times, we could not in good conscience proceed with a proposal as requested. Be sure you know WHAT you are trying to accomplish before looking for HOW to accomplish it.

> "Summer afternoon, Summer afternoon... the two most beautiful words in the English language."
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> —HENRY JAMES, AMERICAN AUTHOR

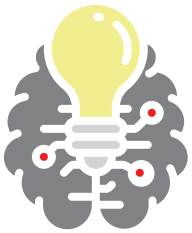
7. Think Process

Process is the ultimate protector of productivity. We all need to do more with less. But assume that you have had to justify (like so many others) all your head count expense. Before doling out pink slips, look



for productivity gains by addressing operational processes. First, identify them; then organize processes by *frequency and complexity*. Your focus needs to be on high-frequency events and activities. These are NOT necessarily the most talked about! Focus your analytical energy on high-frequency/high-value contacts. This approach assures that you are attacking the processes that will yield the greatest return. Look at each step in the process and identify ways to improve.

8. Hire Someone Smarter Than You



One of the best moves I have ever made in the 35 years of owning my business has been hiring people who were SMARTER and DIFFERENT from me. Leaders often suffer from a tendency to hire folks like themselves. It is comfortable, non-threatening, and ultimately not much good to the organization or to the leader.

Leaders need to find complementary skills, fill in gaps, and enjoy the challenges that come from another perspective. Of course, it is important to avoid the snipers. Learn to be specific about requirements and honestly challenge your own comfort zone. This is truly a skill required to genuinely progress as a leader and in your career.

Focus on What You Can Control

Leaders across the contact center industry are facing challenges that none of us could have predicted. So give yourself a break and focus on conditions you can do something about. Provide yourself and your teams with the encouragement to take that time off, rest and renew, see things differently, and enjoy the rest of the summer!



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