Vision on Culture for a BPO

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Introduction

Culture is often talked about but rarely defined and even rarer, truly implemented. This white paper will outline and describe what it means for a BPO organization to deliver a culture of transparency, dignity and service for all constituents (employees, clients, vendor partners, and equity stake holders). When this culture becomes part of a company's DNA, not just something in an HR manual or a poster on the wall, everyone benefits. Clients will benefit from a high-quality, low-turnover work force. Employees will benefit from a work environment that becomes a home. Equity stake holders benefit from long-term clients that are profitable. Following will provide an overview of areas of focus.

Employee Culture

To build a family, a community, where employees care about each other, the clients they work for and the company they are employed with, it starts with a mentality of Servant Leadership. Servant Leadership is where the main goal of the leader is to serve. This is different from traditional leadership where the leader's main focus is profitability or growth or some other company metric or even worse, their own personal gain. A servant leader shares power, puts the needs of people first, and helps people to develop and perform as highly as possible. In this inverted pyramid, instead of people working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve the people. When leaders serve first, everyone benefits as the organization grows due to the employees growing commitment and engagement. Attrition, a traditional BPO industry problem, becomes a non-concern. This servant leadership starts at the top with the CEO and flows through all levels of middle management to the front line. Front line employees should feel their Team Leader has their best interest at heart and will help them perform to their best level and progress in the organization on a career track if that's what they want.

In the BPO space, the term "agent" or "customer service rep," should be abolished. All front line employees should be "Advocates." More than just branding, the term Advocate defines a role of dignity where the employee is an advocate for the brand (client being served) as well as an advocate for the consumer or customer with a problem or need. Customer advocacy is a higher level of customer service which focuses on what is best for the customer. This higher level of customer support is ultimately better for the brand as it will result in higher levels of customer loyalty and satisfaction.

The Physical BPO space should be an environment that doesn't feel like a "cube farm," but a place of dignity. If employees are to be put first, they have to be given a work environment that reflects that. This means amenities such as comfortable and casual break out areas for informal discussions, on site cafés, game rooms, and personalized, interesting wall themes. The environment should be a place that employees are proud of and feel good to be part of.

Employees should be given as much transparency into company and client decisions as possible. The "why," should be explained and defined, before the "what." As important, ideas, suggestions and recommendations, should come from all levels and departments. An air of openness needs to exist where anyone is free to share ideas on any topic. Cross functional, ad hoc teams can be formed to tackle a specific project or problem. Within the team, it doesn't matter what the person's regular role or title is, on this particular project everyone's ideas and input can be valued.

Client Culture

The utmost priority is for the client to truly believe the BPO is a partner, not a vendor. This starts with transparency. The BPO needs to share all information and aspects of the business. Not only the victories need to be shared, but when there is a problem, regardless of why, this needs to be immediately brought to the forefront. Transparency includes allowing the client unfettered access to all employees and the facility. If they would like, a client office should be designated on site at the BPO.

To become a partner, not a vendor, the BPO needs to truly understand the client's business objectives. Rather than just following processes, the partner needs to determine what is the best practice to achieve the clients' goals. This may result in short-term steps backwards in terms of volume of transactions, but will ultimately make a stronger, longer term relationship as the client's business continues to grow. Quarterly Business Reviews should not just be a regurgitation of numbers, but a sharing of ideas that will seek to improve the Customer Experience.

The BPO partner needs to not just process transactions but add value to the business relationship by analyzing data and becoming an expert in the functions they are providing for the client. This will result in new innovative recommendations, whether that be in technology, people process, channel changes, or ways of doing business. The partner needs to have relationships and on-going engagement with multiple levels and disciplines with the client organization. Ultimately, the partner goal is to achieve "trusted advisor" status with the client.

Supplier Culture

Suppliers of the BPO, whether they be technology providers, staffing suppliers, consultants, or other resources, should be treated the same way employees and clients are. In that regard, goals should be shared and identified transparently, and the supplier should be encouraged to share ideas of improvement, even if they conflict with the initial requests. Supplier should be incented with a compensation model that encourages rewards for new ideas.

Community Culture

The BPO needs to be active in the greater community where its employees live. This may mean helping with education efforts or participating with local charities that are relevant to the employees or helping to solve local issues. This may mean working to improve local transportation or safety. This means being a good corporate citizen and working with local government to stimulate jobs. It is insuring that the company, employees and local community have a shared set of values.

Industry Facing Culture

The BPO needs to not only provide a great culture for its employees and clients, but needs to be seen as not only a participant , but a leader in the BPO space. The BPO needs to provide Thought Leadership to the industry and be active in conferences and industry events. The BPO needs to be willing to learn and gain back practices from industry resources such as COPC, Six Sigma, suppliers and competitors. Likewise, the BPO needs to participate on industry boards and lobbying groups to further the entire BPO practice.

Summary

A BPO that is focused solely on lower costs, or more volume or growth or some other inward-facing metric, will have high turnover in employees and ultimately have attrition with clients.

A BPO that truly demonstrates and builds a family/community environment with and for its employees, will retain those employees and they will be more engaged and truly be looking out for the best interests of the company and the brand they are servicing.

A BPO that truly seeks a partnership with its clients, rather than thinking of them purely as "revenue," will have a longer, deeper relationship that will be profitable for both parties.

A BPO that truly practices doing the right thing, with the right people, at the right times will build a culture that self-perpetuates itself and separate itself from other traditional BPO players.