



Leading IT Service & Support

The Support Center as a Business

The HDI Support Center Director course provides leaders with the tools they need to succeed



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When he talks about the HDI Support Center Director program, HDI faculty member John Custy talks in terms of management and leadership rather than tools and technologies. His focus is two-fold: to clarify the role of the support center director, and to develop the key leadership competencies needed to succeed. “To be successful, the support center has to align its goals with those of the business” he notes. While the program touches on processes, tools, and metrics, he takes pains to point out that this is a course about leadership, not operations. “A support center director has to ensure those elements are in place, but important skills are leadership, team building, and developing a service strategy.”

While HDI offers a multitude of training courses, the three-day HDI Support Center Director program is the graduate level class for support center leaders who are looking to take their leadership and business process skills to the next level. Designed for experienced support center directors and managers, the program looks to develop strategic leadership skills for the IT support organization. Participants are coached in how to use their knowledge and communication skills to align their department with organizational goals to develop techniques to help them market the support center to upper management.

Sharpening Business Skills

John does see a big difference in the types of people who are drawn to the support profession today. Where in the past the focus had been on technical support, today it's much more about business acumen. “The support center needs to be run as a professional services management organization,” he observes, “and positioned as a strategic asset.” To that end, the last half-day of the program is dedicated to building the business case for the support center. The role of a leader is to recognize and remove the obstacles to improvement.

One former student who certainly put that into practice was Jessica Nocon, Customer Service Center Manager at Rural Community Insurance Services, a division of Wells Fargo. Jessica manages a group of 30 agents who handle calls from about 7,000 internal users and independent insurance agents who handle the company's lines. With 13 years in the support center industry, Jessica is no novice.

Over the past year, her company has put the entire Customer Service Center staff through HDI training programs. To cap the commitment, she took the HDI Support Center Director class with Custy and was amazed at his depth of knowledge. More importantly, she took the business planning exercise to heart.

Getting IT & Users Involved

Nocon says that having everyone in step with the HDI philosophy helped them to develop a mission statement and to align the center with the overall objectives of the company. A key element in that was establishing operating level agreements with the IT department and

augmenting their activities in coordinating with project management. Now when new networks or applications are brought on line, the support center is a key element in the project rollout. IT has come to realize that along with communications, training, and documentation, support is a key element in ensuring customer satisfaction.

Probably their biggest initiative was in terms of marketing the support center. As the support center deals with the agents as well as their internal users, they had to work with the company's marketing department on those initiatives. The support center contact number was available on the company's website, but they found they could do a lot more. They are now expanding their web capabilities to include self-service pages, access to the knowledge base, and to peer support groups. Users can now check the status of trouble tickets and respond to ad hoc surveys with immediate results. The support center also has the ability to post "system available" and general status messages to keep users informed.

They didn't stop there. They are also distributing stickers and laminated cards to all laptop and desktop users with instructions on how to reach the support center and how to access the various self-service functions. One of their next initiatives is to have a link to the support center home page on the desktop image they distribute to all of their adjusters. They are also getting ready to test HDI's Customer Satisfaction Index tool.

They are already seeing results, but there's always something else to do. They now close 80% of their tickets in one day or less, and handle 90% of their calls without escalation. "When you look back at what we've accomplished, it is encouraging," Jessica says, however, she still has plenty on her plate. As she rattles off the list of initiatives she's working on, you can see Nocon is not slowing down anytime soon.

About HDI

HDI is the world's largest IT service and technical support membership association and the industry's premier certification and training body. Guided by an international panel of industry experts and practitioners, HDI is the leading resource for help desk/support center emerging trends and best practices. HDI provides members with a vast repository of resources, networking opportunities, and the largest industry event, the HDI Annual Conference & Expo. Headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO, HDI offers training in multiple languages and countries. For more information, call +1 719.268.0174 or visit www.ThinkHDI.com.