

Case Study

Arc Theatre in partnership with London Metropolitan Network

Achieving Customer Service Excellence through Interactive Theatre

In March 2009, the whole ICT Department of the London South Bank University took part in an interactive theatre workshop, facilitated by Arc Theatre, which focused on developing customer service skills. This training came as part of the restructuring of the Department at the University, led by the Director of ICT, Wojtek Adamek. The purpose of the new structure is to create healthy dialogue across all teams in order to increase productivity, break down barriers and to create a motivated, customer focused department. The objective of the interactive theatre workshop was to help facilitate this dialogue by examining behaviours, developing strategies and improving communication. Using theatre as a training method was a new departure for the Department, and Wojtek was keen to see how his team would respond.



Approach

Arc's interactive workshop used a process called Forum Theatre using professional actors to bring situations and stories to life. After working intensively to understand exactly the issues Wojtek wanted to address, Arc's Resident Writer, Clifford Oliver, wrote a series of scenarios that explored the types of issues and experiences faced by the members of the ICT team. For example, one scenario entitled 'Meeting Expectations' involved a lecturer making some problematic demands on ICT services, and three other

"Training was a critical part of re-structuring the ICT Department at LSBU, aiming to create a motivated team and a focus on service for our customers in the University. Along with technical training and management training, we invested in soft skills training with a customer service session with Arc Theatre for all the team - the results were phenomenal."

Wojtek Adamek, Director of ICT at London South Bank University

"Motivating the IT team and providing the skills for them to deal effectively with their customers is today a critical task for managers in London's universities and colleges. A new approach being piloted through LMN members is showing how effective training and team-building can achieve results. We see great interest from LMN members in new ways of realising and retaining talent in the IT team, especially at a time of challenge and change."

Maria Iliu, Head of Business at LMN
Following on from 'The LMN workshop: Building and Retaining Talent':
www.lmn.net.uk/events/05Mar2009/index.htm

characters, as members of the ICT Department with different views on what could be achieved, trying to find a solution that everyone was happy with.

Forum Theatre is a dynamic format which uses highly-skilled actors to perform a scenario, and when the action reaches a moment of conflict, the scene is stopped. The actors, in character, then talk to the audience in small groups where they have the opportunity to explore and direct the different outcomes and actions of each character. Through this highly energetic process, the actors draw on the feelings, advice and thoughts of their audience in order to go back into the scenario and skilfully improvise a range of alternatives based on the guidance they are given. The audience then observe the implementation and consequences of their suggestions. They can stop the action at any time to feed in new information or experiment with alternative ways of handling it. This is a safe and engaging process, which allows different opinions and experiences to inform the outcomes, and also encourages participants to share ideas with each other as they resolve the issues.

The LSBU audience responded very positively to this format as it allowed them to empathise and play out a range of different processes, and to find their own point of relationship with the issues. During the story, the characters moved around the groups and therefore the audience members got to experience the situation from everyone's point of view. Furthermore, this form encouraged all members of the team to get actively involved and make a contribution. The experience is a great way of bonding a team, and the skilful use of humour creates a relaxed and fun way of learning.

Result

The workshop was a great success.

Participants felt that the scenarios were accurate and well observed, recognising their specific types of situations and behaviours, and understanding their relevancy. They also got fully involved and had fun working together in this participative way. They gained a clearer understanding of their customers' priorities and also of how staff behaviours and attitudes might be experienced by customers. It also emerged this was not only important to the Help Desk team, but throughout the Department. By experiencing things from a range of different perspectives, everyone gained a sense of working together across the teams, and their role as part of the whole. A dynamic dialogue was created to help communication throughout the Department and across teams with a practical reminder that better communication will lead to better customer service. The experience offered by this workshop enabled a shared point of reference when staff returned to their desks, and the identification of explicit skills such as tone of voice, listening and rapport building, which they could apply immediately in their work.

“Working with the LSBU was a very positive experience. Communication with Wojtek was frank and clear, which meant we could pinpoint the issues that the workshop needed to cover very accurately. The group were receptive and responsive; everyone had and took the opportunity to get involved and have their say. Feedback after the presentation was very positive. Participants felt that we had addressed their issues with accuracy and purpose and that it had given them an opportunity to discuss those issues in a safe and affirming environment.”

Clifford Oliver, Resident Writer at Arc Theatre

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