



## Improving Lead Development Team Culture to Drive Teleprospecting Effectiveness

An organization's culture is one of the most powerful determinants of how effectively it operates

Organizational culture emerges from a company's stated values plus what its leaders recognize and reward, and where they apply resources

Consciously managing the culture of a teleprospecting organization is critical to its success

The leaders of Enron Corporation, in their 2000 annual report, proudly enumerated the company's core values: communication, respect, integrity and excellence. Within a year, Enron was bankrupt and many of its leaders were on their way to jail, having flagrantly violated each of their stated values to ignite one of the worst corporate scandals in history. In the aftermath of Enron's collapse, it became clear that its stated core values were outweighed by tacit values that drove rewards and recognition (R&R) and, ultimately, employee behavior.

Virtually all organizations have both stated and tacit values that – along with R&R and resource allocation – are the primary drivers of organizational culture. Because teleprospecting effectiveness depends on maintaining constant positive interactions with customers and prospects, lead development reps (LDRs) are especially susceptible to their organization's culture. In this brief, we explain the powerful impact of culture within lead development teams and how to assess and improve the elements of a teleprospecting organization's culture.

### Why Culture Matters for Lead Development

An organization's culture can have a dramatic impact on employee behavior. For teleprospecting organizations, culture impacts behavior and results in three primary ways:

- **First impressions.** Most organizations formally espouse values related to the importance of customer relationships and experiences, but these values are rarely reinforced by the culture within the LDR organization. Instead, nearly all the salient aspects of the LDR team's culture – including training, R&R, playbook resources and even informal conversations with managers – focus on activity and output. This culture might encourage high achievement, but it is less likely to foster strong customer relationships and experiences. In many b-to-b companies, the LDR team creates more first impressions than any other function. When the team's culture does not reinforce customer-centric mission and values, the experience of prospects and the organization's brand suffer.
- **Lead conversion.** Our research shows that only 5 percent of calls made by LDRs end with a positive result – a teleprospecting qualified or teleprospecting generated lead. Of the remaining 95 percent, nearly half are declines, with an average talk time of just over one minute. This data strongly suggests that prospects are not taking the time to thoughtfully evaluate the potential benefits of engaging with the company. In this model, increases in



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LDR activity may produce short-term gains in lead output, but it also dramatically increases the number of prospects who decline without due consideration. Furthermore, given the brevity of calls that end in a decline, it is unlikely that LDRs are engaging these prospects sufficiently to enroll them in nurture streams and other marketing activities that can result in future lead production. A more productive and sustainable approach is to improve the quality of prospect interactions, which will maximize the number of prospects who agree to engage with the company.

- **LDR engagement.** As with other skill-based activities, poor execution of teleprospecting might occasionally create the right outcome, but such results are not sustainable. The most effective leaders focus on process and outcome, trusting that the consistent execution of best practices is the surest path to sustained success. Even the very best performers who execute best practices fail far more often than they succeed, making lead development a notoriously challenging job. However, by fostering a culture focused on best practices, organizations can recognize, reward and encourage LDRs whether or not new leads are produced on a given day. This approach lays the groundwork for optimal lead conversion and is the best way to keep LDRs engaged and motivated.

## Assessing and Improving Lead Development Culture

Apply the following questions and guidelines to assess how the three primary elements of organizational culture are contributing to the team's success (or lack thereof) and how to improve these elements:

- **Stated values.** Does the company have stated values? If not, answers to the questions in the next two sections will show what is valued in practice. If values have been stated, how do they relate to the LDR role? What impact should they have on how LDRs interact with prospects and how their performance is assessed? Survey the LDR team (anonymizing responses to encourage candor) about their knowledge of company values, whether (and how) they believe these values relate to their calls, and what they think the company's values are in practice. Additionally, are there any stated values or mission statements that are specific to lead development? If not, create one or more value statements centered on having great conversations and starting lasting customer relationships.

- **R&R.** All organizations have formal R&R processes (e.g. monetary rewards, employee recognition programs) that are intended to encourage desirable behaviors. On LDR teams, R&R processes often include contests and games. Verify whether formal R&R processes are consistent with company and team values, and eliminate any processes that encourage behavior that is inconsistent with these values. Next, assess which stated values are not being reinforced and consider whether new R&R processes could fill this gap. Organizations also have informal R&R (e.g. employee gossip, discussions between managers and team members about the behavior of others). Anonymous surveys of LDRs also can be used to discover which behaviors and outcomes are informally recognized. Next, consider whether informal R&R is consistent with formal R&R and stated values. Undesirable informal R&R must be gradually transformed. For example, if employees' informal conversations praise LDRs for undesirable behaviors, leaders should publicly praise desirable behaviors, while intervening to question the praise of undesirable behaviors whenever possible.
- **Resources.** Organizations frequently espouse values related to customer experience and employee success, but often fail to provide training and other resources to enable LDRs to behave in accord with these values and succeed in their roles. Worse, training and playbook resources often encourage behaviors that are clearly inconsistent with the organization's values. For example, companies may say they value the voice of the customer, yet train their LDRs in combative objection-handling techniques. Team leaders should assess whether the training, development and enablement resources provided to LDRs are appropriate for the quality and type of interactions desired. Ask team members if they have the tools and training they need to succeed. If the answers to these questions are not emphatically yes, probe more to find out what is missing. Finally, like R&R, many resources (e.g. prime seating, access to managers) are allocated informally based on manager preferences, seniority or other criteria not consistent with organizational values and goals. Survey the team to assess whether current practices support desired behaviors.

## The Sirius Decision

Once a lead development team's leaders understand the importance of culture, remediation is often straightforward, though it may require significant effort. For example, if tacit



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values expressed in R&R or resource allocations don't match stated values, engage the company's human resources or organizational development team for guidance in making changes to eliminate this lack of alignment. Above all, celebrate the achievements of LDRs – not just the value of the sales opportunities they produce, but also the relationships they create and the value they provide to prospects during their everyday interactions. While it may take time to improve the LDR team's culture, the payoff will come in the form of improved lead conversion and lower LDR attrition.

