

Help Desk Communications

What's good for the Help Desk is good for the whole organization

By Andrée Iffrig

If you want to infuriate one of the users of Information Services in your organization, try these magic words: "We're sorry; the system is down, we'll get back to you later today." That user you just put off has a deadline to meet and is feeling utterly powerless at the other end of the line.

As the nerve centre for information technology problem-solving, the Help Desk interacts with a variety of groups: other employees in the organization, the back end IT personnel who may have to fix the problem and other IT staff who either work at the Help Desk or are employed in the department. When communications are ineffective, tempers flare and response time to user problems is impacted.

Solving users' issues with the Help Desk can have immediate benefits for the wider organization. Effective handling of customer concerns through improved communications brings the following results:

- Help Desk staff can respond proactively and prevent common, irksome problems from constantly reoccurring. You can reduce lost opportunity costs by at least 10%, which means at least one less person at the Help Desk, or better planning and service delivery from the existing staff.
- Your managers spend at least 5 to 10% less time daily fighting fires caused by ineffective communications between Help Desk staff and their customers, or between the Help Desk and other IT personnel.
- Less angst at the Help Desk results in a more productive work situation. We know that employees who enjoy their work make for engaged employees, and engaged employees make for happier customers. The ripple effect from resolving minor, but chronic Help Desk issues is significant.

A model for improving communications

A fundamental building block in creating great communications is an understanding between people of what it feels like for other users in the organization when things don't go right. Identifying this requires a process for systematically finding out what matters to various users of Information Services. Evidence of irate customers complaining is not out of place: it adds a sense of urgency which can create momentum for making changes.

The first rule of communications is: Make your communications about the other person first, and yourself second. Arguably, no amount of training can change an innately introverted person into a customer service rep. Anyone, however, can become sensitized to the needs of others and learn to use communications tools that advance everyone's interests and the organization's long-term goals.

Once you've laid this foundation in place, it becomes possible to create understanding and support for the Help Desk function. Simultaneously, managers and employees at the Help Desk can learn to respond in more customer-centric ways to handling user complaints and concerns. A key to implementation of a communications strategy is support from leadership for communicating more effectively.

Effective communications go beyond placating the user who called into the Help Desk with a problem. They ensure that employees know when and how to do things, management and staff work effectively together, and people understand their good work is recognized and appreciated. Best of all, they make it possible to create a climate of trust throughout the organization and to better align IT strategies and delivery systems with business goals.

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