



Case Study

How Indigo Training Worked With Glen Eira City Council To Transform Them Into A Modern, Award-Winning, Customer Focused Organisation Equipped To Deal With The Challenges Of The 21st Century

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Background

In the mid 1990s, the Victorian State Liberal Government introduced sweeping reforms right across the public sector. These included the amalgamation of small local councils into larger, centralised councils, which meant councils began servicing increased numbers of residents with larger land areas.

Glen Eira Council was typical of an outdated '70s style local government at the time. There was virtually no concept of a customer service culture and residents often found their calls ignored and queries unanswered for long periods of time.

At the time, each council department had its own reception desk, staffed by one or two people who were responsible for answering telephone calls and greeting residents who came on-site.

Telephone calls were a particular problem. Once answered, the receptionist would guess which department to transfer a call to, and then pass the call on. More often than not, the caller would find themselves in an unanswered loop or not in the correct department which would mean that they would need to hang up and try again.

If their calls were answered, the query would often not be resolved, leaving many residents frustrated or angry.

Not surprisingly, residents' attitudes towards Glen Eira City Councils customer service were extremely poor.

Time for Change

With amalgamation came major changes. Staff who had held a comfortable job suddenly had to reapply for their position or band together with others to submit a tender for service provision under the competitive tendering process.

It was a major shake-up right throughout the organisation and an opportunity for internal changes and vast improvements in service standards.

Lessons were drawn from the private sector, which was introducing the concept of customer service. Specialised departments were being implemented, staffed by trained people working with new technology that had the capacity to track response times and resolution of queries.

The C.E.O of Glen Eira City Council (Andrew Newton) decided it was time to improve their own processes and began deploying a series of improvements that would have exceptional results right throughout the organisation.

It would be a long and sometimes painful process over many years, but as the results show the process has been very worthwhile for the organisation, the organisations staff members (particularly in the Customer Service Department) and most importantly for the residents of Glen Eira.

Strategy & Tactics

The overall strategy for Glen Eira City Council began by combining individual departments' service desks into one dedicated customer service department and introducing a tailored customer relationship management system (CRMS).

This formed the base that would drive the change throughout the rest of the organisation.

Establishing a Service Centre

- A service centre was established, involving the appointment of a team of staff recruited from various council departments. Customer service staff were responsible for either answering telephone calls for the whole organisation or greeting residents at the desk.
- Staff in this area were supported by new CRMS software that tracked the progress of calls, ensuring they were answered and the query was resolved. All staff participated in training to ensure they understood and were comfortable in their new roles.
- All queries were tracked and all calls were required to be logged as closed once resolved, otherwise the call would be automatically escalated to management. This introduced a new culture of accountability throughout Council, geared towards customer focus.

Blocks to Success

When the new systems were introduced, staff across the organisation reacted negatively. Staff viewed the new technology and the creation of a customer service centre as a form of Big Brother as they realised they could now be monitored and they would be held accountable for their actions or inactions.

Soon after, the CRMS was implemented small acts of sabotage occurred through actions being signed off prior to queries being resolved. It was a way of cheating the system as calls needed to be logged as closed, otherwise they were immediately escalated to management, who would have to follow up to ensure the queries were dealt with appropriately and within the KPI's of the department.

Some departments even refused to participate in the tests or trial the CRMS in their departments which frustrated the attempts to create a fully accountable organisation.

Attitudes towards the customer service team were also negative. The team, which had been trained to do its best for residents, became highly frustrated as a result of consistent resistance to their efforts. Staff in other departments blocked the progress of calls and viewed the customer service staff as implementing change for their own gain, rather than for the residents or organisation's benefit.

Staff in the customer service team began experience very low morale and the sense they had to process calls quickly, rather than accurately. There were many internal issues and a volatile atmosphere within the team. These issues needed addressing as a matter of urgency.

How Indigo Training worked with the CEO and management team to Bring It All Together

The brief – To take the City Glen Eira from the 1970s to become a council ready to face the challenges of the 21st century, whilst improving the service to residents and creating a Customer Focused Culture accepting of new working practices and technology..

Indigo Training was engaged in 1998 on strong recommendation from Whitehorse City Council.

Indigo's principal consultant, Rum Charles, worked closely with key members of staff before creating a tailored and unique program aimed at raising morale within the Customer Service Team and turn wider negative attitudes towards the changes into strong positives supporting the new paradigm.

Indigo Training deployed a series of steps over several years and many contact hours, working closely with staff and management across the entire Council.

- In order to provide the best possible customer focused approach, it was important to obtain further knowledge about other departments in order to give residents a better service through higher first call resolution.
- To achieve this, customer focus advocates were created from within the customer service team to work within other departments to promote the new culture and train people on the use of the CRMS.
- Greg Goldenberg (the customer service manager) also engaged in one-on-one meetings with department managers to explain how the new system could save their staff members time through providing basic information to the service centre team. This enabled service centre staff to answer many queries without having to put the caller through to other departments. Departmental staff could now concentrate on their core activities without having to answer the same query many times a day thus improving interdepartmental communications and productivity.
- Many council departments implemented specialised training in customer focus and attitudinal change, which assisted overall culture change and buy-in of the new processes throughout the organisation.

The Customer Service Team

The program began with the Customer Service Team, who underwent intensive training that identified issues and problems as well as involving team members in writing their own service charter.

Participants in the training were encouraged to be open and honest during the sessions, which assisted in the identification of key problem areas. The approach was flexible, allowing all issues to be immediately addressed in a practical and realistic manner.

The results were highly successful, with the team developing their own departmental charter of behaviour and goals. All team members, including management, agreed to the charter and signed it off. Its success is still felt today as its essence is about staff taking personal responsibility for their own working lives and creating a positive, supportive work environment in which to deliver exceptional service.

In addition to the Departmental Charter, staff:

- Were equipped with the skills to perform their duties to a measurable world class standard and deal with problems and issues as they arose. This was actioned through an ongoing program of “tools” based training, equipping the staff with the skills to handle any and all calls in a timely, professional and friendly manner. By demonstrating their professionalism this encouraged other departments to use their services
- The customer service team also sought knowledge about other departments activities in order to give residents a better level of service through higher first call resolution customer service advocates were created from within the team to work in other departments to gain knowledge that would assist in the creation of a knowledge base (intranet) and to train colleagues from other departments in the use of the CRMS.

Further key elements of the training sessions resulted in some staff identifying that they were not suited to the customer service environment. These staff were relocated to other positions and new, eager staff recruited to fill the positions. The selection of the correct members for the service centre has been crucial to the success of Glen Eira City Council

The department was also relocated to new purpose built offices that enabled telephone-based staff to answer and resolve calls without being approached by visitors to the reception desk. This vastly improved the response time and quality of telephone calls.

The Results

Today, Glen Eira City Council is an award winning council with an award winning customer service team.

While it has taken some years, with the help of Indigo Training Glen Eira City Council’s old negative, non-accountable staff culture has transformed into a positive and functional culture where people look forward to coming to work and interacting with their community.

Changes right across the council include:

- Information flows smoothly through departments, with all departments reporting increased productivity due to the CRMS and are more efficient.
 - The customer service team is equipped to resolve 95% percent of enquiries with a first call resolution.
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- Staff are now accountable for their actions with the implementation of CRMS.
 - Managers are able to motivate their staff to obtain higher results
 - Council now has excellent reporting processes and a strong organisation-wide customer focused culture, with staff equipped with the skills and attitude to give exceptional service to internal and external clients alike.

In Conclusion

Indigo Training continues working successfully with Glen Eira City Council in many aspects of training, induction and service delivery programs.

The ongoing relationship ensures Council' continues to excel in its service delivery standards for external clients and internal departments.

Glen Eira City Council also continues to gain recognition for their outstanding customer service. Winning new awards and being first in many customer service bench association categories.

The Key Points

1. Strong leadership from the C.E.O and management Team
 2. A commitment to creating a new culture
 3. Personal empowerment of all staff members
 4. Persistence, courage and political will.
 5. Achievable measurable goals
 6. Budget for on going training and personal development through the entire organisation.
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