

This figure, \$29.1 million, is a realistic representation of the amount of money that is being spent that doesn't have to be spent at all if the claim people could save themselves as little as four hours per week. The cost of doing that training doesn't seem so high anymore, does it?

This is a real-life scenario that those in the claim environment are facing every single day. Most of the time, the wrong decision is being made. In order to reduce expenses, claim operations stop investing in the development of their people, which quickly results in extra expenses for the company to continue its operations. Slow times should be met head-on with increased training to improve those skills. Start with the ones you wanted to do before but didn't due to lack of time.

The best training we provide is the in-person, on-site training that is delivered by qualified instructors in classroom setting. There is no better way to get the very best learning opportunity for the students. A good substitute for those companies that don't have the financial resources is the online training that International Insurance Institute is now in the process of developing. Indeed, their flagship course, the *Awesome Claims Customer Service* program is now online and available at one-third of the price of the full classroom setting. At one-third of the price, it is an extremely reasonable substitute for in-person training. All of the skills that are taught in the normal, full-day workshop are in this program.

What is the cost? Well, let me ask you a question. What would you say the "cost" was of that deal I offered you before? You give me a \$100 and I give you \$100 every single week. Would you say that "cost" you anything? Well, it didn't really. You invested \$100, and you got back \$5,200. The same thing holds true for this type of training.

People always talk about the cost of training when what they should be doing is looking at it as an investment. What is the investment amount for either the *Awesome Claims Customer Service* or the *Real Life Time Management for Claims Professionals*? That's easy to answer; it's about \$300 for in-person training and about \$120 for on-line training. What is the return? That's easy to answer, too — it's \$7,280 per person. When you think

about it, the cost is really zero. There is no cost; there is only return on investments. That's the best way to look at training, especially when the point of the training is to increase efficiency.

The goal is to increase efficiency and improve customer service at the same time. In fact, if you take a good look at it, it is actually almost irresponsible not to invest in training in slow times. It's irresponsible to waste money paying people to work in a process that can be done much more efficiently. This is a waste of money, and if we want to improve our industry, we need to see the situation for what it is: An opportunity to improve ourselves while we have the time. ■

Quick Tips for Claim Professionals

Setting customer expectations

It is important to set customer expectations throughout the claim process and at the close of any customer interaction.

- ▶ Perception is reality. It is all about whether we can exceed customer expectations or not.
- ▶ If we set customer expectations, we are in control to exceed their expectations.
- ▶ Look for opportunities to set expectations rather than letting the customer set his own expectations.

Managing customer expectations means consistently and accurately communicating with them. When claim issues are involved, that includes not only having a claim resolution plan, but also conveying that plan to your customers. It means that when someone solves an issue, they make sure that the customer was notified about the solution.

Many customer issues boil down to mismanaged expectations or poor follow-up. Customers expected some level of claim service and it was not delivered when they expected or it was not what they expected. This explains why two

similar customers can feel so differently about our claim service.

Setting up a claim protocol that assures customer expectations are managed can make all the difference. Make sure you document any expectation you have given the customer in the claim notes.

Think about how many of your frustrations are caused because you expected something to be different than it was? If you had known what to expect, you would not have been as upset.

Needing more time to resolve an issue

In order to set adequate customer expectations, you need to tell the customer in clear and simple words. "Based on the amount of research we will need to do, we will have your coverage issue resolved in two days. We will be working as diligently as possible. However, if you don't receive resolution within that time, please contact me."

The customer may reply with, "But I really need this solved now." It's important to control the situation with something like, "I understand and we will work as quickly as we can to resolve this issue." The point to make here is that you are working hard and that you are on their side.

Getting more information

In claims, it is often necessary to continue to ask questions so that we can gather all of the information to make the right decisions and help the customer. However, customers can sometimes feel they are being made to "jump through hoops." Even worse, they can feel as though they are being tricked into saying something that could have negative consequences. Most often, they can feel that we are being meddlesome and looking for a way to deny them the services they deserve.

We must strike an acceptable balance between doing a thorough and accurate investigation, and providing outstanding customer service that lets the customer know we are here to help.

This also comes into play when trying to further understand an issue that has caused a customer to become upset.

The preceding text is an excerpt from Telephone Handling for Claims, a full-day workshop offered through the International Insurance Institute, Inc. More information is available by calling 504-393-4570, www.InsuranceInstitute.com. ■