



Business Service Leadership: *The Time is Now!* Part 1

By Peter J. McGarahan, Founder and President, McGarahan & Associates

What are they thinking?

I am sure that I am not the only one slightly discouraged by the current lack of leadership in America today. In my travels, I have had many discussions with business executives, IT support managers and customers on this topic. In most cases, the sense of frustration centers around leadership without vision, purpose, caring and the moral backbone to do what's right for the customers they serve and the people they lead. It is evident in the recent headlines where major companies and government entities are making decisions and taking a course of action that leaves the rest of us saying, "What are they thinking?" I have to assume that the executives and government officials making these decisions are certainly capable, so why are we left with a feeling of amazement, disengagement and disappointment?

Every day leaders

In my many leadership positions and interaction with IT support professionals around the world, effective leadership comes down to one thing – people care when they know that you care! In recent Gallop Polls regarding the state of the US worker, it is shocking and disappointing to see how many people are truly disengaged in the workplace. In support organizations, the biggest differentiator between organizations that excel at service delivery, customer service and delivering business value and the ones that always struggle - **is leadership**. Leaders who awake daily and approach responsibility with energy, passion, caring and intelligence will always make a difference in people's lives. These leaders never forget:

1. Where they came from
2. What it took to get where they are
3. The important lessons they learned along the way

They are particularly resourceful and utilize trusted, experienced mentors for advice, direction and support. What's even more interesting is the fact that these leaders, who are successful and happy, are

humble! They never let their egos convince them that they are the smartest people in the room. In reality, they never let arrogance stand in the way of being a good listener and a continuous learner.

Service leadership

Business Service leadership is about doing the right thing for the right reasons and making fact-based decisions. It's about challenging conventional wisdom and having the moral backbone to stand up for doing the right thing for the customers and the people that serve them. Business Service leadership is a servant role that looks at the business of IT service and support creatively and innovatively with a foundation based on industry best practices. They strongly believe delivering exceptional customer service is not difficult as long as you stand by the customer service principle of treating every customer like they were your only customer. They know that the difficult part of delivering consistent service is in meeting their customer's expectations is ensuring that the rest of the organization doesn't create barriers making them hard to do business with. I challenge all service leaders to; set the bar high for your team, constantly measure and continuously improve and create a culture of encouragement and rewards for over and above performance.



I have broken down [Business Service leadership](#) into the following five areas:

1. Leadership

- Create the service strategy and vision
- Create a service culture
- Set the example

2. Customer Advocacy

- Be the voice of the customer
- Listen, listen, listen
- Always market, communicate and build lasting customer relationships

3. Business Service Management

- Identifying and solving the business problem
- Add business value - find ways to increase bottom-line profitability
- Be relevant, adaptive, flexible and responsive to business priorities

4. Get It Done

- Remove barriers for the front-line
- Deliver quantifiable results
- Hold your team accountable – practice total contact ownership

5. Ambassadors

- Work well with other teams to deliver transparent, relevant IT / business services
- Be EZ to do business with
- Work with a sense of urgency and be passionate about what you do

Business Service leadership takes courage. It can guide your decisions and your day-to-day interaction with customers, team, peers and management. **It's time for a change in the way we lead and the time is now!** We need to reengage our team and our customers, giving them hope and purpose that their needs come before ours. They need to know and see that they are the central focus when decisions are made. Great leaders know that at the end of the day – their customers are the only reason they are in business and that their people are the business.

An Informal gathering

I was at a Service and Support industry event recently and I had the opportunity to spend some great social networking time with some old friends and colleagues. I really enjoy the opportunity to share old war stories and learn what's new in their lives and work experiences. As the conversation continued, I was able to reflect back on all the collective conversations we have had over the years and how this group truly embodied Business Service Leadership. These service leaders shared:



1. A passion for delivering quality customer service.
2. An attention and understanding of the many intricate and interrelated details of service and support.
3. Positive energy for creating a service culture by empowering individuals to work as teams.

I admire this group for many reasons. What I appreciate most about this group is that they all did the job. Their experience is first-hand. They only excelled after experimenting with calculated chances aimed at proving conventional wisdom wrong. In the end, they were right in their belief of Total Contact Ownership and investing in Level-1 that resulted in increased first contact resolution, customer satisfaction and lower resolution costs. I am brought back to the conversation with the question of what does it take to be a Business Service Leader?

Please look for the next installment of **Business Service Leadership: The Time is Now! Part 2** available only at www.bsmreview.com.

Arise Ye Service Leader – The time is now! Good luck and God Bless!



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Business Service Leadership: *The Time is Now!* Part 2

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Details, details, details

I always remember being challenged when trying to communicate the impact of any upgrade, update, rollout, download, new release or change gone bad to management. The frustration of experiencing the steady state call volume spike and trying to get the attention of the project management team who were already claiming victory and celebrating success. I felt like an idiot when IT management challenged my initial report of the impact, what caused it, what types of calls we were receiving and what we were doing to handle it; both reactively and proactively. “You know Pete, the production change was not intended to impact that area of the customer’s functionality – you must be mistaken.”

It’s always important to know the facts, the details and what you are planning to do about it before ever engaging IT management. In fact, your credibility relies on your ability to extract the details regarding anything you do to proactively change the situation for the better. If you talk to any service leader, they will quickly give you the areas of opportunity for positively impacting business services.

The areas of opportunity for positively impacting business services:

1. **Minimize the impact of any change**, rollout or upgrade by working closely with the project team to ensure the quality in testing, documentation, communication, knowledge and escalation/resolution.
2. **Always working with Level-2 IT management** on minimizing escalations by focusing on what your team can resolve at Level-1 and what knowledge, training, documentation and tools you need to make it happen.
3. **Reporting aging tickets** and link the follow-up, status and resolution to the Total Contact Ownership philosophy that has guided many best-in-class service and support organizations.
4. **Hold you team accountable** for mastering the role of service and support professional. Industry best practices range from attitude to 100% incident tracking, validating resolution to anticipating the customer’s needs and proactively identifying trends and quality ticket documentation. These are the best practices that any and all customer support professionals should practice on a daily basis

5. **Creating an IT culture** where everyone works for the Service Desk. Where the Service Desk is seen and treated as the “Face of IT” and the “Voice of the Customer” / Customer Advocate. They are given the benefit of the doubt and respect when they bring the impact details and case for taking immediate corrective action.

Deliver tactical results

As I struggled to find my ‘voice’ in the organization, a mentor of mine reminded me that my audience would take us seriously if we had a track record of results. He called it credibility with the IT organization and stated factually, “they won’t listen to you strategically, unless you can deliver tactically.” That single piece of advice changed my day-day operational management focus. For me, the daily focus was establishing a foundation based on help desk basics, metrics and best practices – right from the book. I established the standard operational procedures, configured the tools of the trade to support the best practice processes, trained the team on how and why these daily practices were critical to our success and then I held each of them accountable for meeting those performance targets.

It ALL makes a difference!

From the way you configure the ACD menu options, to your staffing schedule and individual adherence, your consistent customer greeting to tracking every call / issue/ request, quality ticket documentation to Total Contact Ownership (status, follow-up and validating satisfaction / resolution), managing call volume spikes, and finally to create operating level agreements (OLAs) with peers to letting customer satisfaction be your telling guide that from the customer perspective - you are doing all the right things the right way. Once you are doing the job consistently and you confidently know you are because you see it, measure it, report on it and live by the daily numbers, it’s time to hand over the day to day operations to your team. It’s time to begin the role you were meant to play.

The role of:

- The customer advocate,
- The problem solver,
- The voice,
- The ambassador and
- The communicator – Business Service Leader!



Engage your team

It's not easy handing off the day-to-day operations to your team, but it shouldn't be hard either. I often thought my main focus after implementing the continuous improvements was removing myself as the “bottleneck” in decision-making. You have engaged your team throughout this continuous improvement journey. They helped you make decisions, provided you with advice and bought into the service and support strategy. It passed the **common-sense** and “**why it's important**” test. It was up to you to create this sense of urgency, sense of empathy and sense of purpose that would lead the change in culture, behavior and attitude.

As you leave the day-to-day operations in the capable hands of your team, make sure you take the time to mentor / coach them first-hand leadership by example. They need to see you in action to know what's important, why it's important and how to handle situations (something like the way you did). Never assume that everyone can figure this out. Make yourself available to them for coaching, answering questions and make sure they know the boundaries for making front-line decisions.

I will never forget the lessons I learned when trying to re-engage myself into the operations and decisions when the team was functioning quite well without me. I called into the help desk from vacation and a senior team member was insulted when I asked how everything was going.

She said, “Pete, we have everything covered, you trained us yourself. Go and enjoy your vacation with your family and do not call in her again – got it?” **Lesson learned.**



Just the facts

I learned quickly to take the emotion and personality out of reporting. IT Management does not necessarily enjoy hearing about problems on a regular basis. In your reporting you need to establish the facts, the actual numbers, the real business impact, the costs, the trends and what you plan or recommend doing about it. Establish reporting that meets the needs of your audiences and stakeholders. I always tried to separate operational reporting which was geared for me and the team versus management / marketing reporting which should focus on areas that impact all of IT and the business.

One of my CIOs became actively involved in Service Level Management and was interested in the response and resolution times for all IT resources based on priority, impact and urgency. She was focused on aging tickets and worked with the different group managers to ensure they understood that this was a priority for her and should be for them! She regularly took them on customer tours to see the “face” behind every ticket. It was few month later that she informed all of her direct reports that **they ALL worked for the Help Desk**. She surprised them by “putting their money where her mouth was” and stated clearly that 25% of their performance review would be based on the success of the Help Desk. You could have heard an aging ticket being closed! Business Service leaders must know the numbers, the story behind those numbers and how to tell / sell their success story.

Sell the success story

If you don't tell people your success story, who will? Or, asked in another way, if a support success story is told and no one is listening, does it make a sound? A support success story is a brief, eight- to ten-slide presentation on the value proposition of the support organization. It should include:



- Breadth and depth of your services
- Value proposition
- Involvement in current IT/Business projects
- Business impact measurements
- Cost-effective best practices
- Customer testimonials
- Org Chart showing the many proactive roles in your organization

Tell your support success story to whoever will listen. It works. I know one CIO who was so impressed by the “Success Story” he had it mounted on an easel outside his office. As senior executives walked by and inquired about it, the CIO told the support success story. That’s high visibility / impact marketing.

For unexpected encounters with senior management, prepare an **Elevator Pitch** - a focused, deliberate, 20-30 second message that paints a memorable picture of delivering business value (e.g., impact, results, continuous improvement). Leave them with the confidence and impression that all is well the service and support organization. For example:

“Thank you for asking; everything is going very well. We’ve recently completed an assessment of our support operations against customer needs, industry benchmarks, and demonstrated best practices. From there, we created a 30-60-90-day continuous improvement plan, which aligned our support strategy, structure and services to better address business objectives / needs of our customers. We delivered against phase I targets and have eliminated 10% of our calls, are solving more problems, faster at Level-1 while reducing the total cost of support to the organization. Our “**Shift-Left**” strategy is working and I’d love to share additional results, our focus on delivering more business value and customer testimonials at your convenience. By the way, please stop by the Service Desk at any time so you listen yourself to the “**voice of the customer**” and see us in action!”

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Business Service Leadership: The Time is Now! Part 3

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Strategic thinking

It's often difficult to find time to be a strategic thinker when you are busy delivering tactically. The following has guided me through many difficult situations that required a strategic framework in order to properly align all of the continuous improvements we were presenting to IT senior management:

1. **Know where you are** — assessment (How do we track our progress along the journey?)
2. **Know where you are going** — strategy, vision, end-metric or result (What is the right outcome for the customer and the business?)
3. **Know how you plan to get there** — the roadmap (How do we make forward progress?)



These three simple guidelines have always worked for me when I needed to simplify and articulate a story to senior management. The approach was for them to “get it quickly.” Always ask yourself, “In the end, how will I know if we are successful? What does success look like? How will I know if we have achieved it?” **Envision the end first**, then build the roadmap that will take you from where you are today to where you want / need to be tomorrow. And remember — the arrival must be empirical, quantifiable, visible and articulated.

Success is entirely dependent on how you define, pursue, and measure it. It comes by focusing and working relentlessly toward the right end-metrics. In short, success comes to Business Service leaders who plan the work and work the plan. Business Service leaders use this success strategy to inspire themselves and their teams to provide valued services to their customers. Remember, your customers are depending on you to make their voice heard! Don't disappoint them!

On-the-job experience

I just completed a 4 month project for a customer where I was asked to replace the Service Desk manager, assess the team's performance and implement recommendations for continuous improvement. It was a wonderful experience to be able to practice what I preach and gain further insights into team and organizational dynamics. There were a few basic components missing from the way this Service Desk operated. To sum it up:

- They were not a team.
- They had not embraced industry best practices.
- They were lacking trust, communication and shared goals.
- They were individual contributors, all doing their job their way with little concern for all doing it the same right way.



I started my assignment by observing, interviewing, communicating and building trust by leading by example. To me, establishing what is important to you in terms of performance and professionalism is the first step. You have to tell the team what matters most to you, what you care about and what they should care about! Once understood, you then must be relentless in your pursuit to ensure it is engrained in their daily behavior. Provide one-on-one and team training to show them and connect their new and improved actions / your expectations to results/consequences. The team had become reliant on the manager to make all of their decisions for them and I believed this was holding them back. We implemented daily 15 minute team meetings to rebuild the trust and open up the communication channels. I 'pushed' back on making decisions for them when I knew they could make them on their own or by consulting their teammates.

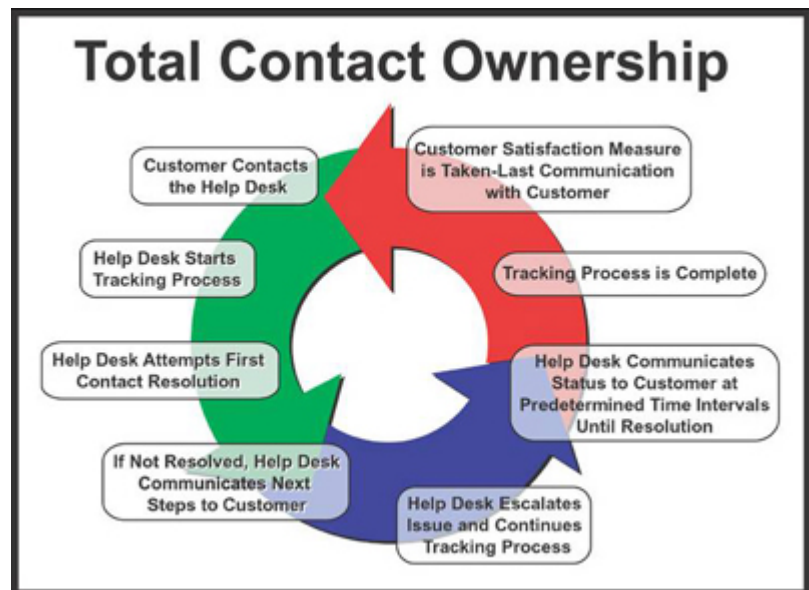
The natural leaders quickly rose to the challenge and helped the other team members who were struggling with the new directive aimed at harnessing the power of the team. We used examples and scenarios to clearly communicate to the team the difference between unacceptable, expected and over-and-above performance. The team agreed to police their own performance using a daily scorecard and work with other team members who needed coaching on the newly focused support best practices. I think the greatest satisfaction for me with this team was restoring their pride in themselves, their work and their team. **Service Desk pride** is a key component of success. The Service Desk must take pride in their professionalism, customer service culture and their attitude / approach in supporting the business. Then,

and only then, will the organization respect them and treat them for the outstanding customer service professionals they are!

After transitioning my responsibilities to a permanent Service Desk manager who I interviewed and recommended for the position, I sent this **Best Practice Top Ten** list to the team in place of a messy, “tearful” goodbye. I asked for them to keep this list top-of-mind as they engaged customers, teammates and peers on a daily basis. I promised that if they focused on these Top Ten best practices, they would be rewarded in more ways than they could possibly imagine.

The Top 10 Business Service and Support Best Practices:

1. **Attitude is Everything** - go into every situation with a positive attitude and the intent on doing the right thing for the right reasons for the customer.
2. **No Excuses, Just Solutions** - never dead-end your customer or assume you know the details of their issue/request without "seeking to understand". Always ask the right questions and actively listen during all conversations.
3. **Team Work** - empowering the team to make front-line decisions and coordinate best practice processes is the only way Service Desks can survive and thrive in today's demanding, complex environment. Remember your roles as Customer Advocate and single point of contact (SPOC) for all customer issues, questions and requests.
4. **Customer Advocate** - represent the 'voice of the customer' and be the 'face of IT'! The customer trusts you to represent them and their issue/request to the other support teams, coordinating timely resolutions and eliminating reoccurring issues.
5. **Total Contact Ownership** - is built upon the premise that the Service Desk will continue to address a customer's issue/request and follow up until the issue or question is resolved to the customer's satisfaction. The entire team must diligently and relentlessly follow-up on ALL of their



un-resolved issues (especially the ones without an updated status), no matter who is currently assigned to work on it.

6. **Quality Ticket Documentation** - Research, diagnose, prioritize and document thoroughly (it did not happen if it's not documented in the ticket). Always ask yourself - "if I was sending this to myself - would I have the right information to begin resolving the issue from the last troubleshooting step attempted by the Service Desk?"
7. **Fun** - having fun is a key component of successful teams. It is up to all of you to make your environment and Service Desk culture a place that is supportive, respectful, hard-working, focused & fun. Fun will be much more "fun" when all of you all agree that you have earned and deserve it.
8. **Being Proactive** - Spotting trends, related issues and reoccurring issues and working to ensure that we minimize the impact to the delivery of business services, communicate appropriately and work to learn from the situation. Provide assistance in bringing visibility to the issue and its impact and what is needed to do to identify the root cause and long-term resolution - eliminating the reoccurrence of these problems.
9. **First Contact Resolution** - you should use all of our available resources (team members, training, tools, documentation, past incidents, etc.) to facilitate solving customer's issue on first contact. It leads to a higher level of customer satisfaction, improves image, allows Level-2 teams to be more responsive and improves our productivity. Research issues in depth or resolved and only escalate when you have exhausted all avenues to resolve at the Service Desk. If you don't know the answer – find out by research or asking someone - the collection of learning in the process will better prepare you for the next time this issue is reported. Always Know!
10. **Solve the Business Problem First** - then address the technical or policy issues. Always ask yourself and then document it in the ticket - who is the customer, what are they trying to do, what they can't do and how critical is it in terms of productivity, impact and customer care.

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