

# Why Trainers Don't Get No Respect

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*Trainers, like the late Rodney Dangerfield, can often be heard lamenting the fact that they “don’t get no respect.” Maybe, just maybe, there are good reasons for that. You be the judge.*

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I have remarked for a long time now that many trainers suffer from the Rodney Dangerfield syndrome (i.e., like the late Rodney, they are often heard bemoaning the fact that they “don't get no respect”).

As a reasonably successful management consultant and executive who started out his professional life as a trainer, the poor self-image many trainers seem to hold of themselves has always rankled me. I'm proud of my background in training and, although my consulting practice long ago shifted to a mix of performance, productivity and process improvement, I still take on training assignments and training is usually a component of my interventions. Not once in my career has a client or colleague ever questioned my affiliation with training or cast aspersions on training – at least not in my presence – although one client did ask me why I went around pretending to be a trainer but that's another story for another day. In any case, I've always wondered why so many trainers seem to suffer from a poor self-image.

A recent thread on an Internet discussion list devoted to training opened my eyes.

A posting with the subject line "Customer service training" started the thread in question. I didn't pay any attention to it until a fellow I know from years of Internet interactions posted a response. I usually read his postings. He was replying to a posting that was in turn a response to the original posting. The original poster was looking for ideas, cases or samples that would be helpful with his charge of designing a training course for call center agents that would improve their "behavioral competences." One of those who replied to his inquiry, clearly in a selling mode herself, indicated that she was using a customer service assessment tool that identified basic behavioral styles and that she has her students (Customer Service Representatives or CSRs) identify how to communicate with each behavioral style for each of the four areas covered by the instrument. Clearly, this implies that the CSRs would have some way of determining the style of the person with whom they were interacting.

The fellow whose postings I usually read wanted to know how the CSRs would determine which style they are interacting with at any given time. What popped into my mind was a picture of a CSR valiantly but vainly trying to apply what he or she had been taught in training, namely, how to effectively interact with the customer based on the customer's behavioral style but, not knowing the customer's style, being doomed to failure.

Next ensued a couple of possibilities that made me laugh. One was a scenario in which customers were required to take a behavioral styles inventory and file it with the CSR's company so CSRs could make use of it whenever the customer called. Another was a scene in which the CSR administered a behavioral styles assessment instrument as part of each call. The length of such calls and the directions they might take offered all kinds of possibilities, some of which made me laugh but few of which would be found humorous by a hard-nosed call center manager or a customer looking for assistance.

Setting aside the issue of whether or not the behavioral styles (and the instrument that assesses them) have any validity, it seems unlikely that CSRs would be able to determine a customer's style in the course of a brief telephone call and adjust their own communications accordingly. Unless the CSRs have a means of identifying a customer's behavioral style, the basic premise of any training aimed at equipping them to adjust their interactions with customers based on their style and the customer's style is at best questionable and at worst an inexcusable waste of time and money. Further, if there is a way for a CSR to identify a caller's behavioral

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style in the course of a brief and often one-time telephone conversation, who needs an expensive instrument?

I guess I'm beginning to see why some trainers don't get no respect. Rest in peace, Rodney.