

# How to Make the Boat go Faster?

Best practice guide to  
“making your boat go faster”

Enghouse Interactive & Olympic Gold Medalist share best practices for  
enhancing customer service performance

# Going for Gold

## A best practice customer service guide to “making your boat go faster”

As a business, you continuously looking to stand out, add value for your customers, drive competitive advantage and deliver enhanced profitability. Each year, you take time to reflect and consider what strategies you can put in place to achieve your goals. Often, the key to success will be a focus on performance improvements designed to deliver results. This was one of the key issues, we explored at a recent Enghouse Interactive event with sporting legend and Olympic star, Ben Hunt-Davis.

At the outset, Hunt-Davis explained that the GB Men's Eight, in which he competed for the best part of a decade, had not won the Olympic Gold Medal in Rowing since 1912. The team consistently finished between sixth and eighth in major competitions in the period 1991-98. In the two years leading up to the Sydney Olympics of

2000, however, everything changed, thanks to a new focus on performance and ‘making the boat go faster’.

Following the disappointment of finishing eighth in the Cologne World Championships of 1998, Hunt-Davis and the rest of the GB team realised that their tactics and strategy needed an overhaul. Prior to 1998, there had never been a fundamental modification of the crew's approach, so it was essentially a case of ‘if you do what you have always done, you'll get what you always got.’ After Cologne, there was a collective sense that something needed to change. The team decided to find a new way to **make “their boat go faster”**.

### They adopted three clear principles:

1

#### **Focus on what's important not what has been done before**

Work out who to listen to and what attitudes to avoid. No one does it alone.

2


#### **Focus on performance in order to get results**

Find your “concrete” and “crazy” goals, and ‘what floats your boat’.

3

#### **Work effectively with others to achieve goals**

Concentrate your full attention on driving improvements in performance. Ask yourself, are you doing the right things and how can you improve your performance every day? If the performance is good, the rest will come.



The strategy paid dividends on September 24th 2000 at the Penrith Lakes in Sydney when the GB Rowing Eight won Olympic Gold. The result was sensational, but it was the work done leading up to the final that was the determinant factor, not what happened on the day itself. The same principle holds true in business. Companies need to focus on performance that drives results rather than results per se.




## Race to the Finish Line

The Eight recognised that to go from solid performances in 1991-98 to winning Gold in Sydney was going to require a fundamental change in approach and unswerving commitment to the new philosophy. In the two years leading up to Sydney, what had changed for the crew was an agreement that the goal was of paramount importance, and in this case the goal was to win Gold.

When the team was on the starting line in the Olympic Final, they were aware of how much they had changed; how far they had come; and that gave them the confidence to win. But while the intensive preparation unquestionably provided 'the Eight' with the potential to win gold, it was also vital that the crew had a clear strategy for the race - 'hit the first 500 metres hard and fast; get into the lead but don't use all of your energy, etc.' - and were able to execute that strategy fully. It was an approach that worked perfectly for Team GB as they ended up clear winners of the race and the gold medal. Success was achieved through complete commitment to the three key goals: focus on what's important; focus on performance in order to get results and work effectively with others to achieve these goals.

Every conversation, every decision, every action focused on moving the Eight to that objective. The team knew success would only happen if they made it happen and they were constantly looking for opportunities to advance their aim. In line with this, every exercise and training routine was analysed to ask: how did we do; what went well; what went less well and what can we learn from it to make sure we do better next time? It was all about setting up a culture of learning and improvement.

The plan required total honesty from all members of the crew. Every member had to be prepared to continually challenge the approach. The strategy was ruthlessly executed throughout the two years. There was no room for compromise or 'meeting in the middle'. A decision was taken on how to proceed and then all members of the team fully committed to, and supported that decision.



"Today is going to be a good day because I am going to make it a good day."


Team GB

## Translating Sporting Lessons to the World of Customer Service

The good news is that all the lessons of ‘making the boat go faster’ in elite sport can be transposed and shown to work in the world of customer service. Here are our top tips for ways in which businesses can win gold by enhancing the way they manage and interact with their customers.

## Focus on What’s Important

- Make sure that when your customer-facing teams turn up to work they are clear about the goals they are working to. In large organisations, complexity is often used as an excuse for lack of clarity.
- In fact, whatever the size of business, people need to be working on what is important rather than simply what is in front of them.
- To work effectively, they need to be aiming at specific goals and they need to be “crystal clear” about the direction of travel.
- In the period leading up to the Sydney Games, the GB team became increasingly proficient at “focusing on stuff that would make a difference rather than what was done previously.
- “It is important for sales and service teams to also have clear goals” – “look at what the competitors are doing that they are not”.



Enghouse Interactive can help here by understanding the business and customer engagement strategy, and providing ongoing support. Analyse your customer journey and experience to work out where enhancements can be made. Finally, look at ways of working collaboratively in partnership with channel players and vendors in order to more successfully achieve end goals.”

## Focus on Performance to Get Results

Just as in a sporting context, players being interviewed typically focus on how they performed; what they did to get the result they achieved, business people also need to concentrate on the performance that led to the result rather than the result for its own sake.

- It's always critically important to focus on getting the execution right.
- Test your performance with customers, be a customer and test out your customer journey across all channels.


Performance can mean many things in customer service, it's not all about metrics.





# Work Effectively with others to Achieve Goals

- The two principles outlined are relatively obvious in theory but hard to execute well in practice, especially if working in isolation.
- The inherent practical difficulties in successfully achieving the first two principles helps to explain the importance of the third.
- It's important to get help wherever possible, towards achieving core goals.
- In the case of the Men's Eight, it was key that they were able to draw on significant support from many people that were not actually in the boat during the final.
- The wider training group numbered 16. More than 30 people in total circulated through that group during the lead-up to the Games.
- There was also an extensive team of technical coaches, medical teams; sports psychologists; logistics people, etc. on hand. Many would not even be paid, let alone have the opportunity to win a medal, but all wanted to be involved in a dynamic team.
- It was important to build mutual understanding across the wider team and make sure everyone was working towards that common goal.
- Again, this key sporting principal applies equally in the world of business.



Organisations can adopt the concept of the connected business, putting the right technologies and processes in place to ensure all departments are able to work together to achieve the same goals.

# Making the Connection

The three key principles outlined: focus on what's important; focus on performance in order to get results; and work effectively with others to achieve goals, translate seamlessly from the world of elite sport to the equally results-driven world of customer communications and service.

Of course, the lessons intonated by Ben Hunt-Davis apply just as much to the salespeople themselves as they do to the businesses they work. The best sales- people in the world of customer communications technology focus their atten- tion on 'making a difference'. Just like the Men's Eight at Sydney, they get up every day and make sure "their boat goes faster".

Equally, it is worth highlighting that the 'boat' itself will be different in each case. "For CEOs and MDs, it's the business itself; for contact centre managers, it's about raising the overall performance of their teams while keeping to budgets and for the agents themselves, it's about driving up their sales figures or the quality of customer service they deliver. In each and every case, however, the individual focus on personal performance helps drive the success of the business as a whole.

Both in elite sport and in business, that success also typically involves trust, honesty, and sometimes difficult conversations, but critically too and, most important of all, shared goals; a shared commitment to enhancing performance and a willingness to work together to "make the boat go faster".



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