

## ABB AND AMA: A CASE STUDY



Sudhakar Kuchibhotla (left), global head of capability, and Jesus Rivera (right), global business controller, Power Grids Service at ABB.

# Customized Training Empowers ABB's Global, Technical Workforce to be No. 1 in Customer Service

ABB is a pioneering technology leader in power grids, electrification products, industrial automation, and robotics and motion, serving customers globally in utilities, industry and transport, and infrastructure.

Continuing a history of innovation spanning more than 130 years, ABB today is writing the future of industrial digitalization with two clear value propositions: bringing electricity from any power plant to any plug and automating industries from natural resources to finished products. As title partner in ABB Formula E, the fully electric international FIA motorsport class, ABB is pushing the boundaries of e-mobility to contribute to a sustainable future. Because ABB's products and services are designed to endure, they need top-of-the-line customer service to support them. In fact, being recognized as No. 1 in customer service is one of the key priorities for ABB, and AMA is helping ABB to keep its word.

## THE CHALLENGE

The Power Grids Division of ABB decided to complement its engineering and technical excellence with customer service training for employees working directly with customers on a daily basis to solve their short, medium, and long-term problems.

ABB sees the customer focus, a true service mindset, as a key competitive advantage and the path to the future. "We continuously do things that make our customers more efficient," says Sudhakar Kuchibhotla, global head of capability, Power Grids Service. "Becoming number

one in customer service is a logical extension of that. Our equipment typically has a long lifecycle, and we are committed to providing the kind of service our customers will need throughout the life of that equipment."

To be No. 1 in customer service, ABB needs to offer customers not only the best technical knowledge, but also the soft skills required for a proper understanding of customer needs.

Kuchibhotla and Jesus Rivera, global business controller, Power Grids Service, decided to invest in equipping ABB's technical workforce with training that will help ABB deliver a better customer experience. But finding the right education partner would be a challenge.

## SCALING A DREAM TO A GLOBAL FOOTPRINT WITH LOCAL INSTRUCTION

ABB operates in more than 100 countries with approximately 147,000 employees. In an industry that undergoes continual transformation, ABB needed not only strong content, but also speed in execution and implementation, a customized program to target ABB's needs, the capability to deliver globally in the local language, and the aptitude to handle logistics and administration for each of the programs.

"We needed a global company with a local face," says project sponsor Rivera. "We needed to make sure the program would be successful, and we wanted to present in the local languages, with local trainers and examples that were easily relatable for the local audience." It was important that the instructors have local industry experience and the ability to make the training resonate.

The other key factor was speed. "We were in transformation mode," Rivera says. "We had no time to waste. We couldn't wait to make this happen in 2020. We needed to get it done, and we needed to get it right, and quickly.

"We had a dream and I had just the right partner in mind."

## QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

"Earlier in my career as a first-time manager, I failed, and that was a wake-up call," Rivera says. "I was looking for places to go to improve my management skills, and I found AMA. I love AMA. Once I was there, I was hooked. I took 28 seminars in one year, and all of them were high quality, with excellent coaches, excellent material, and an excellent pace. It was an amazing experience for me, and it helped me to become a better manager, to be more assertive."

When Kuchibhotla shared his plan to make the Power Grids Service a customer-focused organization, Rivera suggested partnering with AMA. "We talked about improving the soft skills for the most important people in the organization, which are the people who interact with customers daily, on the most critical problems on the customers' side. We needed to make an investment in service excellence. We contacted AMA and told them we have a dream, and this is what we want to do."

"We met with ABB to understand what they wanted to accomplish and why it was important within the context of their business, and their passion for serving their customers was truly inspiring," says Lisa Zoba, regional director, Corporate Learning Solutions at AMA. "Leveraging AMA's deep experience in employee development, we quickly translated ABB's vision and business goals into learning objectives that could be scaled into a global initiative."

ABB's learning objectives included providing customer-facing employees with the ability to consistently:

- Describe the connection between service excellence and high performance
- Listen actively to understand customer needs
- Apply communication skills to build rapport and manage conflict
- Seek customer feedback with a mindset of continuous improvement
- Articulate how customer-facing professionals can help customers achieve business goals

## 8 SKILLS TO DEVELOP A SERVICE MINDSET

ABB recognizes that just one interaction can affect a customer's loyalty and commitment to maintaining a lasting relationship with ABB. Therefore, all customer-facing sales and service employees need effective communication, relationship-development, problem-solving, and customer service skills.

Employees have the ability to prevent and successfully manage conflict by using techniques and approaches to defuse a difficult situation and achieve a positive outcome. Equally as important, they can help customers leverage the full range and value of ABB's products—including solutions in other divisions.

After program participation, ABB representatives:

- 1 Employ listening skills to understand customer needs and problems
- 2 Apply effective use of communication skills to resolve problems
- 3 Understand the ABB prospect generation process and proactively create new prospects through enhanced customer relationships
- 4 Use knowledge of personality styles to help understand their own style and others' styles and to communicate more effectively with customers
- 5 Enhance their customer-facing role as a trusted advisor
- 6 Seek feedback from customers and achieve a mindset of continuous improvement
- 7 Defuse challenging situations by seeking to understand, listen, and ask questions
- 8 Effectively handle conflict to achieve a win-win resolution for customers, themselves, and ABB

These core competencies help employees build relationships that will have a significant impact on customer retention, satisfaction, business growth, and ultimately on revenue generation. In this program, employees learn best practices for communicating, establishing a customer-focused mindset, and managing conflict to gain customers' trust in them as advisors. This lets them facilitate deeper relationships, provide exceptional value, and deliver best-in-class customer service to represent ABB at the highest level in the marketplace.

## CONSISTENT DELIVERY DESIGNED FOR A GLOBAL WORKFORCE

AMA's solution was to provide 13 instructors, trained in AMA's experiential learning method, to deploy the program in 43 sessions across 16 countries, including Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Finland, Germany, India, Italy, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, and the United States. In just nine weeks, AMA's instructors were able to scale ABB's program to provide consistent instruction, translated into Chinese, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, and Swedish.

"AMA proved to have fantastic linguistic capabilities, and they were able to match our footprint," Rivera says. "Not many companies can do that."

Flexibility was also a key factor. "AMA has a robust process [for employee development] but is ready to partner with customers to match their needs," Kuchibhotla says. AMA was "very collaborative in terms of designing the course to reflect our requests."

In addition, AMA offered a centralized, dedicated customer support team to ensure everything ran smoothly. "Just imagine, we were deploying it in so many languages, in so many countries, and in a very short time," Kuchibhotla says. Top-class facilitation was going to be critical.

## INSPIRING COMMITMENT TO A SERVICE MINDSET

At first, there were two pilot sessions. The training followed all ABB's requirements, and the employees were very engaged in the content. "[The workshops were] very practical and interactive, so employees gave very high feedback scores. The managers were excited and wanted to include more staff. They told me, 'We need to have one more session.' In the end, we had to add sessions, and it was clear that overwhelmingly people liked it. [That's when] we decided to go global, adding 15 more countries."

"When I presented the global roll-out plan, it was to train employees in 15 countries, in eight different languages," Kuchibhotla says. "People asked, 'When will it be done?' I told them we would get it done in the first quarter of 2018. They didn't believe it! I said it will be done, and in fact we actually got it done in two months, all sessions. That was a reflection of our commitment and of AMA's capabilities."

"Overall, this was a very challenging task, in terms of time frame, footprint, and content," Kuchibhotla says. "Yet, the implementation was amazing. It was impressive. It required a lot of interaction and coordination, and the team has done an excellent job of it."

## NEW SKILLS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

"Traditionally the field service training is focused on technical skills, and rightly so. Now our emphasis is equally on soft skills, which are critical for nurturing our relationships with customers," Kuchibhotla says.

Superior customer service is not just about customer retention, it's finding out what the customers really need. "That has shown a good value creation in terms of additional opportunities," Kuchibhotla says. When ABB representatives have more meaningful conversations with customers, they uncover additional needs that ABB products and services can support. "It creates more prospects and more opportunities. We've seen millions of dollars of opportunities created, and this [initiative] definitely contributed towards that."

## Exceptional Response from Participants Inspires Better Customer Service

Instructor Rating:



Program Rating:



“The training program was aptly designed for [the] service business, with excellent examples and role-plays. Giving detailed insight about the kind of customers one may generally encounter, the program helped in fine-tuning communication skills and better understanding of the customers.”

—ABB participant, India

“Very well done. Good pace, good interaction and teamwork. Allowed other, less-experienced individuals to learn from the more experienced in the organization.”

—ABB participant, United States

“The content of Service Mindset training was very interesting, helpful and also useful. [The instructor] did an awesome job.”

—ABB participant, Germany

“Investing in people's soft skills will bring several business benefits for enterprises like ABB, its customers, and employees, but more important, it helps to create a better world, because such skills are transferable to their day-to-day jobs, their lives, and future movement in their careers.”

— Jesus Rivera, Global Business Controller, Power Grids Service

Based on the success of the program, ABB scheduled an additional 13 sessions in 11 countries, translated into 5 additional languages. They were completed in Q4 of 2018. [AQ](#)