



Fierce Conversations® Good for Employee Development; Good for Business at National Retailer

Crate and Barrel was first exposed to Fierce at an American Society for Training and Development conference where Crate and Barrel trainers saw a program highlighting the foundations of Fierce. They immediately knew that the skills and tools behind the Fierce Conversations program would be a tremendous value to their organization.

Because Crate and Barrel is fully committed to training as a part of its business model, corporate director of training and education Lou St. Ville is always seeking programs that meet Crate and Barrel's needs and support their culture.

Fierce Training Programs Work

Lou chose Fierce because it provides top-notch communication skills training that enables all levels of associates to engage in more productive and direct dialogue. Many programs offer good tools, yet Lou is passionate about Fierce because it works quickly and cost-effectively. Lou also recognizes that Fierce aligns with Crate and Barrel's long-standing culture of dignity and respect that

has made Crate and Barrel an anomaly in the retail industry—a retailer with associate longevity and low turnover.

Crate and Barrel's success, according to founder Gordon Segal in a recent interview with The Guardian newspaper in London, comes in part from its social contract with associates, which according to Segal means, "if you give us your career we will treat you like family."

Segal, who started with one store and now has more than 160, also said it was never his goal to build an empire.

"Our goal was to be the best, not the biggest." So how does an organization stay true to its values, keep its culture intact, and remain the best as it grows exponentially? With good communication skills taught through training programs like Fierce.

"Crate and Barrel understands the direct correlation between employee development and successful retailing."

— Nancy Spratt
Manager of Training & Development
Crate&Barrel

Crate&Barrel

A national retailer with stores across the United States and Canada, Crate and Barrel has deployed Fierce Conversations training in many parts of its organization. Crate and Barrel associates participate in Fierce as part of the corporation's commitment to associate development and advancement, which is a part of an overall culture of caring and a strategy responsible for the retailer's longstanding success.

Although the Fierce program has touched multiple parts of the organization, this case study focuses on two key areas of the business that have experienced meaningful on-the-job success because of the Fierce Conversations training program: store managers and the Contact Center team (which includes quality assurance mentors).

The most significant feedback about Fierce Conversations training is that it is relevant to associates' work, and it is easy to learn and integrate successfully. This simplicity enables associates to be more successful at their jobs shortly after taking the training.





a fierce case study

Fierce Coaching in the Contact Center

Nancy Spratt, manager of training and development and quality assurance for direct marketing, believes that training Fierce Conversations and Fierce Accountability aligns with Crate and Barrel's cultural expectations that have been so important to the company's success. Nancy said Crate and Barrel understands the direct correlation between employee development and successful retailing. She explained that at Crate and Barrel, communicating clearly, effectively and respectfully creates associates who are happy, who love coming to work and who are empowered to do their best every day. Happy employees create a good experience for customers. And happy customers are good for business. Crate and Barrel's use of Fierce aids in providing the communication skills that make associates successful and therefore happy.

Fierce teaches the art of conversation, fitting perfectly with what Nancy Spratt's direct marketing Contact Center team does every day. The team includes customer service agents (CSAs) who converse by phone, email, or IM chats with customers and quality assurance mentors (QA) who monitor and tutor CSAs to ensure CSAs meet customers' needs.

At Crate and Barrel, the Contact Center QA mentors have no authority over the CSAs whom they monitor and coach. The QA mentor must build relationships and earn the trust of CSAs through effective conversations. Nancy and her QA team were able to use the Fierce coaching model effectively to meet the needs of the Contact Center operations, while improving the dynamics between the two groups. QA mentors now are able to elicit feedback during the coaching process that enables CSAs to self-identify behaviors needing improvement thus making them more committed to the solutions they cooperatively create. Using the coaching model, they listen more effectively and problem-solve more cooperatively ensuring quick integration of optimal behaviors.

"Fierce is nothing like the theory-intensive programs that tend to confuse people and don't have much of a 'take back' for the job"

– Christy Lerner
Regional Trainer, Southern Region
Crate&Barrel

Fierce in the Trenches with Store Managers

Store managers supervise the personnel that present the public face of Crate and Barrel to the consumer. Well-run stores are vital to Crate and Barrel's overall success and store managers particularly appreciate the language and content of Fierce because it is both easy to understand and very relevant to their jobs. The ideas are current, and the concepts can be quickly integrated to improve their managerial skills.

Christy Lerner, regional trainer for the southern region (who was once a sales associate and store manager), said store managers respond well to the quick, relatable Fierce concepts because they are easy to remember—and therefore easier to implement—in their fast-paced, pressure-filled store environment. Fierce is nothing like the theory-intensive programs that tend to confuse people and don't have much of a "take back" for the job she said.

The feedback from store managers who use Fierce is unanimously positive, and Christy sees direct results in the Fierce-trained store managers who, post-training, are able to quickly identify and resolve personnel issues with good communication skills to keep their staff working productively.



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Fierce Fits Crate and Barrel's Corporate Culture of "The Right Conversations"

Fierce Conversations training aligns with Crate and Barrel's corporate culture which values good communication. "We've always talked about the right conversations and the right way to lead so the Fierce training really fits in with what Crate and Barrel believes; it resonates with our people and our culture," Christy Lerner said.

Christy explained that Fierce training facilitates communication for "managing the right way" through open, honest, communication and solid coaching skills that engage staff and lead to appropriate employee development. Managing "the right way" is part-and-parcel of Crate and Barrel's strong culture of caring that creates the employer-employee loyalty and commitment that ensures the retailer's success.

Nancy sees the skills learned with Fierce as vital to being a good manager, supervisor, trainer, or coach. "When you have authority, or even when you don't, you still care about the people that report to you or work with you, and you let them know that," Nancy said. "You care about what they believe and think; you let them know that their ideas are important."

For Lou St. Ville, success with Fierce is obvious. When they use Fierce, Lou observes, participants are able to incorporate new skills immediately upon returning to their work environment—be it a store, a distribution center, or corporate department. Lou has become an impassioned Fierce advocate because Fierce provides materials that are straightforward, understandable, relatable, practical, and powerful. Fierce helps Crate and Barrel develop productive, competent associates critical to Crate and Barrel's retailing success.

add fierce to your training toolkit

Our diverse, global client list underscores a basic truth: Business is fundamentally an extended conversation—with colleagues, customers and the unknown future emerging around us. Whether your focus is on implementing key initiatives, managing top talent, improving customer acquisition and retention, developing leaders, or simply igniting productive dialogue that generates clarity and impetus for change—success occurs one conversation at a time.

For more information about how Fierce can help your business, visit fierceinc.com or contact us at 206.787.1100.



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