

At your service

Building a world-class services and support organization.

Julian Eames, F5's senior vice president of business operations, offers a few tips for building a dynamic services and support organization—especially within the high-growth tech industry. He was interviewed by F5 World's editor in chief, Tracy Thompson.

Q What are some of the challenges in building a successful support organization within a high-growth company like F5?

A For the last three years we've been in a growth mode, and that has brought its own special challenges. Our growth came in a big rush, which was fantastic for the company, but difficult for my organization. Call center volumes doubled from one quarter to the next. And we didn't have enough people to deal with that, especially as it was related to [then new BIG-IP] version 9, where our customers/partners and SEs were also in the dark. We're a long way past that now, and our processes are much tighter, which is important.

Q Is finding the right people one of the more important keys to building a successful organization?

A Yes, finding the right talent and the right experience for our products. We're always looking for people who have strong networking skills and application knowledge, as well as a desire to stay in support. Then you have to provide them with the right training. We've brought in full-time trainers just for that purpose, so we can get new hires up to speed quickly. It's also important to have a single set of processes throughout the organization.

For example, all our support centers worldwide report to one manager, rather than having to report into local geographies. Customers around the world receive the same consistent service because we follow the same consistent processes. You don't want to reinvent the wheel each time a new call comes in—there's not enough time in the day for that.

Q What are the processes based on?

A The vehicle we use is the ISO 9001 standard, which is an outside agency that comes in with a standard of clauses that you have to prove you can meet—things like quality management, quality policies, quality processes, and benchmarks. We're on our way to meeting the accreditation for that standard, which will formalize our processes even more and can also be used as collateral when talking to potential new clients. It serves as proof that you're meeting some tough service benchmarks, based on the opinion of a respected third party. Say what you do, do what you say, prove it, and improve it.

Q How do you gauge customer satisfaction?

A We measure customer satisfaction by going back and surveying half of our callers—it's as simple as that. We have six different questions to them, covering areas from initial response time to the quality of the engineer, the quality of the fix, call wait times, and so forth. You then tally the scores on a scale of 1-10. You want to be over 8 at the minimum. Obviously, having a great product will also definitely go a long way toward making happy customers. Good support will



F5's Julian Eames: When growth comes fast, think forecasting and simplicity.

initially keep them with your company, but you'll always need competitiveness of product, both in features and in price.

Q What three key pieces of advice would you give someone who is being charged with building out a services/support organization within their company?

A First, you need accurate forecasting: Understand what your product is, what your shipments are going to be, and what the customer requirements are going to be. Get a good forecast, and then put together a good model of what you need to meet those requirements. Second, look at the systems you have in place, and try to keep them as simple as possible. Simplicity is key, especially when you're growing at a substantial clip. Finally: people, people, people. Get the right people, get the right training for them right away, then stay out of their way and let them do their jobs. ✨