CallMiner

5 Upskilling Secrets to Supercharge Your Contact Center

How combining the right training, tools and AI, can drive agent productivity and retention

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## How combining the right training, tools and AI, can drive agent productivity and retention

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Turnover rates in the customer service and support industries are sky-high. In fact, **average contact center turnover** rates exceed 30% per year. The impact of this loss is much higher than you might expect. The real cost of turnover is estimated to be 33% to 2x the cost of the employee's annual salary.

That means a 100-person organization that provides an average salary of $50,000 with 30% turnover could face staggering attrition and replacement costs – ranging from $495,000 to $3 million per year. Approximately 67% of these costs are "soft" costs that come in the form of lost productivity, lost knowledge, errors, and more.

Attrition can be a fixable by developing soft skills that drive productivity and employee success. By keeping the contact center workforce engaged and satisfied, teams can retain employees, create a recruiting engine, and even improve customer satisfaction. According to McKinsey, engaged contact center employees are:

- 8.5x more likely to stay than leave within a year

- 4x more likely to stay than dissatisfied colleagues, and 16x more likely to refer friends to the company

- 3.3x more likely to feel extremely empowered to resolve customer issues.
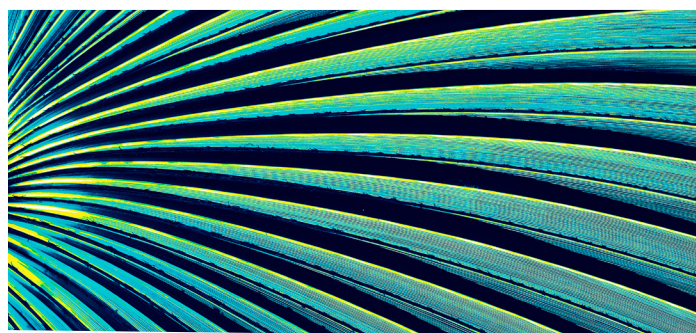
With metrics like these, organizations are paying more attention to agent experience than ever before. It turns out most employees' demands are very realistic. According to a **recent survey**, 90% of respondents consider training and upskilling an important feature in prospective employers. That number increases to 97% for employees in the tech industry. An additional 56% of workers want to see their employers offer more training and career development programs in 2022.

Beyond training alone, another major part of improving the agent experience is providing the tools they need to be successful at their jobs. According to a **study from Freshworks**, one out of three business leaders in 2022 will prioritize digital platforms that help their service teams work better.

Chief among these investments are tools that leverage artificial intelligence (AI), that improve agent workflows and productivity. In addition, AI-fueled tools provide managers and supervisors with the capabilities to create targeted one-to-one coaching and one-to-many training programs for agents.

Upskilling: What does it mean in the contact center?

The **definition** of upskilling is the ability "to provide (someone, such as an employee) with more advanced skills through additional education and training." For business process outsourcing (BPO) firms and customer experience teams, **upskilling can mean** training agents to:

- Handle new support types
- Work more efficiently
- Improve service quality
- Close critical skills gaps.

Five Upselling Secrets

Secret 1: Gain actionable intelligence from customer insights

When designing training and development programs, many organizations overlook the insights that are contained within the actual conversations that take place with their customers. The reason is simple: Many teams are not capturing these insights in the first place. Some rely on random call sampling to determine agent performance.

While these samples may detect some issues, they miss a vast majority of interactions. And, with omnichannel customer experiences on the rise, they don't account for digital customer interactions via chat, email, social media and other emerging channels. But what better way to train your employees than using real-world learning from those conversations, rather than seat-of-the-pants theoretical or anecdotal examples. In reality, collecting and analyzing 100% of omnichannel customer conversations using conversation intelligence technology can reveal much deeper, more critical information for your organization.

These technology platforms, often powered by AI, can uncover insights into contact drivers or the motivations behind why your customers reach out. Going a dimension deeper, they can reveal the emotions behind why customers are reaching out, and how those emotions and customer satisfaction levels might evolve throughout the customer journey. By tracking these changes, you can gain a deeper understanding of your customers' experience with specific agents and your brand overall. Additionally, employees can be trained based on the strategies and tactics that have proven most effective at producing positive call outcomes.

These insights can also be used to provide targeted coaching for agents based on real interactions they're having with customers. Rather than relying on generic scripts and training programs, agents can leverage conversation intelligence via real-time guidance or post-interaction coaching.

For example, **a healthcare organization** might use real time conversation intelligence to detect emergency situations when an agent should escalate a patient to a medical practitioner. Post-interaction analytics can be used on a larger scale to provide feedback on trends in an agent's performance, or to use positive interactions to drive success across the entire organization.

Achieving early wins with contact drivers

Hoist Finance implemented conversation analytics to drive a culture of above-and-beyond customer support, remove risk, and gain actionable insights to drive organization-wide improvements. The company saw near instant results by analyzing contact drivers, or the motivations behind why a customer calls.

Rather than relying on agents' disposition codes or their interpretation of what happened after a customer call took place, the team was able to uncover a much deeper insights on customers' true motivations, providing a link between customer and agent perceptions. The team used this intelligence to look for opportunities to digitize some customer interactions and provide feedback to agents on how to modify behaviors to better understand customer contact drivers.

Secret 2: Accentuate the positive: Using top performers to drive upskilling

Many managers intuitively (and mistakenly) think of performance improvement as calling out faults. However, flipping the script and focusing on areas where your agents are excelling may be more motivating and effective than emphasizing areas for improvement alone.

That's what a major home services provider focused on when designing an effective sales and support agent training program. The company analyzed its sales operations data with conversation intelligence to determine trends in what worked best for conversions when customers reached out with questions or issues with the platform.

Using this data, the provider found that successful sales representatives relied on empathy and understanding the customer's situation to prevent customer churn. By analyzing the conversations of these successful representatives, the management team devised a strategy to coach every employee for empathy, and reward successful outcomes.

Specifically, managers trained each person to use more empathetic statements, and provided new tools that empowered sales representatives to be more effective in their customer interactions. Rather than working with data on what went wrong, using what went right was far more motivating for employees.

As a part of the program, employees can give feedback to managers on how the training program is or is not working for them. They are encouraged to say what they need for growth, which provides opportunities for the management team to hear and respond to their needs. It's a two-way, collaborative form of coaching that's a win-win for managers and employees alike.

As a next step, the company plans to feed data into the conversation intelligence platform to determine attrition and retention trends by hire date across their salesforce. They will compare this data against sales KPIs, such as customer close rates. As a result, they'll be able to see job satisfaction trends, such as when agents are burning out. From there, managers can provide further coaching or move them into a different role.

Overall, the conversation intelligence program has led to a "coaching the coaches" movement, which encourages process improvements for supervisors to adapt to these new data-driven training programs. By talking about conversation intelligence technology (including how the data is gathered and analyzed) during the training program, they have improved supervisor trust in the new coaching process. Knowing that supervisors trust the process has inspired trust in employees, and propelled this company's culture of continuous improvement.

Secret 3: Leverage KPIs as a development tool

Your organization may already be collecting data for quality assurance (QA) reporting, and tracking movement on other important customer experience KPIs (e.g. CSAT, NPS, and more). However, even QA data can make supervisors more effective coaches.

Gant Travel used automated QA via conversation analytics to eliminate time supervisors spent monitoring random call, allowing them to spend that time continuously sharing feedback with agents. As a result, there has been a 400% increase in frequency of feedback between supervisors and agents.

Gant Travel agents use scorecards to see the progress they are making in key areas. The agents now have time to review their customer interactions and supervisors can spend time coaching based on what the data is telling them.

For example, the company plans to look at various traveler personas and correlate sentiment data with each one to determine how to best interact and support customer behaviors. Most importantly, Gant Travel plans to share customer data with other team members outside of the contact center to drive transparency throughout the company.

Similarly, **VitalityHealth** first tapped conversation intelligence technology to monitor QA, then expanded its use case to provide its agents with individualized coaching and development. Every call is now analyzed for quality monitoring, with key terms being tracked and tied to business KPIs. Because 100% of calls are being analyzed, the VitalityHealth quality team is also able to consider the context of each agent's wider work.

Managers typically assess calls in three areas:

Regulatory: Industry benchmarks and requirements that everyone in the sector must meet

Service excellence: An analysis of each conversation's tone, empathy, and how the call was opened and closed

Process assurance: Call data is used as the basis for highly focused, personalized coaching for advisors.

The response of VitalityHealth agents has been extremely positive, as they recognize this approach as a more objective, individualized and constructive way of looking at their performance.

Secret 4: Help agents tap into emotion and empathy

As seen with the home services company above, empathy can be a superpower for high-performing agents. In a study commissioned by CallMiner, **Forrester Consulting** found that 57% of contact center decision makers struggle to determine their customers' dynamic emotions. Brands will find it difficult to provide emotionally resonant interactions if they don't understand what customers are trying to do and how they feel about the interaction.

That means focusing on coaching and training agents on emotional indicators can help them accelerate in their career path. These indicators can include:

Loyalty: Emotions include happiness and satisfaction

Interest: Emotions include excitement and surprise

Negative interest: Emotions include fear, guilt, shame

Destructive behavior: Emotions include anger, irateness, contempt, disappointment, disgust.

On the flip side, supervisors can use emotion data to detect patterns of abuse from customers to agents. This attentiveness, and subsequent responses by management to support agents, can lead to more trustworthy relationships with agents and reinforce that this type of behavior will not be tolerated.

Tapping into AI for 'artificial empathy'

Artificial empathy is the idea that AI systems can detect and effectively respond to human emotions. For example, if a customer is engaging with a chatbot about a billing error and is displaying frustration, the chatbot can appropriately express remorse for the situation the customer is experiencing.

Similarly, AI technology can help human agents better engage with customers. For example, if an organization leverages a conversation intelligence solution that includes AI and ML capabilities, that tool can help alert agents to customer situations that might require an empathic response in real time.

Since machines can't actually "feel" anything, AI uses three steps to leverage emotion to improve customer experiences:

1. **Detect** The emotion of the customer. This can be done using a variety of inputs, such as facial recognition, voice (acoustic) analysis and natural language processing (NLP) of written or spoken language.

2. **Display** an appropriate emotional response. For visual AI systems, this could be a change in facial expression. A chatbot, on the other hand, may present a predetermined response, like "I'm sorry to hear you're experiencing that."

3. **Take actions** that attempt to mitigate or intensify the customer's emotion, depending on the scenario.

For example, if a customer expresses joy from an e-commerce purchase, the AI system may suggest a similar purchase or send out a survey. For negative emotions, AI tries to solve the problem. If someone calls with a technical error, the AI system may troubleshoot the problem, or if there's a defective product, the system could suggest a refund or replacement.

In combination with upskilling opportunities, this AI technology can be a defining factor in supercharging your contact center. They can support agents in real time, help them be more successful in their roles, and drive performance improvements over time.

Secret 5: Create a continuous feedback loop

One-and-done feedback isn't always valuable to your agents, but when your managers provide continuous feedback, agents can learn and develop in their careers. This improves retention by demonstrating to agents that they have a future with the organization.

As customer experience leader **Jodi Beuder** aptly put in an article about coaching and training:

"As a manager, it is your job to listen and respond to your employees. Coaching/ training can happen at any time, at any place, and it doesn't have to be long-winded. Sometimes it is most effective to offer a short piece of advice to your employee that is immediately relevant to a specific situation.

The message communicated during these less formal interactions are often heard more clearly as they aren't lost in a longer training session. Training needs to relate to the job at hand. Try to incorporate relevant training into the working day, and into the tasks and activities agents have to complete in a real-time setting,"

As mentioned in the scenarios above, conversation intelligence can be used to provide training that's most relevant to the job at hand. In addition to real-time and post-interaction feedback, this technology can also be leveraged for predictive purposes.

One example of a predictive scenario might be determining the reasons why customers are most likely to contact your organization based on past interactions. Knowing these reasons in advance can help your supervisors and agents partner to address potential problems before they happen.

Since agents are on the front lines of the customer experience, ongoing, collaborative training should be a dialogue between the agents and their supervisors.

Agents' observations and collective experiences can also be used to inform cross-departmental business improvements. For example, a retail customer support department might receive an influx of calls requesting a new color SKU. This information can be relayed to the product team for incorporation into future iterations of the product.

Vary training tactics to improve retention

In addition to incorporating all necessary training elements in your regimen, it helps to change up how your new agents (and even experienced ones) learn. Classroom-style learning, practice calls, and asynchronous quizzes are great for consistently conveying important information, but not the best for retention.

There are several ways to vary training, including:

Gamification: Turn the information into a game by tracking progress, having a trivia contest or even creating a game for the team to play

Role-playing: Practice calls with managers are important, but what if you allowed more experienced agents to throw "real-world" common curve balls to new agents? Doing this will build camaraderie while better training your staff

Cross-training: In many call centers, there are specialty agents for specific issues. These teams are often smaller than the pool of general reps. Cross training allows for a happier and more well-rounded team

Pulling it all together:

Supercharge your contact center

Given the troubling statistics around agent attrition, it can be easy to feel overwhelmed or discouraged about where to start. However, the most successful contact centers leverage the right tools and technology, like AI, and insights to provide a better agent experience – helping them increase productivity, celebrate their successes, and pinpoint areas for improvement and career advancement.

These successful organizations share three traits in common:

- They rely on customer feedback as a mechanism to offer agents the training and support they need to excel in their jobs

- They allow for bilateral feedback between agents and supervisors to reflect what parts of the training process are working and not working

- They take their training beyond QA score and KPIs. Reviewing actual customer interactions can provide real-world coaching opportunities and create a continuous feedback loop throughout an agent's entire career

To learn more about improving agent performance and productivity, read the Forrester study, commissioned by CallMiner, **"The New Contact Center Empowers Its People with Customer Intelligence"**

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About CallMiner

CallMiner is the global leader in conversation analytics to drive business performance improvement. Powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, CallMiner delivers the industry's most comprehensive platform to analyze omnichannel customer interactions at scale, allowing organizations to interpret sentiment and identify patterns to reveal deep understanding from every conversation. By connecting the dots between insights and action, CallMiner enables companies to identify areas of opportunity to drive business improvement, growth and transformational change more effectively than ever before. CallMiner is trusted by the world's leading organizations across retail, financial services, healthcare and insurance, travel and hospitality, and more.

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