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5 Ways to Create Engaged and Empowered Call Center Agents

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Hiring new agents is never easy. Too often, contact centers employ individuals that show great promise, only to see them leave a few months later. Deloitte reports that large call centers with over 500 agents suffer from turnover rates of 50% or higher annually – and the number significantly increases in certain countries and industries. The agent role is a high-stress one. When the majority of their days are filled with often negative, angry customers, and little positive reinforcement, agents are quick to become disengaged.

Employee or agent engagement is a measurement of how committed the individual is to the overall good of the company and their role in it. Contact centers can experience a number of struggles from demotivated agents including absence, attrition, customer complaints, after call work, and an increase in average handle time. Each of these can cause further damage to a contact center's bottom line through bad customer experience, lower Net Promoter Score, diminishing revenue, declining compliance, customer churn, and an overall decline in sales.

Contrary to popular belief, the agent's job activities are not usually the cause of disengagement. Instead it is often a direct result of unfair and inaccurate evaluations, limited self-development opportunities, incentives that don't align with their values, and limited opportunities for growth. The good news is that all of these are things that contact centers have full control over if they know how to approach them the right way.

To successfully measure the change in engagement and properly track results, contact centers should have a starting point to work from which includes specific data.

The most efficient way to gain data is by analyzing the agents' recorded calls. Call recording is used by 92% of call centers according to survey in Contact Babel. But of those calls, typically less than 1% are actually analyzed by a manager or QA supervisor and can take up to 45 days to be reviewed. To give real coaching feedback to your agents you need to analyze 100% of their calls. Then look for ways to improve engagement and create empowered agents.

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1. Create learning Opportunities

Today there are plenty of ways to create continuous learning opportunities for employees. Employees are actively seeking to work for businesses that offer opportunities to learn and develop skills and use it as a criterion before accepting a new position. Deloitte survey results showed that 42% of employees responded they were likely to leave a company if they aren't learning fast enough. Employee attrition is a costly expense making it imperative that contact centers find ways to create valuable learning opportunities.

Micro-learning

Micro-learning focuses on delivering valuable information in just minutes. Teaching small chunks of information allows agents to process and implement new information more quickly than traditional long-form training.

Digital Learning

Instead of creating new content, contact centers can use curated content that gets sent to agents to complete via a learning management system. Training opportunities are provided once agents reach a certain point in their training or career. Agents can also request access when they are ready to learn more about specific topics.

Social Learning

Learning from one another is powerful as long as agents don't pick up bad habits. Contact centers can utilize online platforms where agents can post and answer coworker questions. By using a social platform, management can monitor the conversations and step in when the wrong information is provided.

Dedicate Learning Zones

Create specific areas in the contact center that have resources, chairs, and technology that agents can use to learn and research. This gives agents an opportunity to leave their desk for an hour each week for professional development. By having agents leave their desk, they are more likely to take the opportunity instead of getting distracted by work at their desk.

Gamification

Gamification is a hot topic in engaging employees and ties rewards and competition to completing certain training opportunities.

Clear Learner Pathways

Every role in a company should have a pathway that identifies where agents should start and what steps they need to take in regards to learning.

Peer to Peer Coaching, Self Assessments, and Real-time Feedback

Providing feedback in real time to agents gives them the chance to make changes on upcoming calls as well as seek out training on where they need it most.

Agent Scorecard in Real-time Success Story

After working with CallMiner Eureka for a short time, **Dialog Direct**, now Qualfon, learned how to apply it to help meet its process and quality improvement goals. Dialog Direct made extensive use of the automated agent performance scorecards through speech analytics to recognize agents that performed well and to identify areas for improvement and provide targeted coaching.

Although there was some initial resistance, once agents saw the amount and quality of data they were being evaluated on, they quickly came to trust the scorecard results and buy into improvement efforts. Learn more about Dialog Direct's success in their **video**, and **webinar**.

2. Offer Reward and Recognition

Research shows that the number one reason why people leave jobs is limited recognition and praise. According to analysis done by Gallup, only one in three workers in all industries strongly agree that they received recognition or praise for doing good work in the past seven days – and employees who do not feel adequately recognized are twice as likely to say they'll quit in the next year.

Rewards and recognition are not just about money; praising agents is also powerful. They key is to be specific during recognition by saying, "When you did X, the impact of that was Y." By being specific, agents know what actions they should repeat in the future. Sharing a recording of how an agent handled a particular call is also a great way to both train other agents and recognize performance.

It is important to remember that not every reward needs to be big - non-financial rewards also work well in driving engagement. Early finishes, certificates, awards, and chances to earn new learning opportunities are also great ways to inspire engagement. And having that reward be presented in front of their team for public gratification can be a powerful motivator.

Developing a Better Work-Life Balance for Agents

The contact center can be a stressful place and can impact overall productivity and health, leading to absenteeism. That's why businesses are increasingly opting for flexible practices that allow workers to choose the hours they work (and, if the technology allows, from where) to minimize the effects of stress and develop a better work-life balance.

A study from Indeed found that more than one in four employees in organizations that are not perceived to support work-life balance plan to leave their companies within the next two years.

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3. Demonstrating Leadership

Agent engagement starts with how the leader manages the contact center and the agents. Employees often leave a boss, not the job.

Listen and Coach

Listening to employees is extremely valuable. The more leaders listen, the better they can coach employees. Coaching doesn't have to be scheduled; it can happen every day at any time.

Empower Agents

Instead of handing out answers when agents ask questions, leaders should encourage them by asking, "where do you think you can find the answer?" This creates the expectation for agents to do the research on their own first and creates a feeling of empowerment.

Ask What Motivates

Every agent and employee is different in what motivates and drives them to perform better. Leaders need to personalize their approach to employees by asking them what motivates them most. Don't assume every agent responds to the same motivators or incentives.

Be Human and Authentic

Sometimes it is okay to say now is not a great time for this and ask to come back to it at a later time. When leaders are honest up front, they are less likely to snap at agents or give wrong answers, which creates respect and shows you are human like them.

Be Visible and Involved

Sitting behind a computer all the time won't result in engaged agents. Leaders need to be in front of their team, having conversations, and offering coaching. While that may seem difficult, it is easier when mundane tasks that eat away at time are delegated to other employees.

Be Consistent

Inconsistency in style and approach from day to day makes agents fearful in approaching leaders. How leaders approach employees should be consistent across all team members. When leaders use data to coach and train, they are less likely to allow their emotions about an individual agent to get in the way of how they approach the conversation.

Delegate

Delegate to help agents grow, not just to make the leader's work lighter. When leaders delegate tasks to agents that need to improve skills for that task, agents are more likely to improve their performance over time.

4. Use Automated Analytics to Coach Agents

Traditionally, contact centers utilized manual monitoring of calls and review. Unfortunately, this approach results in not being able to review enough data to provide valuable feedback to agents.

In addition, the manual process requires a lot of time which can often take thirty or more days to review calls. By the time the agent receives the feedback, they might not even remember the call being referenced.

An automated approach through interaction analytics provides agents with real-time feedback while they are on the call or directly after. Customer engagement analytics reviews 100% of the conversations which minimizes the chance of skewed results. This also allows management to identify outliers and determine what agents are doing really well and where there is room for improved performance. Knowing which areas agents need specific help with makes it easier to personalize training and coaching to their needs.

Coaching to Success Story

Dialog Direct also wanted to improve how many of its process steps are followed on each call (process adherence) and how well agents put the coaching and training they received into practice, which it calls "coaching adherence." Better adherence to quality processes and their new consultative approach led to more sales plus better closing and activation rates.

"Once we got speech analytics, we could measure what was absorbed and retained from our training. We could measure it and coach to it right away," says Marvie Wright, Director of Leadership and Training. "As a result, we reduced our onboarding process from eight months to four months."

Learn more about Dialog Direct's success in their **video**, and **webinar**.

5. Create the Performance Feedback Loop within your Agent Community

All of the information is shared with the agents so they can make changes as needed in their conversations while also taking additional training in the areas where they need assistance.

Results can easily be shared from peer to peer, team to team and within your organization to show improved measurements. Great call center agent and manager relationships are truly a two-way street. Continuous performance feedback solutions are a great tool to keep those lines of communication open.

Transitioning to a customer engagement analytics solution may seem like contact centers will have to change their whole approach. The truth is, contact centers can still use the same strategy; it is just automated through technology instead of a manual process. This makes it much easier to continue the performance feedback loop without missing a single conversation or opportunity for coaching and learning.

Takeaways

Having engaged agents is essential for any contact center. Instead of justifying high turnover rates, contact center managers should take the time to review and analyze internal procedures.

Start with having conversations with agents that ask how they feel about their work, what their goals are, and if they are happy with current opportunities. By surveying and listening to agents, managers should be able to identify common trends and areas where operational improvement is necessary.

Once trends are identified, managers can work to improve agent engagement through learning opportunities, rewards and recognition, developing better leaders, using automated analytics, and creating a constant feedback loop. Over time, they can measure the change and really focus on the areas or strategies that work best for their contact centers overall culture.

It pays to hold on to your call center agents. Investing in the tools that enable personalized feedback and insight to agent performance ensure not only retention, but happiness, engagement and commitment.

As a result, the impacts will be felt far beyond just the call center – boosting sales, brand reputation, and overall customer experience.

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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.

About Ember

Ember is a business services group providing specialist management consultancy, training, analytics and executive search.

We're joined by a shared ethos, of doing the right thing for our clients, and a shared focus on the customer experience and how to improve it — with the end goal of increasing value for our clients. For more information visit **www.embergroup.co.uk**

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