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Happier Agents, Happier Customers

A Mindsight Guide to
Optimizing the Contact Center
through Improved Agent Job Satisfaction

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Meet Our Experts

LAURA LUKIC, ATI PHYSICAL THERAPY, TRAINING MANAGER

Laura has over a decade of experience in the contact center. Starting as a contact center manager, she was offered the opportunity to learn workforce management strategy and implement it into her contact center. From there, she was recruited by another company as their Senior Workforce Management Analyst where she implemented workforce management solutions for seven contact centers across the country. Currently, she serves as the Training Manager at ATI Physical Therapy where she is responsible for quality management, workforce management, and analytics for the contact center.

JASON SHIPLEY, CAMPING WORLD, DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT CENTER

With a background in internet sales and restaurant management, Jason brings a passion for customer service to his contact center. As founding director of Camping World's Customer Engagement Center, Jason was responsible for overseeing design and construction of the space, initial onboarding and training as well as design of work flows and tracking of KPIs within the center.

JOANN GAWCZYNSKI, VITAS HEALTHCARE, PATIENT CARE ADMINISTRATOR - TELECARE

Joann's career in contact centers started at VITAS Healthcare in 2005 as a telephonic triage nurse for hospice patients. Joann was a clinical supervisor in the contact center before being promoted to her current role in 2008 as Patient Care Administrator. Telecare MWR handles calls for patients and families of 22 of the 45 programs VITAS has in 19 states.

Executive Summary

Happier Agents, Happier Customers is a Mindsight guide to improving the efficiency, performance, and ultimately the revenue generating power of the modern contact center. It accomplishes this goal by first recognizing that nearly every aspect of the customer experience, good or bad, stems from the performance and quality of the contact center agents on staff. Therefore, optimizing the contact center is really about recruiting, retaining, and motivating the best team possible.

Yet, the contact center industry brings its own inherent challenges. The work is repetitive, the calls don't stop, and agents can feel like the job is headed towards a dead end. *Happier Agents, Happier Customers* lays out a series of strategies to overcome these challenges, inspire agents, and create the changes you want to see in your contact center. These proven strategies were gathered through a series of interviews with real contact center executives who have used them with their own team in their own contact centers. The topics covered here include developing a successful onboarding strategy, reducing agent attrition rates, using workforce management applications, and improving the physical space of the contact center. Through these strategies, contact center managers can increase the job satisfaction of their team and thereby optimize their contact center.

Introduction

Creating an effective or optimizing an existing contact center involves a number of moving parts. Even outside of drafting call scripts, using social media, and resolving customer complaints, there is still the human element of managing a contact center that needs to be addressed. Live agents need to be trained, motivated, managed, and sometimes even replaced. The contact center has a notoriously high turnover rate and finding good talent is always a challenge, yet the quality of the staff is the linchpin of customer service and the customer experience.

In this guide, we'll showcase proven strategies to overcoming the challenges of training and retaining talent as well as how to optimize your contact center. To aid us in this task, we've reached out to three contact center executives who have employed these strategies in their contact center with great success. Starting with onboarding strategies, the guide will then move on to describe methods of reducing agent attrition rates. Then, we'll cover workforce management (WFM) strategies and ways to improve agent productivity by improving the contact center physical space.

The effectiveness of the contact center is directly related to the quality of the team, and the rewards for operating an excellent contact center are not to be understated. According to the **Harvard Business Review**, it is five to twenty-five times more expensive to acquire a new customer than to retain an existing customer. Adding to that fact, a report from **Frederick Reichheld of Bain & Company** notes that increasing customer retention rates by as little as 5% can increase profits by 25%–95%. The true value in the contact center is in its potential as a customer retention tool.

Consider these statistics:
- 91% of unhappy customers will not willingly do business with the company again[1]
- If a customer's complaint is resolved in their favor, they will continue to do business with the company 70% of the time[1]
- 59% of Americans would try a new brand or company if it means better customer service[2]

The strategies in this guide will help your contact center take the next step. Retaining and training the best agent talent and setting these agents up for success is the key to an efficient, effective contact center. With the right staff with the right skills in place, your contact center can drive more revenue, foster greater customer loyalty, and ultimately yield a superior customer experience.

Part One: Onboarding Strategies

Contact center agents are the ambassadors of their company, and therefore need to possess an expansive depth of knowledge to converse with their customer base. The agent must know about the company, the industry, the contact center applications in use, the key performance indicators of their position, the call scripts, the customer service philosophy behind the call scripts, and on and on it goes.

A new hire needs to be brought up to speed as quickly and efficiently as possible, and to do that effectively, your contact center needs to have an onboarding strategy. We sat down with Joann Gawczynski, Patient Care Administrator - Telecare, VITAS Healthcare to discuss the onboarding strategy used by VITAS, a hospice organization with contact centers around the country.

DAY 0: PAPERWORK AND GUIDELINES

For Gawczynski, the onboarding program begins before the agent begins their first day. It's important to get things moving quickly, so she wastes no time.

> "Before 2014 when new hires started on their first day, they would come in and spend eight hours completing paperwork. Currently they are completing 90% of the new hire documentation before walking in the door. Once we have made an offer that has been accepted, I contact the business manager, who then sends out an email that has the information for the drug screen. A second email goes out that gives the new hire access to their employee profile and directs him/her to complete new hire paperwork. The paperwork consists of tasks such as the W-4 information sheet, direct deposit, etc. This email link also includes the corporate handbook and the guidelines for the contact center here at VITAS."

By moving up the legal paperwork and standard first day activities, Gawczynski, along with the business manager and executive management, make room to host a very different Day 1 experience for new hires.

DAY 1: WELCOMING THE AGENT

With paperwork already out of the way, Day 1 focuses instead on welcoming the agent, making them feel comfortable, and helping them acclimate to a new role. The combination of these activities helps drive home the central philosophy behind customer service at VITAS and cultivates positivity in the contact center and optimism in the agent.

> "We work to promote positivity and inclusivity. It's working with your team one-on-one starting on Day 1. When someone comes into the contact center on their first day, everything is ready for them. We have everything ready from the agenda for the day to a lanyard to hold their ID and a headset for them to use on the job. We also give each new employee a copy of "The Energy Bus" by Jon Gordon. While this was rolled out to help change our culture in the contact center, this small book with the "10 Rules for the Ride of Your Life" is changing the culture with the company. We don't wait until the last minute to get the materials ready for our new hires the morning they arrive, because when you do so, the agent may feel unimportant or not as welcomed or included. We want our new hires to know they have made a good decision in deciding to accept a position in the contact center at VITAS."

The agent then participates in an online orientation hosted through WebEx. Because VITAS is a national company, agents in different states all log in to a video meeting hosted by a live moderator and including the contact center business manager, HR assistant, and the VP for the contact centers. The moderator and presenters cover standard Day 1 topics like rules and training program, in addition to presenting information about our culture and so on.

The live group orientation benefits the agent in a few ways. First, it shows new employees that though they may be the only agent starting in their particular contact center, there are new VITAS agents all around the country having the same experience as them. Second, it yields a better conversation with live interaction among the group. Agents can ask questions in real time and receive answers just as fast.

From there, one of the activities completed in orientation involves different personality/leadership types:

> "Leadership, including our supervisors, went through a training called True Colors by James Champion. Now all new hires go through it as well. It's personality trait training. Once a new hire has answered a questionnaire, it leads you to the next step which is understanding your true colors/ personality/leadership traits. You could end up having one true color or a combination of the different profiles. That's something new hires go through with HR to learn a little bit more about themselves. They also share that information with the group during orientation to better understand each other. This can also help the supervisors know how to better interact with the new hire."

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Though it may seem unconventional, True Colors helps break the ice for many new hires, and gives them a shared language to understand the kind of people they will be working with. Because everyone is operating on the same vocabulary across multiple contact centers around the country, a new agent can use these categories to get a sense of the different personalities on the team. This is also a help to the management team in interacting with a new employee.

> "The VP of Customer Service actually makes a point of getting on every Day 1 with our new hires and talks to them about customer service, tries to get them to open up a little bit. We enlist the help of some of our other VPs in the company who have come up through the contact center. We want the new team members to see that there are opportunities in the company for advancement."

It's important to note what is not included in Day 1 activities. The agent is not listening to calls, they aren't working with the software, and they are definitely not on the phone. While there is no time to waste in an onboarding process, you also cannot rush the agent into it. Gawczynski put it best when she said, "It's all about creating that energy and positivity in the contact center where employees want to do their best.

DAY 2–10: THE NITTY GRITTIES

After a welcoming first day at VITAS, the onboarding process turns toward the actual functions of the position. WebEx orientation continues with the same collection of new hires as a live educator dives deeper into the knowledge required for the job.

> "Day 2 is when we get into the nitty gritty of the job role. They learn about our company, our industry, and the job they were hired to do. It's a similar experience to Day 1 orientation. They come in at a designated time, log into the WebEx meeting, and now some of the new hires they saw on Day 1 are back for Day 2 orientation. It's all educator led. While there is some self-study such as reading, and quiz taking, the majority of the time is led by the live educator."

Putting the focus on live education continues to allow the agents the opportunity to ask questions, spark conversation, and discuss scenarios. This level of interaction can't be done with an exclusive self-study approach and goes a long way to develop the kind of skills and language the agent should be using on the phone.

Furthermore, this allows every new agent to hear the same message. Whether Florida, Illinois, or California, a new agent is going to receive the same training, from the same educator, at the same time. This orientation and training carries on for the next two weeks where the new hires learn their essential job functions.

> "By the time they're done with Day 10, they have learned a lot about the company and the industry. They've learned about what they're going to need to do on the job. They've completed mock calls with the educator and role playing. They've been instructed on how to use the documentation system and phone system. They understand the metrics that they need to meet, and they're given the knowledge to know how to meet the metrics."

Even after two weeks, the onboarding process is still not complete, and the agent is still not quite ready to get on the phone. Next, the agent begins their Peer Mentorship program.

DAY 11–20: PEER MENTORING

These last two weeks of the onboarding process are the most critical. The new agent begins to put the skills and lessons she/he has learned into practice. The key is that the agent is doing so in a controlled environment with a more experienced agent there to assist if necessary.

> "Now the next 8-10 days, the new employee will be working with a peer mentor. It's a gradual process. At the beginning, they're not the one handling the call. They're putting in documentation and learning how to use the different applications. Then, they gradually work toward taking control or handling the call. Finally, the new hire will be completing the documentation and handling the phone call. This is all done while they are still connected to their peer mentor who at any time can cut in and help guide if they are not providing the correct information to the caller. Every day they're with the peer mentor, the mentor must submit a report on the progress of the new hire."

Peer mentorship also helps build camaraderie in the contact center. For most of the day, contact center agents are at their desks and on the phone. This leaves little room for team building and getting to know one another. The peer mentorship program allows a new agent to work closely with another team member on a common goal.

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ONLY THE BEGINNING

After Day 20, the agent is fully trained and ready to begin their careers as a contact center agent. Of course, quality management does not stop there. Regular call reviews and quality assurance meetings are necessary to keep agents focused and performing at their best.

To review, the onboarding process is about more than just a transfer of knowledge and skills. It's about welcoming a new member of the team and helping them become acclimated to their new environment and new responsibilities. Truly, a quality onboarding process is the first step to retaining top agent talent. As we cover in our next section, however, it is only the beginning.

Part 2: Reducing Agent Attrition Rates

Once you have a contact center agent trained and up to speed, the next challenge is to ensure the agent sticks around. Developing an efficient and effective onboarding strategy is moot if the agent doesn't stay in that position.

Many agents don't stay. The contact center has had historically awful attrition rates. Compared to the business average of 15%, the research firm, **Quality Assurance & Training Connection,** puts the contact center attrition rates as high as 30-45%. In any given year, a contact center could be replacing almost half of their staff and running a whole new batch of agents through their onboarding program. It's unworkable, unacceptable, and it doesn't have to be this way.

STRATEGY 1: BLUNT EXPECTATIONS

To curb attrition rates, Jason Shipley, Director Customer Engagement Center of Camping World, believes that the direct approach is best:

> "I very actively in the interview process try to sell people out of the job. I am absolutely blunt with my expectations. I tell people that they are going to be making 160-200 contacts per day, that they are going to be on the phone the whole time, that they are going to be doing the same activity over and over again."

By being so straight forward and candid, Shipley is able to weed out those who are not suited for the position. In some cases, the candidate decides the job is not for them, but in others, Shipley elects not to move forward with certain candidates based on their reaction to the reality of the position.

One of the best aspects of this strategy is that it stops a problem before it starts. If you can weed out employees before training, onboarding, or before they're even considered "employees" at all, you can avoid a lot of wasted time and resources.

Be absolutely blunt with your hires. Tell them the reality of the position and lay out your expectations for them as clearly as possible with call numbers, shift times, and other data to round out your explanation. However, be sure to include the good aspects of the job as well. If there are ways in which your contact center staff blows off steam, builds camaraderie, or adds levity to the job, be sure to share that as well.

If there are no surprises, there are no regrets.

STRATEGY 2: BREAK UP THE MONOTONY (PRODUCTIVELY)

Despite expectations of call volume, breaking up the monotony of the job can go a long way in agent satisfaction, but at the same time, these breaks in the action cannot be frivolous. Provide agents the occasional project that also serves to make them more familiar with your product, customer base, or company.

> "We do a lot of different trainings on our products. We do video production for a portion of our web content out of the contact center here, and I involve the agents in working on our scripts and the development of the video. We do this for training purposes, so agents understand what buyer motivations are. It gives the agents insight into what features, advantages, and benefits the product has, and it gets their hands on things to get an understanding of what is going on."

While video production is an excellent way to keep agents involved and in touch with the customer base, it isn't the only method of accomplishing this. Agents can also build internal training documents or manage a "knowledge base" for easy reference by other agents. Even just a different format of customer service can be a nice change of pace for the agent. Webchat, social media, or a different "type" of call can serve the same purpose. If the contact center engages in marketing calls, customer service calls, and sales calls, ensure each agent gets the chance to participate in these different calls to keep things interesting.

The point here is to provide a reprieve from the same customer interactions while still ultimately improving the agent's performance on the phone.

STRATEGY 3: HIRE PEOPLE YOU KNOW WILL STICK AROUND

Life, of course, takes people in unexpected directions, but based on different factors in someone's life, you can predict whether or not they will be available for the foreseeable future.

> "I look to hire people that I know I will have for a little bit of time. I'll be flexible with a mom that has kids in school and be flexible with her start and end times to make sure she's out of here on time to meet the kids at the bus. If I only get five and a half or a six hour shift from somebody, but I know that her kids are going to be in this school district for the next eight years, I'm happy to make those kinds of accommodations for her."

The key here is flexibility. If there are certain parameters of the job that you can meet someone halfway on to secure their job satisfaction for the future, it is worth the compromise. However, this must be used in moderation. If every employee has special privileges, it can become difficult to accommodate everyone all the time. Be judicious with your flexibility, and make sure that, at the end of the day, it serves the betterment of the contact center just as much as it serves the agent.

STRATEGY 4: GAMIFICATION AND DAILY SPIFFS

Healthy competition with a monetary reward can be a great motivating factor for agents. While you do not necessarily need to develop a full gamification strategy with level ups, achievements, and records, select elements of gamification can go a long way.

> "I do daily spiffs off of different things we're trying to drive. So, if I'm trying to get call volume up, I'll do a call volume type spiff, or if I'm trying to drive appointments, I may take a week and put out a $200 spiff on the most shown appointments. We don't do a formal gamification strategy, but there's always some kind of running contest."

Shipley goes on to point out that monetary rewards have worked the best in his contact center. The spirit of competition is certainly an element in sparking motivation, but a small spiff is the most effective strategy. The nature of the contest should be based on whatever metric is lagging or salient at that time.

STRATEGY 5: SUPPORTING YOUR AGENTS

The last strategy to reduce agent attrition involves keeping in touch with your agents. Shipley likes to be hands-on with his agents to support them and help them in whatever way he can.

> "I make sure me and my other managers are very active on the floor. I spend two to three hours of time on the floor on a daily basis to make sure I'm in contact and in touch with people. I'm active with them on escalations and making sure that customer issues are handled. By making sure that they feel supported and that there is an open door policy is a factor in our retention."

Practically speaking, if the contact center manager then senses that an agent is losing motivation or their performance numbers are dipping, shuffling tasks as described in Strategy 2 or a spiff as in Strategy 4 can reignite their interest. By being on the floor and in touch, the manager can get a better sense of morale and base their other decisions off this intelligence.

THE PROOF IS IN THE RESULTS

By employing these strategies in his contact center, Shipley's contact center has remarkably low attrition rates. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the average contact center attrition rates range from 30-45%, but his contact center last year only lost five agents out of a roster of 35. That boils down to a 14% attrition rate—less than half of the lowest end of the average.

Part Three: Workforce Management

Contact centers can vary in size from a handful of agents to numbers in the hundreds or thousands. Regardless of size, management is still presented with the challenge of overseeing and managing the logistics of a contact center. Training, shift scheduling, time and attendance tracking, performance monitoring, and more are all essential to an efficient and effective contact center environment. While it is certainly possible to track and monitor this information manually, doing so can be tedious in a small contact center and a major time sink in larger operations. For that reason, contact center managers are turning to workforce management software to digitize the process, gather analytics, and provide an easy platform to oversee their workforce.

Laura Lukic, a Chicago-area contact center manager with 15 years of experience, has worked in contact centers both with and without workforce management software, and her opinions on the subject are very clear. She's a passionate proponent of the solution, and it is easy to see why.

STRATEGY 1: AGENTS CAN SEE REAL-TIME PERFORMANCE

Elsewhere in this guide, contact center executives have discussed transparency and analytics as excellent tools in agent management. Workforce management is the tool by which this transparency is achieved.

> "Agents can see their real-time performance, and I think that is really, really important. Years ago agents thought, 'I wonder how I'm doing?' or they didn't know they were doing bad until we were walking them out the door. Those days are gone. People want to know how they're doing and these tools put all that information right in front of them."

Agent analytics are essential to the modern contact center. As Lukic describes, analytics provide complete transparency on job performance. Agents always know how well they are performing and understand which metrics they need to improve in order to meet contact center standards. However, it is also an excellent management tool in that it allows contact center managers to intervene earlier if agent performance is starting to dip. As described in Chapter 2 on Agent Attrition, such dips in performance are signals to management that this agent may need a change of pace or management should present a spiff to reignite motivation.

Lukic also brings forth another important point. Transparency leads to fair and equal treatment of agents, which in turn increases motivation.

> "I always felt it was a tool that helps cultivate a fair environment. It shows that we are fair and non-biased as a management team. It wasn't really me sitting down with an agent to tell them that they are not where they need to be. They can see where they are at and, they know our expectations. No one wants to be the agent taking call after call after call, while the low performers sit around and do nothing. They may get recognized as a top performer, but why would you want to be the best agent if you had to carry the weight of the team? I think there's a lot of contact center agents that still feel like that."

STRATEGY 2: STAFFING THE RIGHT NUMBER OF AGENTS

Planning shifts and schedules is a risky assignment in the contact center, because the margin for error is so small. Staff too many agents on any given day, and it results in a waste of payroll funds. Staff too few and the customer experience suffers for it. Using historical analytics, workforce management provides a simple solution. Lukic explained the importance of getting staffing hours correct when she said,

> "The biggest killer of a contact center is mismanagement of staffing, because the labor is so expensive. In my contact center, almost the complete cost of what we do is the labor itself. It's such a large percentage of our costs that we cannot afford to even have a buffer, so it has to be spot on."

Workforce management software uses several metrics to determine how many agents should be staffed on each day and during each shift. It cross references call volume for that same date in previous years against the average number of calls fielded by agents along with a couple other factors. This yields an accurate estimate of how many agents should be staffed on that day to meet historic call volumes.

The most compelling argument for its effectiveness was put succinctly by Lukic:

> "Without it, you're back in the primitive world of spreadsheeting and working on instinct."

STRATEGY 3: LETTING AGENTS BID ON SCHEDULES

A powerful strategy to improve job satisfaction for agents while also easing the workload of a scheduling manager is to allow select agents to choose their own shifts. Workforce management software can facilitate this process so that the scheduling manager does not need to track or oversee any requests. Lukic has used such a system in the past:

> "Allowing agents to pick their own schedule works really well. There are some businesses out there that have different roles in the agent arena. There may be a contact center that has three different types of agents and they each have particular roles, especially in the healthcare industry. Before my current position, we had registered nurses that doubled as contact center agents. Their role was a little bit different than the standard agent and their shifts were a little bit different."

The different roles are important for making this strategy effective. Because these specialized agents have specialized roles, they exist outside the standard pool of agents and therefore exist outside the standard call volume. Allowing them to pick their own shifts out of available options streamlines the scheduling process.

Furthermore, agent bidding also presents an opportunity to easily staff and manage per diem employees. Lukic explains:

> "Per diem staff, which really don't have any scheduled shifts and just pick up extra hours here and there when we have staff call off or out on PTO, really benefit from WFM. Managers are able to see upcoming coverage needs up to a month out, and per diem employees can log onto our WFM system once a month and pick up a few hours here and there, just to cover the holes. This allows the flexibility for as many or as few hours as the agent wants to work."

The per diem employee is also a valuable way to save on overtime costs and avoid agents being forced to work double shifts to maintain coverage. This will both help the contact center weather scheduling conflicts and maintain work-life balance for the entire staff.

NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED

Lukic laments that when many businesses build a new contact center from scratch, they overlook workforce management tools. It is understandable, but misguided. WFM tools are not inexpensive and a contact center can manage without one, but in terms of optimization, there are no other tools more powerful. Between scheduling, analytics, time management, and more there is something for everyone.

> "Not everybody is in the contact center business, but every business needs the support of a great customer service department."

Part Four: Creating an Effective Facility

Environment plays a much larger role in agent motivation and productivity than you may realize. In a study conducted by members of **RLW Analytics, Inc.; Heschong Mahone Group Inc.; and California Energy Commission,** researchers were able to find statistically significant improvements in agent performance based on environmental factors. The study looked at 100 contact center agents working in an incoming contact center in the Sacramento Municipal Utility District. They used a computer program to continually track and record data on handle times for each call as they manipulated environmental conditions. The study found that different environmental factors can actually improve agent productivity by a factor of 6%-11%.

Jason Shipley of Camping World is a strong proponent of productive spaces and has found success in his contact center by providing a well-lit, organized, and enjoyable workplace.

STRATEGY 1: LIGHTING

Talk to any office worker under the sun, and they'll tell you how much natural light improves their mood and their job satisfaction. If you've ever worked in an interior windowless room during the daylight savings months of November through March, you'll agree how draining it can be. Shipley's contact center has the advantage of a scenic landscape, but the company has also taken steps to improve the lighting in the contact center.

"We are on a property of about 22 acres in Wauconda, IL, so we're surrounded by fields and a big pond and a little bit of outdoors. But, we cut into the building eight or nine additional large picture windows to make sure we've got a lot of natural light coming in. We also use soft-spectrum LEDs to avoid that bluish-cold lighting in the center to make sure people are comfortable."

STRATEGY 2: A RELEVANT AND PLEASANT THEME

Outside of the outdoor scenery, the way in which the contact center is decorated also has an impact. What pictures are hung on the walls, what color paint is used, and so on can improve agent mood and create a pleasant atmosphere.

"Our business sells camping and RV equipment, so we very actively designed [our space] around a camping and travel theme. There are a lot of pictures and imagery of both the product, people using the product, and outdoor scenery. In our studio area, the walls are done in large-scale panoramic photos that make it feel outdoorsy. That place also doubles as our break room, and we use reclaimed lumber in there to create a campsite feel. All those things combine to make an impact."

Shipley has the advantage of a clear and appealing theme to the business and his contact center, but other businesses can find their own niche. Get creative and loop in your marketing department for ideas on ways to make your contact center a more dynamic and interesting space.

STRATEGY 3: DESK ARRANGEMENT

The actual layout of agents will also have an impact on agent mood and productivity, and there are plenty of options available. Some contact centers have rows of cubicles while others have no division at all. Shipley's contact center has a clear strategy on how to approach this subject.

"We don't use cubes. We've got straight rows of desk that have dividers in between. They're arranged in groups of six with three on each side. We've got a really open environment in here. There's a fine balance between sound control and closing people too much into a cube and making them feel too restrained. You don't want them to feel locked to a little desk making a heck of a lot of phone calls."

The balance here is key. Agents need enough of a barrier to block the sound of other conversations while also providing an open enough space so they do not feel constrained.

As a side note, when asked if high barriers or cubicles and the privacy they provide leads to negligence, he had an interesting response. He believed that privacy should not exist in a modern contact center at all. Despite dividers or cubes, a contact enter with modern analytics will keep each agent honest. Analytics will shine a spotlight on any negligence that is occurring. Whether or not management catches the agent slacking off in the moment is a non-factor if the agent's numbers for the day are still meeting standards.

DOING WHAT YOU CAN WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

Not every business is going to have the resources to perform significant remodels on their building in order to improve the agent work space. Even if they can, fewer businesses will be able to make all of these upgrades at once. Therefore, contact center managers must do what they can with what they have to improve the environment. If budget is a concern, Shipley recommends improving the hanging artwork in the contact center. It can be updated at little cost and create a better atmosphere.

In addition, consider bringing your agents in on the design decisions. Provide them with a few options and allow them to vote on what artwork should be hung in the contact center. This is likely the best way to ensure that the design changes will be well-received.

Try to make your contact center space is as welcoming and inviting as it can be.

Optimizing Your Contact Center —
The Human Element

There is no single turn-key solution to a building a motivated team of agents, as this guide has demonstrated. But, the strategies laid out here build upon each other to create a unified approach. At the center of these strategies is the need to help your agents feel welcomed and important. From Day 1 of the onboarding strategy to gamification, workforce management, and a comfortable work space, if the agent is happy, the contact center will perform better. Yet, this will not last forever. Even if you design the perfect contact center environment and hire the perfect contact center agent, that agent still requires the occasional nudge of encouragement throughout their career. Otherwise, they may burnout, lose interest, or find new employment elsewhere. It requires constant vigilance and upkeep.

It can be tempting as a contact center manager to become focused on numbers, on analytics, on performance metrics, but numbers don't always reflect every aspect of reality. At the end of the day, a contact center is really just an assembly of people. Yes, technology can go a long way to empower your agents to do their best, but that technology needs quality agents to operate it. Trying to encourage your agents to perform at their best day in and day out is essential to contact center optimization. They require the skill of an attentive and knowledgeable management team that sets the stage for their success and helps them along the way.

Our goals may be more revenue, greater customer retention, or lower costs, but in the end, our only path to get there is through a happier, healthier team.

Discussion: First Steps

Presenting a list of strategies is beneficial, but it doesn't supply any direction for where to begin. Some of the strategies outlined in this guide require a significant time or financial investment from the company in order to actualize their success. However, three of the strategies to reduce agent attrition can be put into place immediately.

STARTING TODAY: STRATEGIES YOU CAN EMPLOY RIGHT NOW

Strategy 1: Blunt Expectations

In your next interview, try this strategy: lay out exactly what the position would entail in complete detail. Include the good, but make sure the bad is as clear as possible. If the applicant is going to be uncomfortable answering dozens of calls a day, it is better to weed them out now than to waste time training an agent who will burn out after a short time.

Strategy 2: Break Up the Monotony (Productively)

Look around your contact center. You can probably point out a few agents whose performances have dipped lately. Experiment with this strategy and begin swapping responsibilities. To prevent inconsistencies in the customer experience, start this on a small scale first.

Take a handful of agents and exchange their job functions for a week or two. Monitor their performance during the experiment, and when it is over, ask whether or not they enjoyed a change in responsibilities. It's possible that some agents may respond better to this exercise than others.

Strategy 3: Support Your Agents

Try a more direct approach. Over the next few days, walk the floor a little longer, schedule one-on-ones with some agents to ask how they are doing, and make your presence known. Agents don't necessarily like a manager breathing down their neck, but it's important to appear as though you're involved and a member of the team.

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Our contact center consultants are well-versed in the technology and business process improvements that can drive real change in your contact center. Increase efficiency, drive more revenue, and improve your key performance metrics with a Contact Center Roadmap from Mindsight.

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