



ON-DEMAND *Is In* DEMAND



ONLINE TALENT PLATFORMS ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK. BY SUSAN HASH

Say what you will about the gig economy, the concept holds high appeal for contact center agents who crave more control over their schedules. Although recent reports suggest that the size and rate of growth of the gig economy have been overinflated, the growing emphasis on flexibility and better work-life balance indicate that on-demand work will be increasingly in demand in future work environments.

The prevailing assumption is that digitally savvy younger workers are at the forefront of the gig movement; however, studies show that the ability to work flexible hours remotely appeals to older generations, as well. [Aspect Software's 2018 survey of 500 customer service reps](#) revealed that, while just over half (51%) of young millennials and Gen Z reps were interested in moving to an on-demand job, 41% of all survey participants between the ages of 18 and 55 also expressed interest.

...p04

THE FUTURE OF THE CONTACT CENTER: OPTIMISM WITH A DOSE OF CAUTION

BY LORI BOCKLUND



WE EMBARKED ON A FUN LITTLE SURVEY THIS SPRING TO GATHER INPUT ON THE FUTURE OF THE CONTACT CENTER. Our focus was

on which technologies are expected to have the greatest impact and what that impact might be. Of course, artificial intelligence (AI) is a hot topic, so we asked those with “transformational” expectations of AI to share more input on this widely hyped enabling technology.

The results should provide useful insights to those who sell technology, those who analyze and write about it, those who try to make the business case to invest in it, and those who implement and use it.

...p08

BEWARE... FIVE SIGNALS OF CUSTOMER CARE BURNOUT!

BY KATHLEEN M. PETERSON



ARE YOUR CONTACT CENTER AGENTS INCREASINGLY LATE FOR WORK OR CALLING IN SICK? Are

quality and productivity declining while error rates and customer complaints escalate? Do bad moods and negativity dominate the contact center? If this is happening, your culprit may be BURNOUT.

Burnout is defined as “a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress” (“Burnout Prevention and Treatment,” Helpguide.org). Stress is a common ailment in many contact centers at all levels and impacts both agents and management. The fact that we call this a “demand environment” is

...p16



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ONLINE TALENT PLATFORMS ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK.

BY SUSAN HASH,
CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE



Continued from page 1

While companies have been slow to adopt gig work models as of yet, it's an approach that the majority of business executives are currently considering. According to [Mercer's 2019 Global Talent Trends report](#), 79% of executives say they expect contingent and freelance workers to substantially replace full-time employees in the coming years. For their part, more than half (54%) of the employees surveyed said that managing their work-life balance is one of the top five things their company can do to help them thrive at work (compared to 40% in 2018 and 26% in 2017), and the majority (82%) said that they would be willing to consider working on a freelance basis to gain the flexibility they desire.

Outsourced On-Demand: Agents as Contractors

As more companies rethink their approach to work, Mercer reports that many are experimenting with methods of intelligently matching the work to be done with the supply of skills. This includes pulling from talent pools both inside and outside the company—for

instance, by partnering with contingent talent agencies that can provide access to a broader range of skills and expertise.



To get a better sense of where this model can be highly effective, I turned to **KIM HOULNE**, Chief Executive of [Working Solutions](#), an on-demand contact center outsourcer based in Dallas. Houlné is a pioneer in the on-demand model. Her firm, founded in 1996, was one of the first virtual workforce companies. It provided brands with on-demand, remote-working customer service contractors long before the phrase “gig economy” was coined.

For contact centers, the on-demand marketplace dovetails nicely with companies whose call volumes are cyclical, such as those in the retail, healthcare, travel and utilities sectors, Houlné says—those that don't have a steady state of business throughout the year, and which are continually staffing up or down to manage volume spikes and valleys.

How does an on-demand outsourcing

model differ from traditional outsourcing? “We manage the process and the goal, as opposed to trying to micromanage the people,” Houlné says. Working Solutions' on-demand approach matches the work to be done with the agent's skills, rather than based on the job function or past work experience. Its virtual talent pool transcends geographical boundaries for a more precise alignment of expertise and capability to the work.

Although the contractors providing customer support may not have a contact center background, per se, they're able to deliver exceptional customer service because they have the appropriate skills and are enthusiastic about the work. Houlné points to a retired GM engineer who recently came on board as an example. “This gentleman wanted to do something new and perform work that was challenging and fulfilling. The program that he works on has nothing to do with engineering. However, we find that when the agent is there by choice and not because it's their only option, their passion drives higher performance.”

Continued on page 6

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Profile of an On-Demand Agent

Not every agent aspires to be an independent contractor or is cut out for a virtual, on-demand type environment. Houlné says that there are a few core characteristics that successful remote-working on-demand agents have in common.

Naturally, empathy and emotional intelligence are essential for working with customers, she says. “Beyond that, we look for candidates who are truly passionate about the work. They also need to be reliable and responsible. We find that agents who have had some

The on-demand marketplace dovetails nicely with companies whose call volumes are cyclical.

professional experience and professional training—those who are in their 40s and 50s—tend to be a little more disciplined and focused on setting their schedules, getting things done and balancing the work with their personal lives. Many younger agents may not have figured out their patterns or how they need to maneuver through their day. It takes some time—some life experience, if you will—to figure out how you want to operate.”

From a skills standpoint, the possibilities are wide open. While Working Solutions’ proprietary technology provides the foundation that allows Houlné to fine-tune the fit between the agent and the work, the on-demand model allows agents to find assignments where they apply their expertise and gain new skills. “They can choose their own destiny,” she says. While not a traditional career path, “we’ve found that, by expanding their skills, agents are more marketable in whatever they choose to pursue longer term.”

Importantly, the on-demand environment provides employees with the opportunity to find work that is meaningful to them—another top employee expectation. Having a sense of purpose at work is highly valued by American workers. So much so that 9 out of 10 employees are willing to trade a percentage of their lifetime earnings for greater meaning at work, according to a study reported in the *Harvard Business Review*.

Developing an Internal Talent Market

As the Mercer report points out, the on-demand environment is not an either/or proposition. Forward-thinking companies are finding ways to blend contract workers with permanent staff to make it easier to access the right skills at the right time. Many are also developing internal gig economies to provide

full-time employees with opportunities to work on different projects and teams, to help employees who are on temporary leave maintain their skills, and to retain those who may be nearing retirement age and may want to work

part-time on a project-by-project basis.

In organizations where the contact center acts as the hiring portal for the rest of the enterprise, an internal talent marketplace allows contact center leaders to tap former agents who have moved into other roles but who have the knowledge and expertise to help with unexpected workload spikes, such as weather-related emergencies. In addition, offering permanent staff the ability to opt into projects that interest them and which allow them to apply underutilized skills and knowledge enables the organization to optimize its internal talent pool while increasing staff motivation, engagement and retention.

To ensure that employees can expand their skills and pursue the work that interests them, training needs to be targeted and personalized for the individual. “Training content should be hyper-relevant to an agent’s role and focused on their learning and knowledge priorities,” says **CAROL LEAMAN**, CEO of [Axonify](#).

The microlearning approach is ideal for an on-demand model in which agents are accountable for their own growth and development. “It makes training accessible, memorable and engaging,” Leaman points out. “The quick and mobile nature of microlearning makes training incredibly accessible. Agents

can complete training on any device and from anywhere. In other words, they can do their training at their desks or on any connected device in just a few minutes a day without impacting productivity.

“With regards to making training memorable, science shows that human brains aren’t designed to process and retain large amounts of information at one time. In fact, people forget 90% of what they learn if it isn’t reinforced in 30 days,” she explains. “To combat this, microlearning delivers training in small chunks and reinforces it repeatedly over time. This helps agents to not only remember what they were taught but also put it into practice.”

Combining gamification techniques with microlearning can ensure that the learning experience is more engaging, Leaman adds. “Making the learning experience fun hooks people and keeps them coming back for more, so they’re always learning, which helps them to perform at their full potential.”

Upskilling Agents in an Era of Automation

A recent [McKinsey Global Institute report](#) estimates that, by 2030, roughly 14% of the global workforce may need to switch occupational categories as digitization, automation and advances in artificial intelligence disrupt the world of work. Companies that develop a gig economy culture—one where employees are provided with opportunities to expand skills, expertise and interests through internal “gigs”—seems like a step in the right direction.

In the near-term, as more companies rely on bots and automation to handle basic customer service transactions, frontline agents will need to expand their skill sets to handle increasingly complex calls and to deliver a high-touch customer experience.

“In a world of self-service, talented reps matter more than ever,” says Houlné. “Even though people are becoming increasingly savvy about using technology, they still desire human contact. Machines can undoubtedly enhance service delivery, but our human agents pick up where technology leaves off.”



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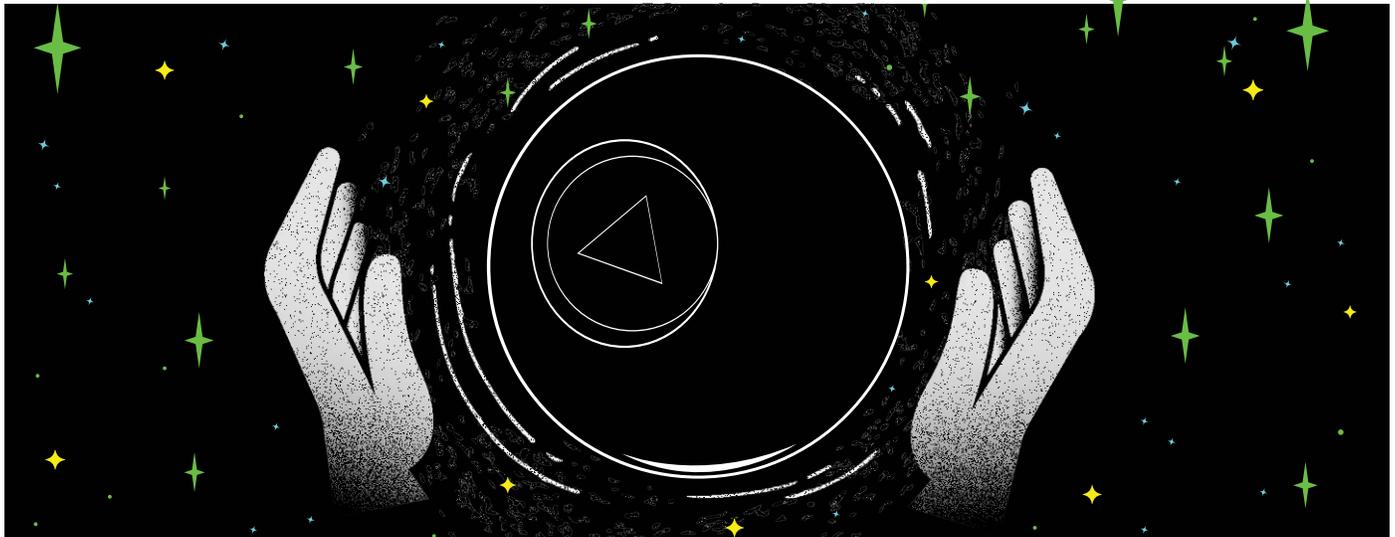
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THE FUTURE OF THE CONTACT CENTER: OPTIMISM WITH A DOSE OF CAUTION

Survey results reveal enthusiasm for employee and customer impacts, but tempered expectations for timing and the bottom line

BY LORI BOCKLUND, STRATEGIC CONTACT



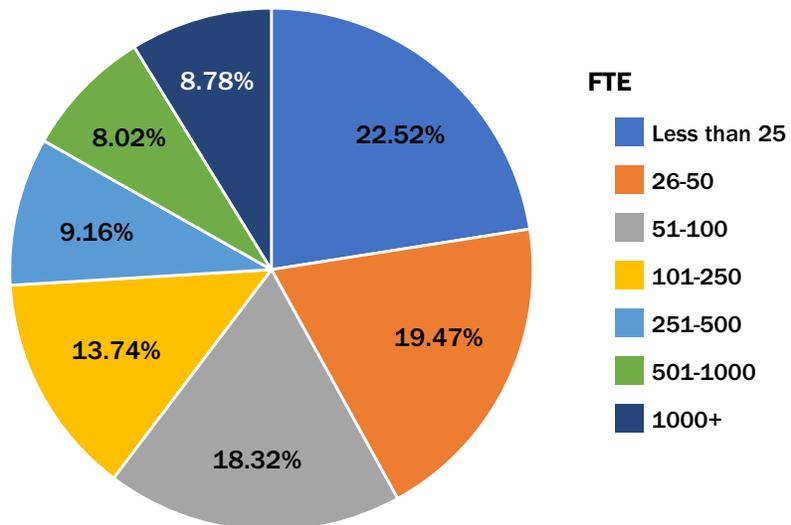
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Demographics

A broad spectrum of players shared their perspectives on the future of contact center technology. Nearly half of our 330 participants are CC leaders such as managers, directors or VPs. We slice some of the results into three main categories to explore their different viewpoints:

1. **Corporate and other (“Corporate”):** Corporate Executives, Corporate IT/Telecom
2. **CC Professionals (“CC Pros”):** Contact Center Leadership (e.g., Managers, Directors, VPs) and Contact Center Frontline Staff (e.g., Supervisor, Team Lead, Agent), and Contact Center Operations Support Managers or Analysts (e.g., Reporting/Analytics, WFM, QM)
3. **Industry Experts (“Experts”):** Industry Consultants, Industry Analysts and Vendors/

FIGURE 1: CC Participants Represent a Variety of Sizes



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Financial Services Perspectives

A high percentage of participants were in the financial services vertical; it is the only one with enough input that we feel comfortable sharing a few specific points about how they differed from the overall input.

- Nearly 40% expect automation won't change frontline staffing needs
- Participants shared an interesting balance on their perspective of AI, with 39% indicating they think it will be transformational and 33% saying it will not live up to the hype
- Financial Services was the only vertical that indicated AI may drive revenue

FIGURE 2: Expectations of Technology Impact on Frontline Staffing Varied Greatly*

Q: IMPACT OF AUTOMATION ON FRONTLINE STAFFING?

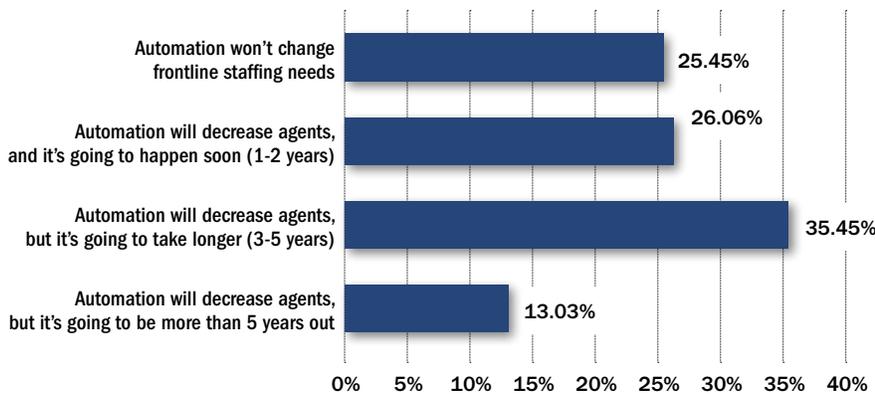
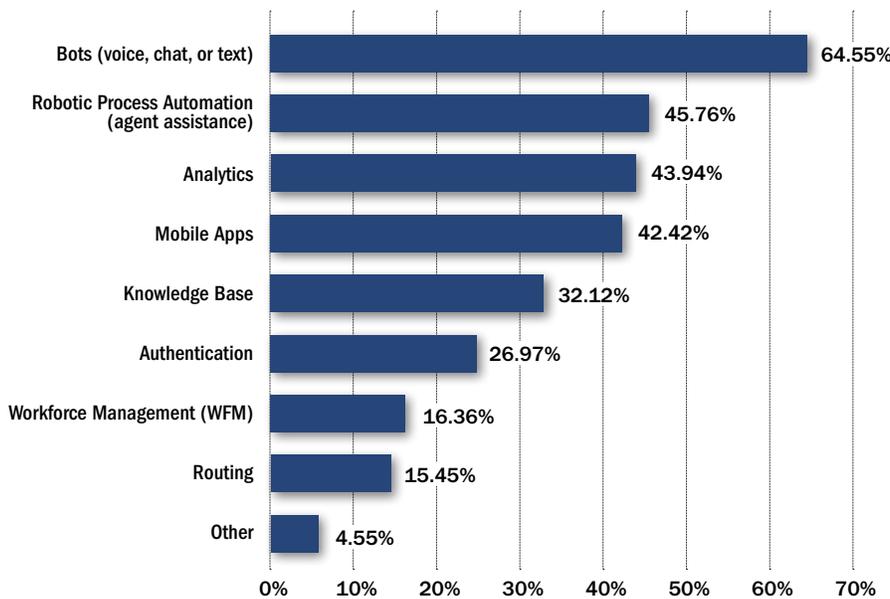


FIGURE 3: Bots Is a Big Winner in the Top Technologies List*

Q: TOP 3 TECHNOLOGIES IMPACTING CCs OF THE FUTURE?



*Visit www.strategiccontact.com/survey/contact-center-technology-future/ to get the survey results graphics, including the breakout of perspectives and sizing.

Value Added Resellers (VARs)

Importantly, the CC Pros represent a wide range of sizes as shown in **FIGURE 1**. This input enabled us to look at differences in perspective by size as well. Our industry segments were not as diverse. I share some input specific to the financial services industry, as they represented about 39% of our inputs (**SEE SIDEBAR**).

Note: To download the survey graphics, including the breakout by perspectives and sizing, visit www.strategiccontact.com/survey/contact-center-technology-future/

Impact of Automation on Frontline Staff

We started with a general look forward into the expected impact of automation on frontline staffing levels. Nearly 50% expect automation to reduce frontline staffing in three or more years. Approximately equal numbers (a quarter of participants) sit in the pessimist and optimist camps represented by no change and change happening *soon* (1-2 years). (**SEE FIGURE 2.**)

IMPACT ON STAFFING BY PERSPECTIVES

CC Pros are on the more pessimistic end of the spectrum, with one-third expecting no impact of technology on staffing levels. Only 10% of Industry Experts and 20% of Corporate share that view. Not surprisingly, more Corporate respondents expect results sooner (in 1-2 years)—33%. Perhaps most interestingly, nearly 75% of Experts have these impacts pegged for three or more years out.

IMPACT ON STAFFING BY SIZE

Slicing our data by size, we find great skepticism from the smallest centers; almost 50% of <25 seats and 31% of 25-50 seats expect no staffing change. Large centers (501+) are betting on impacts but in the 3-5 year time-frame. The largest (1,000+) generally expect impacts (only 9% say it won't change frontline staffing), with about 35% pegging the time-frame at 1-2 years and 52% at 3-5 years. Mid-size (251-500) are the most optimistic, with 46% expecting impacts in 1-2 years.

Top 3 Technologies

We asked participants to select the top three technologies they believe will have the great-

est impact on contact centers of the future. Unsurprisingly, Bots, which were defined to include voice, chat, or text, are number one by a good margin. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to provide agent assistance follows with Analytics and Mobile Apps on its heels. Routing and Workforce Management (WFM), which are bread-and-butter tools for centers, rated pretty low, perhaps indicating people are not looking for as much change here. Knowledge Base has high expectations for about a third of participants. (SEE FIGURE 3.)

TECHNOLOGY BY PERSPECTIVES

Experts had a higher view of Analytics than others, with 57% selecting that option, and RPA, with 56%. Authentication was the choice of 35% of CC Pros, many of whom are in financial services where authentication plays a huge role and offers great challenges and risks. Over half of CC Pros also chose Mobile Apps, showing they are counting on them to have a big impact in the future. (SEE FIGURE 3A for a breakout of the top four technologies by perspective.)

TECHNOLOGY BY SIZE

All sizes of centers favored Bots, with three bands over 70% (26-50, 501-1,000, and 1,000+). Only the smallest (<25) did not rate Bots at the top, giving a slight nod to mobile apps (59%) over Bots (58%). The smaller the center, the greater the expectations of mobile apps (ranging down to 24%-30% on the largest bands). Perhaps that shows the bigger centers (which are often part of bigger companies, with more IT resources and greater budgets) already have made more progress in that category. The bigger the center, the more they are looking for an impact from RPA, ranging from 29% of the smallest up to nearly 70% for the largest. This makes sense given the volumes and opportunities created to shave seconds on *many* contacts. (FIGURE 3B shows the breakout of the top four technologies by center size.)

CC Goals Impacted by Technology

Next, we wanted to know what types of changes people expect technology to deliver. We focused on the top contact center goals around cost, service and revenue to see what

FIGURE 3A: Breakout of Four Top Technologies by Perspective*

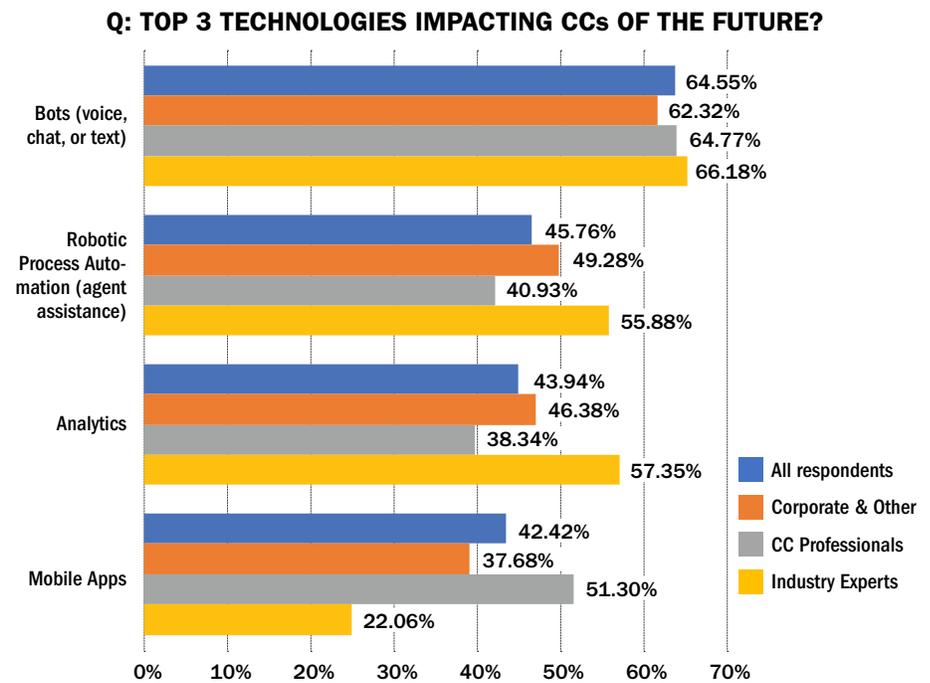
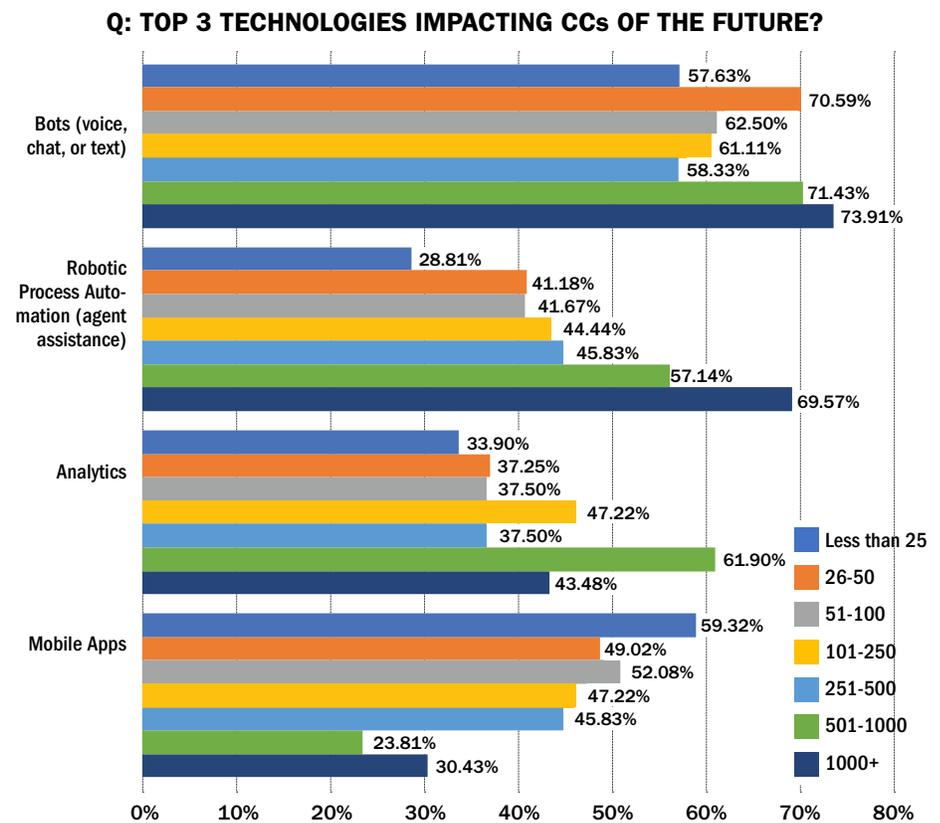


FIGURE 3B: Breakout of Four Top Technologies by CC Size*



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FIGURE 4: Service Tops the List of Expected Impacts*

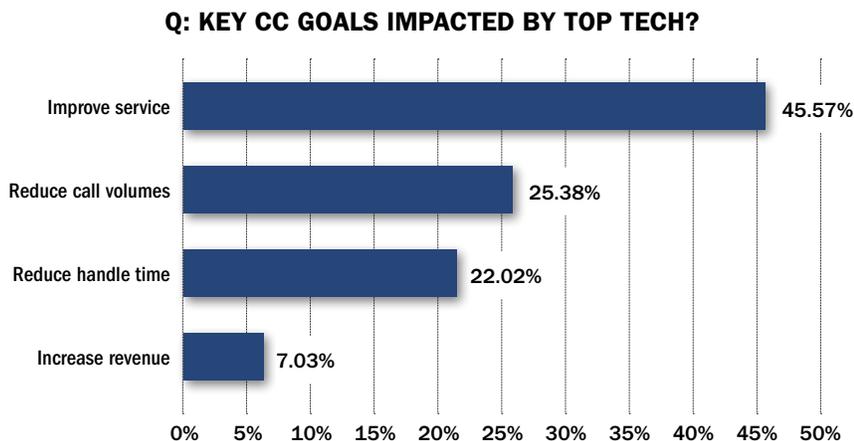
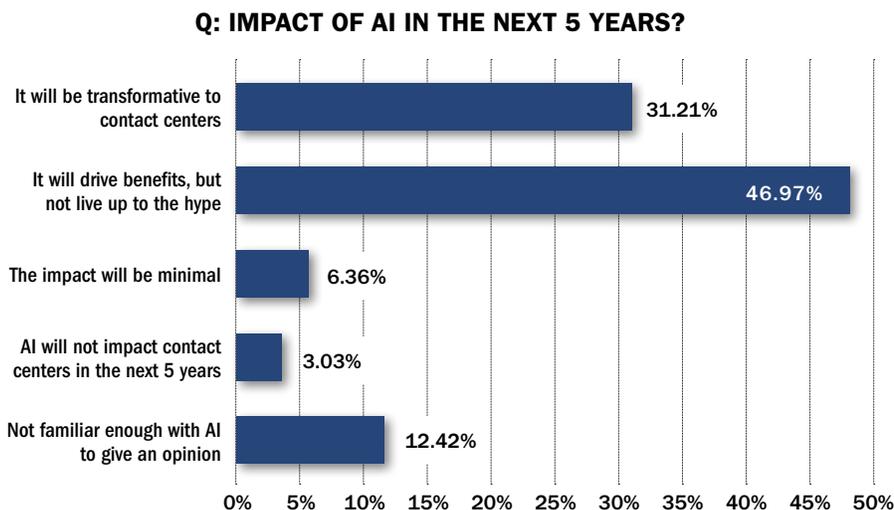


FIGURE 5: AI May Be Transformative... or a Disappointment!*



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participants expect will be impacted the most. Almost half showed a focus on service, and all the top technologies could help deliver on that goal. The high-ranking technologies like Bots and RPA allude to reducing handle time and volume; those each earned around 25% of the participants' vote. Revenue change is an expectation only for a small percentage. (SEE FIGURE 4.)

GOALS IMPACTED BY PERSPECTIVES

It will likely come as no surprise that Corporate people showed more interest in rev-

enue, nearly doubling the overall percentage (13% chose revenue). CC Pros rated volume reduction higher than the others did at 31%, while Experts showed a different weight on reducing handle time (26%). These inputs correlate a bit with the top technologies (e.g., mobile apps could reduce volume, analytics could help identify ways to reduce handle times).

GOALS IMPACTED BY SIZE

One variation by size jumped out: Service improvement is the highest expectation for all but the largest centers (1,000+) where only

22% chose this goal. The mega-centers have higher expectations of reducing AHT (39%) and volume (30%). The smallest centers had the highest percent interest in revenue at 12%.

Impact of AI

In the overall technology question, we asked respondents to temporarily set aside AI as it can play a role in any of these technologies. Then, we asked people to weigh in on what impact they think AI will have on contact centers in the next five years, so that we could then dive a bit deeper into that enabling technology with those that are the most enthusiastic. Less than one-third see it as transformational, and the others displayed a fair amount of cynicism. If you are familiar with the analyst firm Gartner's technology hype cycle, perhaps the 47% who indicated AI will drive benefits but not live up to the hype are in or heading to the "trough of disillusionment." In contrast, only about 10% say they expect minimal or no impact in the next five years. (SEE FIGURE 5.)

AI IMPACT BY PERSPECTIVE

Interestingly, Experts are noticeably more cynical about AI, with almost two-thirds indicating it will not live up to the hype. CC Pros are the most optimistic with about one-third viewing it as transformational.

AI IMPACT BY SIZE

We found more cynicism about AI at larger sizes. Since these centers are arguably the early adopters, that may show some *learned* (and *earned*) perspective. In line with that hypothesis, those indicating they don't know enough about AI to give an opinion were much higher for small centers (37% for <25, 16% for 25-50, vs. 3%-9% for the other sizes), and chances are they are less likely to have pursued AI projects or pilots. The view that AI will be transformational was balanced across sizes, with a range of 24%-40% making that choice. The cynicism range is much wider with 24%-67% expecting benefits won't match the hype.

Applications Impacted by AI

We then asked those in the "transformational" camp which applications will be most changed by advanced AI. Similar to automa-

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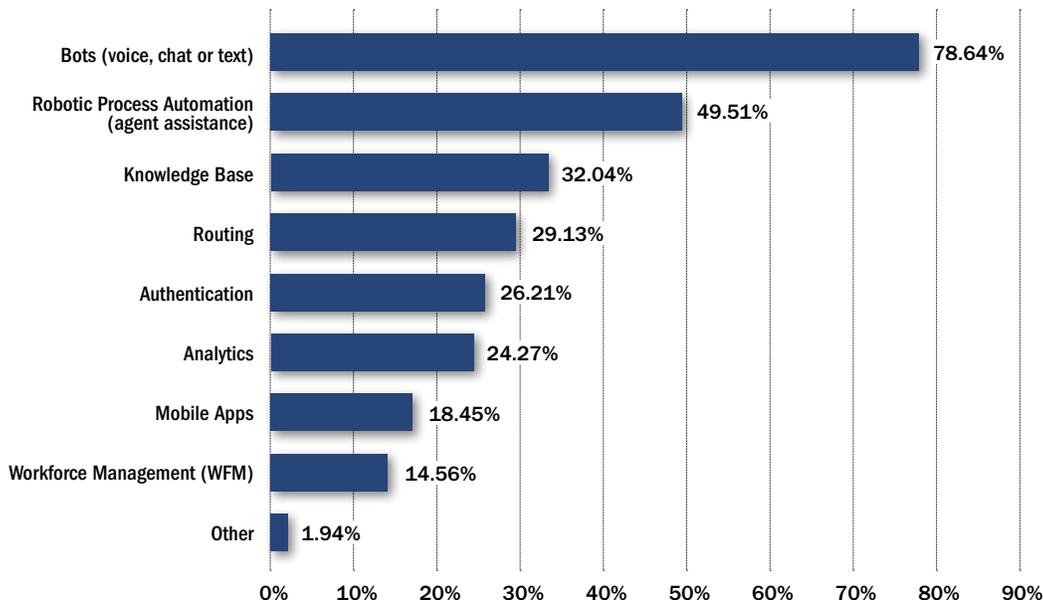


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FIGURE 6: Bots Is a Big Winner in the Top Technologies List*

Q: TOP 3 APPS MOST IMPACTED BY AI?



Continued from page 12

tion technology in general, Bots is highest and RPA is second, but we see an even stronger focus on Bots. Expectations on routing took the greatest leap, nearly doubling from routing without AI. (SEE FIGURE 6.)

APPS IMPACTED BY AI BY PERSPECTIVE

Experts showed a higher belief in RPA (63%) and routing (37%). Corporate (40%) and Expert (37%) perspectives both show more belief (or hope?) in Analytics. No Experts pointed to Mobile Apps while 25% of CC Pros and 22% of Corporate did.

APPS IMPACTED BY AI BY SIZE

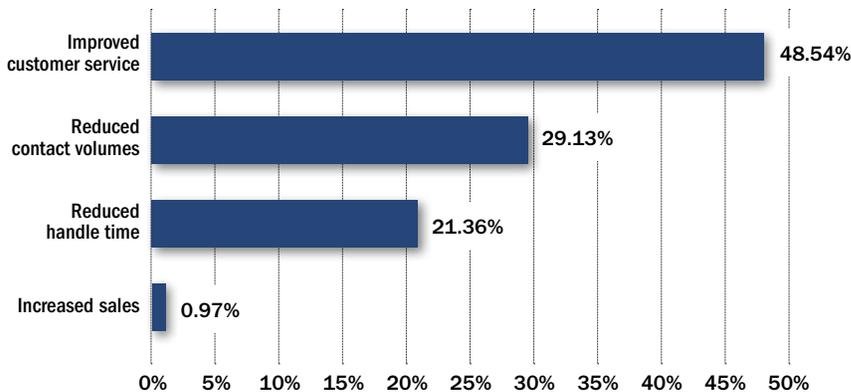
Similar to the views of RPA overall, the larger centers again have more hope and faith in RPA with AI. Beyond that, there are no visible trends aligning sizes and applications impacted by AI.

AI Drives Change

Our last question on AI looked at where the changes driven by AI will be most evident, focusing again on the key business goals. Even fewer are looking to AI to drive sales or revenue impact. Volume and AHT impact are fairly balanced, although with a wider gap in favor of volume reduction. (SEE FIGURE 7.)

FIGURE 7: Service Again Tops the List of Expected Impacts*

Q: WHERE WILL AI DRIVE CHANGE?



*Visit www.strategiccontact.com/survey/contact-center-technology-future/ to get the survey results graphics, including the breakout of perspectives and sizing.

AI CHANGE BY PERSPECTIVE

The Experts focused more on volume (42%) than AHT (5%), and significantly differed from the others in these categories. CC Pros exhibited balance on the two cost-reduction elements (27% on reduce handle time, 28% on reduce volume), and were a bit lower on service than others at 44%. We might expect Corporate to have more focus on sales and cost factors but they are instead the highest

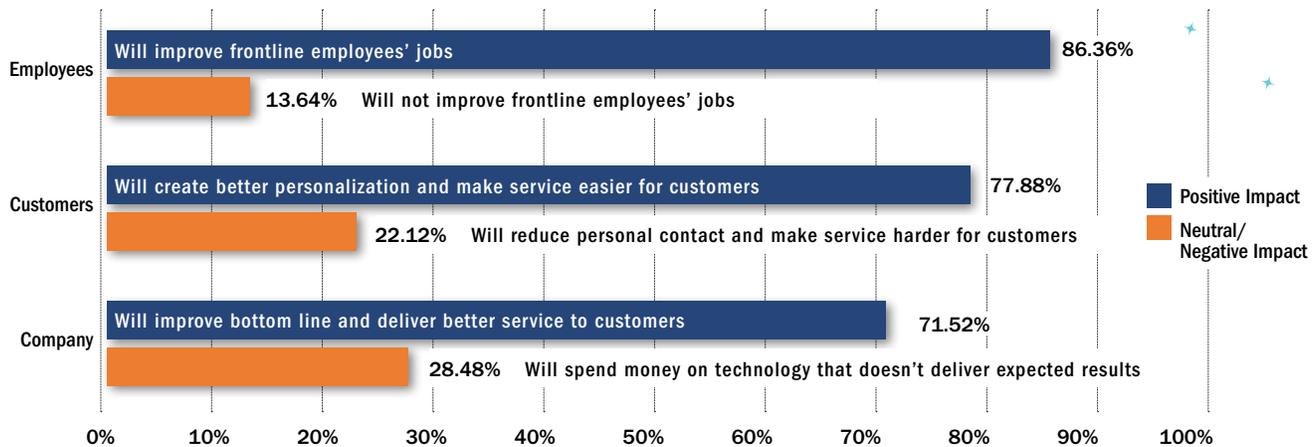
on service improvements, with 60% selecting that expectation of AI's impact.

AI CHANGE BY SIZE

The smaller and larger centers chose reduced volume at a lower percentage (14%-20%) while the three mid-range size bands for centers between 51 and 500 seats were 30%-50% in the volume camp. The 251-500 band was the only one where service improvement

FIGURE 8: More Hope for Employees and Customers than the Bottom Line?*

Q: WHAT IMPACT WILL TECHNOLOGY HAVE ON CCs OF THE FUTURE?



*Visit www.strategiccontact.com/survey/contact-center-technology-future/ to get the survey results graphics, including the breakout of perspectives and sizing.

TABLE 1: Variations by Perspective and Center Size

CONSTITUENTS	DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE	DIFFERENCES BY SIZE
Employees	The optimism is greatest with CC Pros at nearly 90% The Experts are most skeptical (20%)	The skepticism is higher among larger centers, up to 22% for the 101-250 band and 12%-14% for the higher bands
Customers	Skepticism among Experts is much higher at 35% (vs. under 20% for others)	Skepticism is greater for smaller centers than the largest (range up to 31% for 101-250, while only 10%-13% for three largest bands)
Company	Skepticism among Experts is much higher at 37% (vs. under 27% for others); as we might expect, Corporate is the most optimistic (75%)	Skepticism is greater for smaller centers than the largest (range up to 39% for 101-250, 10%-14% for the two largest bands)

was not the highest, with volume reduction at 50%. The largest centers rated reduced handle time and service improvements equally at 43%. Sales did not register at all except for 5% in the 25-50 range.

Impact on Employees, Customers & the Company

Finally, we presented participants with three sets of binary choices to gauge optimism or concern for the future impact on three important constituents of technology: Employees, Customers and the Company. While overall optimism is strong, two interesting insights jump out: Participants expressed a significantly dimmer view of technology's impact on the company and the highest hopes are for

employees, not customers. (SEE FIGURE 8.)

Within these questions, we find a few interesting variations by perspective and center size (SEE TABLE 1).

Where to From Here?

No matter your center size or vertical, or what perspective you bring to the crystal ball of contact centers of the future, the way to drive value from technology is to recognize it's not all about the technology! Undoubtedly, some of the cynicism expressed is flavored by past experiences with technology that didn't deliver on its promises. And while we all want to improve the customer and agent experience, the reality is that technology pays for itself by reducing volumes and handle times,

and driving additional revenue. A line can often be drawn from service improvements to these more tangible and measurable outcomes. As centers pursue bots, RPA, and a variety of AI-enabled capabilities, it is imperative that we consider the people and process changes that go hand-in-hand with these powerful tools. ☉



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BEWARE... FIVE SIGNALS OF CUSTOMER CARE BURNOUT!

Managing demand is vital for a healthy, thriving operation that delivers on the brand and customer experience.

BY KATHLEEN M. PETERSON, POWERHOUSE CONSULTING



Continued from page 1

telling. The word “demand” is defined as “an urgent or peremptory request.” (I confess I had to look up “peremptory.”) Peremptory means “bossy,” which fits given the fact that we are talking about stress. Let’s face it; no one likes to be bossed around. That is stressful! Contact centers are sort of “bossed around” by the very demand they are handling.

The stability and foundation of any contact center is where demand is mitigated. A sound operational infrastructure sees to it that the right numbers of people are in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing. A sound organizational infrastructure sees to it that strategic and budget needs are met. When the contact center is short-changed in either category, the stress of trying to meet objectives is distributed among those respon-

sible—from management to frontline agents.

Contact centers continue to have many demands placed on them. Managing that demand is central to a healthy and thriving operation. This, in turn, is central to delivering on the brand and the customer experience. Few other parts of any enterprise encounter customers with as much frequency as do contact centers. They also take on a never-ending list of demands with varying levels of frequency and complexity... be it new channels (e.g., text, chat, email, voice) or new services.

Five Burnout Indicators and Tips to Remedy

The following are five solid indicators of burnout and some helpful tips for alleviating them.

“
The greatest weapon
against stress is our
ability to choose one
thought over another.

”
—William James, American
Philosopher and Psychologist

1. EVALUATE THE “COGNITIVE LOAD”

“Cognitive load” is a term generally used by information architects and instructional designers to keep at top of mind that there is only so much the human brain can grasp and absorb on any given subject at any given time. I view cognitive load as a measure of what is being asked of the front line. Many organizations today agree that “human capital” in the contact center is reserved for the more complex, problem-solving demand. Alternative channels continue to absorb the lower complexity transactions. But there are limits. Current trends have customer service staff (who previously handled customer orders or inquiries) providing technical support to customers that use alternative channels such



as websites, mobile apps and patient portals. These skills barely line up on “What the Agent Needs to Know” chart. Yet, in come the calls. Often, the stress factor occurs when little if any real training has been provided. (Keep in mind that stress is not always related to the task; it may also stem from a lack of confidence in performing the task.)

TIP Train for all tasks assigned to the front line. Don't take on activities without analyzing the skill sets required and determining how well they match to available staff.

2. CONSIDER “COMPASSION FATIGUE” FACTORS

“Compassion fatigue” is a term generally applied to nurses and caregivers. I believe it can be applied easily to contact centers in which the front line constantly deals with “problems” (another word to describe “complex”) and there is no relief. Someone once told me that compassion fatigue is like being emptied without filling up again.

The stress of compassion fatigue occurs when there is no compassion shown to the front line. If not enough staff are hired (100% a management problem), the effect is relentless demand put upon those who show up for work. If Contact Center management understaffs the operation, yet continues to take on additional work, the results can be damaging. Those charged with assisting customers will likely be stressed without the compassion to care about the experience the customer is having.

Hard work is not the culprit. People are happy to work hard when it is necessary. But when it is constant, there is no time for renewal. Stress replaces compassion!

TIP Staff the contact center to meet your demand; schedule to match demand. Provide ongoing support and acknowledgment to the front line. Make emergencies short-lived. Be a compassionate leader!

3. BEWARE OF ADDING, RULES, RULES AND MORE RULES

Do you find yourself adding rules to resolve performance issues? Well, the likelihood of it working is slim to none. Today's unemployment rate ought to frighten leaders into providing environments that generate enthusiasm, learning and contribution rather than rules-driven dictatorships. Think about adherence; so many organizations flub this up. It doesn't take an MBA to know that having staff adhere to a schedule is required to meet service level objectives. The tricky part is how you go about achieving those objectives.

If your organization is already on fire and someone says, “Let's get serious about measuring adherence,” the implication is punitive in nature. “Measuring” is simply code for “punishing”—find the guilty and bring them to me. But then what? Late adoption of mea-

Continued on page 19

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REVISITING SCHEDULE ADHERENCE

It's time to build a more customized approach that meets the needs of today's contact center teams.

BY JAY MINNUCCI, SERVICE AGILITY



When you find someone in a contact center who is passionate about schedule adherence, it's a good bet he/she is (or once was) a member of a workforce management team (WMT). That's because all of the forecasting and scheduling and planning done by anyone in a WMT is useless if no one actually follows the plan. Yes, agents and supervisors on the floor also care about adherence and want to meet the objective. But in the WMT, it goes beyond just wanting it. Good adherence is vital to the WMT's survival.

Full disclosure here. I've spent many years creating, working in and consulting for WMTs. So yes, I am passionate about schedule adherence. But times change, and today's fast-paced, react-in-the-moment, "just grab

an Uber" lifestyles don't match very well with permanent, fixed, standard schedules locked down three weeks in advance. Something's gotta give.

The Traditional Approach

For those new to the concept, adherence is a measure of actual manned time to scheduled manned time. It is a common metric in larger centers, especially those using a commercial workforce management system. The systems themselves do all the heavy lifting of calculating and reporting. The WMT might make some adjustments and supervisors will provide coaching, with the amount of effort dictated by the importance placed on adherence compared to other measured metrics.

Traditionally, adherence is viewed and mea-

sured on an individual agent basis. An objective is set, and everyone works toward the same goal. In a world where all agents work 40 hours a week, plan the vast majority of vacation days in advance, consistently show up for work before the scheduled start time and are conscientious about following schedules regarding off-phone time, this traditional approach works well. Behaviors are aligned with performance objectives, schedules are a reliable indicator of future phone coverage and service level performance is consistent across time.

Changing Times

Enter the new reality. Today's contact center still has some of those "Steady Eddies" from yesteryear, but they are far fewer than in the past. Many of our agents now have other priorities in their lives that impact the amount of hours they can give to the job, the timing of the hours and/or the amount of notice they can provide regarding schedule changes. In this environment of intense competition for the agent's time, consistently high levels of traditionally measured adherence are a thing of the past.

Enlightened contact center leaders have seen this play out over the years and have reacted accordingly. They realized that if they continued to pressure staff for high adherence, agent attrition and engagement would be jeopardized. Faced with what seemed like a choice between higher adherence or better attrition/engagement, most leaders correctly chose the latter. Adherence standards were lowered, restrictive rules about schedule changes were altered and in some cases adherence was removed from the balanced scorecard altogether. To say that adherence was "sacrificed" for better attrition/engagement may be too dramatic, but it is also fairly accurate.

Modernizing Schedule Adherence

Herein lies the conflict. Adherence is too important to be ignored, but our traditional approach to measuring and managing it does not fit the reality of today.

It's time to build a more customized approach to schedule adherence. Rather than viewing it as simply a casualty of the times, we can redesign our approach to get the best of both worlds. By changing our focus

from an agent-based measure to a full-time resource measure, we get the opportunity to meet today's needs while still expecting accountability from our teams.

And what is a full-time resource? In the case of Brenda, the "Steady Eddie" who has been meeting all performance objectives for the past 12 years, she fits the bill all by herself. So nothing changes for her. But what about Carlos, who works in the quality monitoring team but is required to provide five hours of phone time a week? Or Crystal, who wants to go back to school but still work around 15 hours a week? Or Connie, who helps with a non-profit so often that any schedule commitment over 20 hours a week is questionable? In the traditional approach, we schedule them and measure their adherence separately.

Why not create a Carlos/Crystal/Connie resource that does the work of one full-time

agent? Schedule them as a single entity, and make them accountable for splitting up the hours in a way that will generate the high adherence that is needed. In their case, that might mean having Crystal and Connie take all the scheduled hours, with Carlos filling in at the last minute when something happens. Or maybe they all take some hours and cover for each other when needed. However they decide to do it, they own the accountability and adherence results.

If that is too difficult, or if you don't have enough staff with non-traditional schedules to do this, you could always just go with team-based adherence. In this approach, the WMT schedules a certain number of people per team throughout the day for phone coverage. The team, usually through a supervisor or other designated coordinator, then assigns enough people to cover the number. The adherence measurement is now a team-based

metric comparing the amount of staff required for the interval to the amount manned.

A Compromise That's Worth the Effort

It's just a little too easy to think of adherence as something that is "old school" and needs to be removed to keep up with the times. Doing so might make some staff happy, but ignoring mathematical realities is seldom a good solution. By changing our approach, though, we can keep the accountability that optimizes performance while still maintaining a culture that meets the needs of today's team member. That's a compromise worth the effort. ☉



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IDIOM INSIGHTS | BEWARE...FIVE SIGNALS OF CUSTOMER CARE BURNOUT!

Continued from page 17

sure like adherence is an attempt to fill the poor staffing gap by pressuring those already burning out. The result is the potential loss of valuable resources. It is the "not-so-valuable" resources that often remain.

TIP Change your language. We use "contribution to capacity." After all, you are building a capacity model and agents are a critical factor. Train, inform, align and educate the front line in all they need to know.

4. STOP GIVING ICE CREAM TO COMBAT TROOPS

When things go wrong in contact centers, there has always been the "free food" option as a way to rally the troops. This works, but only under the right conditions. If free food is the only action taken by management to resolve negative factors within stressful operations it may be more like "giving ice cream to combat troops." Given the choice, staff would much rather have the conflict resolved and daily stress reduced than have a free snack.

TIP Solve the problems that contribute to stress. Hold off on adding new people or programs until stability is restored. Fight for budget; make intelligent arguments for investing in the contact center. Continue to provide free food/snacks, but make them part of "bigger picture" training initiatives.

5. KNOW THAT MANAGEMENT SUFFERS, TOO

Remember that burnout signals go both ways and agents are not the only victims. Contact center leaders also suffer. It is a dicey combination when burnt-out leaders try to improve the attitudes and behaviors of burnt-out agents.

TIP Directly acknowledge the state of affairs. Do something—almost anything—to demonstrate that improvement efforts are being made whether they be new technology, training or quick-reference job aids.



Build Trust and Engage with Your Staff

When you begin to "lead" instead of "manage," the path to positive action and calm emerges. Leaders must work very hard to build trust with the front line if burnout is or has been an issue. Engage with your staff; invite and respect their opinions on both conditions and solution options.

Take care of your people and take care of yourself. Take the pulse of your operation. Watch for billowing embers and avoid ignition by engaging as a collaborative team with the front line to identify and help resolve issues. Stress issues must be mitigated before business issues can be resolved. ☉



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CX VERSUS GX: WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Generational expectations for the customer experience will be a vastly disruptive force for the contact center industry.

BY PAUL STOCKFORD, SADDLETREE RESEARCH



Let me start by once again offering a real-world experience, such as the one I described in my April 2019 column, “CX Pundits vs. CX Practitioners: Real Life or Fantasy?” In it, I described the wonderful world of the customer experience as described, written about, and generally fawned over by contact center industry pundits, and how that wonderful world compares to the real-world that I often experience when it comes to customer service. In the end, the problem I described in that column was solved and I’m still a customer of that company.

Last month, I was getting ready to leave for a business trip on a Sunday afternoon when I noticed a problem with my airline boarding pass. This airline, based here in the

Southwest, er, I mean southwest, is an airline I’ve flown on for many years, typically once or twice a month. I had an hour before I had to leave for the airport so I thought a quick phone call would solve the problem. I dialed the toll-free number and got a recorded greeting telling me that the wait time to speak to an agent was 83 minutes.

Yes, you read that right. 83 minutes. I tried calling again and selecting their priority customer option and again received a greeting telling me the same thing. 83-minute wait to speak to an agent.

No problem, I thought. I’ll webchat with an agent and solve the problem that way. So, I went to the airline website, and guess what? No webchat. With time now not on my side, I went to the mobile app and not only did I find

a chat option, I was number one in the queue. Within minutes the problem was solved with the chat agent and, like any good consumer today, I went to Twitter and posted my opinion of this particular airline and suggested that they should perhaps consider implementing scheduling software.

The Twitter response to my posts was less than satisfactory as the social media agents tried to blame the problem on everything from the TSA to my failure to manually add data that has been on my profile with the company for years. I am happy to say that other tweeters who follow customer service jumped into the fray, supporting my position and questioning said airline’s response.

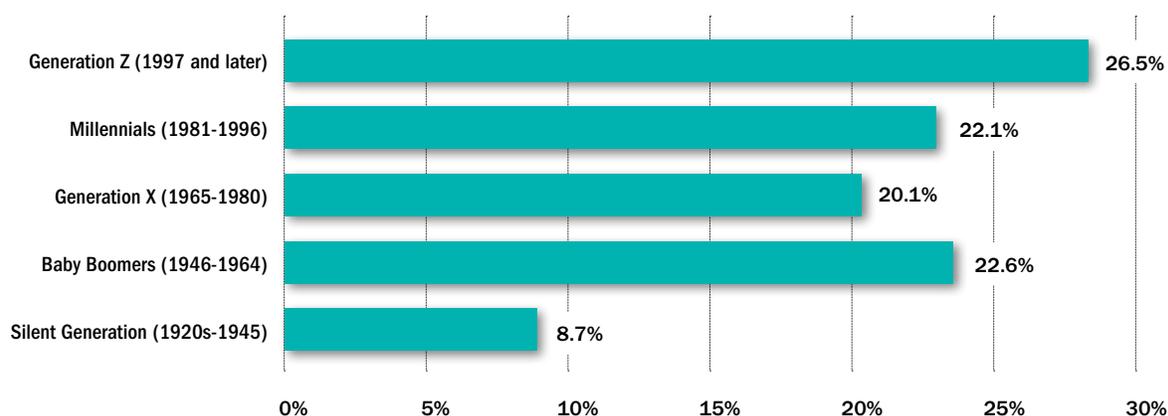
But here’s the crazy thing. I’m still a customer of that same airline. As I write this, I have two more flights currently booked with them. I think it’s because members of my generation are more-or-less hardwired for loyalty. You can mistreat us, insult us, ignore us and disrespect us, and it seems we still come back for more.

If I were a member of the millennial generation or Generation Z, chances are the loyalty outcome would be completely different. These generations have little tolerance for poor customer service and they are not afraid to leave a company after one bad customer experience. Generally speaking, these generations do not possess the same degree of brand loyalty as previous generations. For them, customer service is also a social experience. They have no problem going to Twitter, Yelp, Facebook and other social media channels to share their unacceptable customer service experiences.

Millennials and Gen Z’ers grew up with information retrieval at their fingertips—fast and efficient. An 83-minute wait for voice customer service or having to search multiple devices to find a chat option would likely send them running in the direction of the nearest competitor company. These are individuals who have a set of expectations for customer service, among other things, that are based on their life experience. Practitioners of old-school, defensive, inefficient customer service need to wake up.

I contend that the Generational Expectations (GX) that millennials and Gen Z’ers bring to the Customer Experience (CX) will be the most disruptive force the contact center

GENERATIONAL PERCENT OF U.S. POPULATION



Source: Statista

industry has experienced since the advent of the PC platform over 30 years ago. The last time the industry was disrupted with such power, technology was in the lead. This time, technology will be following in compliance with GX.

The influence these generations will have on CX is undeniable. **THE CHART** illustrates generational representation in the population of the U.S. As the chart shows, Generation Z is now the largest population group in the U.S. While only about 5% of Gen Z'ers are adults, their force as future consumers should not be underestimated. Millennials are all adults and are making their mark on the contact center industry as both workers and consumers. Generation X is holding steady while the boomers are beginning to shrink. In fact, more than 10,000 people in the U.S. turn 65 years old every day. As the consumer influence of millennials and Generation Z grows, the influence of boomers and Gen X recedes. So, what will GX mean to CX?

I think it's safe to assume that an 83-minute wait time to speak to an agent will quickly become unacceptable and, by extension, obsolete. Generation Z is the first digital

native generation, meaning they have never known a world without the internet. Their life experience has been information at their fingertips, quickly and easily accessible with a user-friendly, intuitive interface. Similarly, millennials grew up while technology was evolving and developing at warp speed. Theirs is a world of new experiences, self-reliance, and multiple devices.

Being self-reliant, both generations will gravitate toward self-service as a first option, but not the kind of self-service we're used to today. Painfully slow, complex, tree-based IVR menus are about to go the way of the buffalo. NewGen customers simply won't put up with this antiquated method of information access when smartphones are the norm for them. Self-service will have to be conversational, accelerating the development and deployment of bots.

By extension, all customer-facing technologies will have to be intuitive. If it's harder to use than a smartphone, don't bother deploying it. Also becoming obsolete is the whining and moaning of older generations whenever new contact center technologies are deployed or existing processes are modified. Millennials

and Gen Z'ers are as open to new customer service experiences as they have been open to using new devices and software updates throughout their lives. Not only are they not as resistant to change as previous generations, they welcome change if it improves performance and process.

In case I haven't yet made it clear enough in this column, there is a degree of urgency to this. Contact centers that believe they can wait this one out and maintain business as usual until it blows over are in for a rude awakening. Those businesses simply won't survive. The changes I've described in this column are not going to be optional. When CX eventually, inevitably collides with GX, everything in the contact center, including technologies and best practices, will change. It will be a case of adapt and act, or suffer a painful industry demise. •



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The winner of
**ICMI'S 2019
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 for Best Contact Center Manager
 shares her thoughts on leadership.

BY SUSAN HASH, CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE

In the complex world of Medicare administration, no one understands the need to deliver quick, accurate and up-to-date information to program providers better than **JERRI PIGG-SHOEMAKE**. A 35-year veteran of contracted Medicare administration, Pigg-Shoemake has expertise in various aspects of the program having worked in claims adjustment, customer service and appeals management. In August 2017, she stepped into her current position as customer service manager overseeing the contact center for WPS Government Health Administrators, a Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) which provides claims processing and customer service to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Running a contact center is not a new role for Pigg-Shoemake. She is an accomplished leader and was recently recognized by ICMI with its 2019 Global Contact Center Award for Best Contact Center Manager. The WPS Government Health Administrators contact center also received ICMI's Best Small Contact Center Award. I had the honor of speaking with Pigg-Shoemake to learn more about her approach to contact center leadership.

**A Continuous
 Cycle of Improvement**

Pigg-Shoemake is passionate about the practice of continuous improvement. Her tenure in Medicare administration has endowed her

with deep insights into the daily challenges faced by program providers, as well as how to leverage technology, training and the power of innovative thinking to optimize processes.

"When I came back to the contact center in August, I found that a lot of things had changed over the years, but our mission remained the same," she says. "First and foremost, our role is to reduce the burden on the Medicare providers that we service so that they can get the information they need about the program."

Identifying sources of burden and coming up with solutions to simplify, streamline and improve processes is a perpetual topic of discussion for Pigg-Shoemake, her management team and frontline staff. "I want us to be forward-thinking as a Medicare administrative contractor. We continually ask our team to consider how our actions impact our customers. For instance, we may have certain performance goals, but how do those translate to the provider's needs? We have to look beyond the day-to-day issues, identify the problems that exist and be innovative to come up with new ideas to solve them," she explains. "We always emphasize to our staff that the providers are more than just a voice on the other end of the phone. They are the crux of our business, and it's up to us to see how we can serve them better. That's why we're here."

It's a continuous cycle, she says, adding that it doesn't end when you've achieved your goal—there is always room for improvement.

Leading by Example

Pigg-Shoemake is a proponent of innovation and team engagement—two key themes that are intertwined and woven into the contact center culture. To promote innovation, she regularly engages one-on-one with individual agents and encourages them to apply creative thinking to process improvement. At the same time, she strives to maintain a strong team-based environment in which everyone is in sync, driving toward the same goals and working together for the team's success. It can be challenging, she says, to find the right balance.

Not surprisingly, Pigg-Shoemake is a firm believer in leading by example. "I'm not the type of manager who sits from afar and delegates—I'm closely involved in the work.

You have to know how the work is performed before you can make good decisions about it," she notes. "I want to be able to demonstrate to my staff what needs to be done and how to take action."

In addition to modeling the types of behaviors she expects from her team, Pigg-Shoemake strives to ensure an upward and downward flow of communication. "I have an open-door policy with my staff. They can come talk to me anytime with any questions, or if they feel like they want to share an idea or just get to know me better," she says. In addition to informal communication, Pigg-Shoemake often holds skip-level meetings with frontline staff. "I don't just interact with the supervisors that report to me. I will have meetings with their staff so that they can feel comfortable sharing information directly with me, and they feel like they're being heard," she says.

Building an Environment of Trust and Transparency

Making sure that everyone stays focused on the same goals requires a conscious effort when team members are distributed across multiple offices located in different states. Pigg-Shoemake stresses that it's vital to foster an environment of trust and transparency. Doing so means ensuring that data and information are accessible and available to all team members when they need it. "Whether it's work instructions, updates or process changes, we make sure that the information is clear and in a place where they can access it," she states. "We don't want our frontline staff to have to wait for someone else to give it to them."

Daily huddles also help to keep the management team up to date on center performance, current issues and progress toward goals. "Every morning, we meet for 30 minutes to go over all of our data, our metrics, the things that happened the day before, and where we're going today. It sets

the pace for the day. Everyone knows where our metrics are, what our hot topics are and what needs to be addressed. If there are questions or urgent issues, that is the time to bring them up," Pigg-Shoemake explains. "Our daily huddles contribute a lot toward bringing together a diverse group at different locations. You've got to have that daily touchpoint to keep everyone on the same page."

Creating Opportunities for Team Engagement

With a widely distributed team, you might think that it would be challenging to maintain a positive work environment. At WPS, individual responsibility forms the basis of a healthy culture. "People own their actions," Pigg-Shoemake says. "We are customer-focused so we know that our actions impact our customers. We are also driven and passionate about the work that we do and are committed to it."

Frequent feedback is also crucial, she says. "When you have staff in different locations, you have to look for opportunities for engagement."

One such opportunity is ongoing training. Once a month, WPS closes the contact center so that all staff members can attend training. As part of the day-long event, Pigg-Shoemake holds an open communications session via a conference bridge or Skype. Team members are encouraged to pose their questions about work- or policy-related issues, soft skills, or anything else that may be distracting them from their work—for instance, how to handle different call types.

"Everyone gets to hear the questions and answers and to provide feedback, so they build upon each other's input," she says. "It really fosters a great team environment—especially when discussing the issues that people are struggling with, whether it's certain types of calls or parts of the work instructions. Their teammates will jump in and offer suggestions or shortcuts. Even though they may not be

face-to-face, they build team relationships by helping each other out and keeping that open communication going."

A Rewarding Role

The benefits of building a strong team became evident over the past year as the WPS contact center rolled out new systems and tools to streamline processes and its training program. Although the project required considerable adaptability, staff training and change, the center was able to implement the technology on time and exceed the project goals. Pigg-Shoemake is appreciative of her team's effort in making it happen. "It took all of us working together to be successful," she notes.

Overall, Pigg-Shoemake feels privileged to be part of the Medicare program. She is proud of the work that her team does every day to provide services to beneficiaries and providers, and of the opportunity to be a resource for her staff. "The contact center is not always an easy job. Being on the phones every day talking with customers who may be upset or who need information quickly can be stressful. My job is to make sure that our frontline team has the tools and the training to be able to perform their jobs well. If I can help my staff to do that with a sense of pride and with quality, it makes me very happy."

As a leader, Pigg-Shoemake feels that it is important to recognize individuals and support their development. "We need to coach our staff and hold them accountable for the work they do, but at the same time, it's essential to recognize them for their individual contributions. We need to give people room to grow and projects that expand their experiences," she says. "The more that we invest in our staff, encourage innovation and provide positive feedback, the more they will help our organization to improve and succeed. Every organization is founded on its people. Working with them and celebrating successes with them is key because you learn from each other, and you depend on each other." ❁

“You have to know how the work is performed before you can make good decisions about it.”



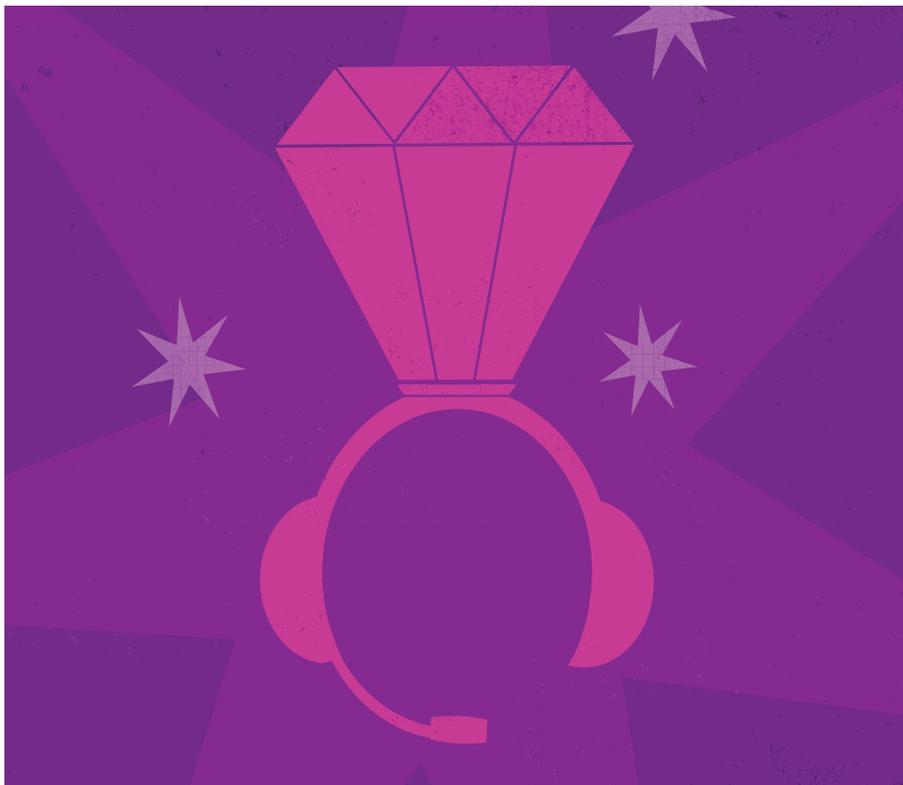
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ANSWERING THE PERSONNEL CALL: FOUR WAYS CONTACT CENTERS CAN ENHANCE AGENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Align technology with engagement strategies to gain the edge in the talent war.

BY KIM WALLACE, HIRE DYNAMICS



While the competition for top talent intensifies across the business landscape, contact centers often feel the impact more than most.

Top-performing contact centers require exceptional agents to lead a memorable and impactful customer experience while upholding their company's brand and values. Whether through direct, chat or online

engagement, the agent role demands specialized skills that are not easily replaceable. This reliance makes the annual American call center turnover rate, which the Quality Assurance & Training Connection estimates to be as high as 45% (more than twice as high of any other field), even more disruptive.

To ensure that agents are not only fully prepared to handle customer needs, but

also satisfied in their roles, today's contact centers must take more creative approaches beyond simply elevating wages. Although not necessarily a typical "budget line item," an investment in employees can deliver exceptional value by positioning a contact center as a destination workplace. In doing so, centers can reallocate resources currently devoted to recruitment and new employee training to other measures that promote growth.

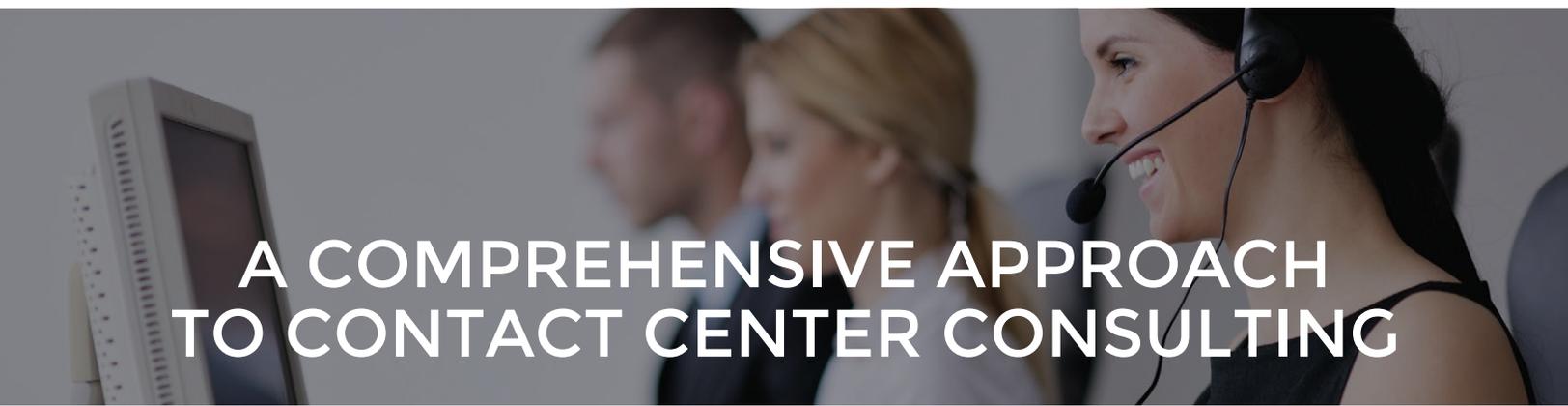
The following four strategies can help contact centers gain an edge in the talent war, and attract and retain the agents who can best serve their customers.

Empower Performance

A panelist at [Hire Dynamics' May 2019 Contact Center Roundtable](#) noted the hypocrisy of modern centers expecting their agents to provide a first-class customer experience when they themselves were not delivering a first-class work environment to their teams. A lack of training, resources and ongoing feedback threatens employees' confidence and performance scores, and ultimately can lead them to consider a company they feel may be more invested in their success.

Contact center leaders can set their agents up to shine by providing ongoing, constructive feedback. From day one, managers should outline how they prefer agents to conduct conversations and reinforce the messages, questions and protocols that will guide their engagement. Advanced monitoring platforms also enable managers to review transcripts of every call and evaluate each agent's disposi-

Continued on page 26



A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO CONTACT CENTER CONSULTING

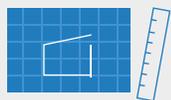
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OPTIMIZE

Operations
Technology
Support Models
Monitoring & Management



**WHETHER YOU NEED TO PLAN FOR, DEFINE, ASSESS,
EVALUATE OR IMPLEMENT CHANGE, WE CAN HELP.**

Continued from page 24

tion, tone and use of keywords and phrases. Providing frequent feedback that seeks to improve, rather than criticize, performance will make agents feel more comfortable in their roles and show that their company is invested in their growth and development.

An investment in state-of-the-art technology also will help agents overcome intangible challenges and feel better prepared to address a host of client requests. Voice and tone detection tools can aid contact center managers in redirecting calls to agents with comparable dialects or language experience, eliminating a long-time source of frustration. Additionally, noise-masking applications can produce clearer and smoother conversations free of off-putting distractions.

Reward Performance

Employees may opt to pursue alternate career options if they feel that their company does not value their efforts and contributions. While there is a fine line between supporting employees and going over the top, contact centers can make themselves more attractive to current and potential agents by incentivizing and rewarding exceptional performance.

It's no secret that contact centers forward their most critical conversations to the agents they consider the best of the best. With higher profile calls leading to more chances for conversion, being a top performer creates more opportunity to meet benchmarks that dictate bonuses and other honors. Contact

center managers can motivate employees at all levels through transparent reiteration of their company's performance policy and stating that agents will be given every chance to prove themselves and be rewarded accordingly. Agents who see the merits of their work will be more likely to stay and grow within their companies.

Contact centers also can inspire top-performing agents in other ways that require minimal effort, but which can significantly boost team morale. An action as simple as

spotlighting top-flight work at a team meeting or featuring a top agent on a company's social and internal communication channels can strengthen manager-agent relationships and fuel a sense of accomplishment among team members.

Meet Agents' Desires

The factors that bear the greatest influence on employees' retention vary by industry, company and individual. Unfortunately, businesses struggle most when they assume they understand what makes their employees tick, and deliver benefits and programs that fail to appeal to their most valuable resource.

Contact centers can better grasp, and respond to, the issues that matter most to their agents through direct engagement. Whether through methods as informal as one-on-one conversations or as formal as an employee survey, call center leaders can show their agents that their voices matter and are being heard, and translate feedback into offerings more in line with their wants and needs.

For instance, flexibility and work-life balance are two of the most commonly requested employee perks in any modern workplace. Traditionally, such requests would be unheard of in a contact center environment that tends to connect employees to a desk and phone in a single, centralized location. However, to better retain top-performing agents, many contact centers are at least exploring

allowing employees to work remotely on occasion. Technological advancements allow managers to verify that their agents are not slacking during work hours and provide the same level of real-time call report feedback that they would in the physical contact center. Beyond the morale boost, flexible scheduling also provides an advantage in that agents can serve more customers in widespread time zones rather than limiting work to a smaller time block.

While not all employee requests may be

reasonable or attainable, contact centers can make great strides in recruitment and retention efforts by demonstrating that employees' feedback is being taken seriously and making efforts to support their requests when possible.

Create a Culture of Success

Even in the shift to more remote operations, contact centers must create and uphold a culture that employees believe in. Prospective agents can quickly sense whether they would be a good fit for a given operation, and centers can create a favorable image by aligning around a consistent mission, vision and brand identity. Although the environment is unique in that agents address customers independently, leaders should still promote an environment of collaboration, open idea exchange and pursuit of larger goals.

While a company's mission, vision and values can serve as a foundation for success and employee inspiration, they should not be permanently rigid. Managers should include agents in strategic planning and solicit feedback on what they would like to see their company become, and how they can contribute to making that vision a reality. As a result, every agent can feel confident in their ability to create a workplace in which they feel they can best succeed—and one in which they would like to remain.

Contact centers have long felt the burden of employee turnover, and the costs and productivity gaps that come with replacing exceptional agents. Instead of sinking in the frustration, centers should accelerate their efforts to become an employer of choice. By aligning modern technologies with clearer and more frequent employee engagement, contact centers can build and maintain a dedicated team who can serve customers and drive company growth for years to come. ●

Employees may opt to pursue alternate career options if they feel that their company does not value their efforts and contributions.



Kim Wallace has served in the Staffing Industry for the last 19 years. As Executive Vice President at Hire Dynamics, she is responsible for leading all locations for Hire Dynamics and StaffMasters. Kim currently serves on the board for the Upstate Alliance in S.C., and is a member of the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), CSCMP, N.C. Regional Partnership, and Buckhead Business Association.

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FOUR WAYS TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN MILLENNIAL AGENTS

Leading WFO vendors are providing the tools to meet job-seeker requirements and capitalize on their unique skill sets.

BY DICK BUCCI, PELORUS ASSOCIATES



Pew Research Center defines millennials as anyone born between the years 1981 and 1996 (ages 22 to 37 in 2018). Today more than one in three members of the American workforce are millennials, making them the largest generation in the U.S. workforce and the prime pool for current and prospective contact center agents.

Because of today's healthy economy, millennial job-seekers can be selective. They will seek out organizations that best meet their vision as ideal employers. If they are happy with their employer, they will spread the word through their social networks and assign positive ratings to employee review sites such as Glassdoor. If things don't work out, the word

may travel even faster. Over half say that they will leave an employer that no longer meets their expectations.

Four of the most important requirements millennials seek from an employer are:

1. Work-life balance
2. Opportunity to learn new skills
3. Access to state-of-the-art technology
4. Frequent performance feedback

Work-life Balance Is Priority One

Over 90% of millennials prioritize work-life balance, and that makes job flexibility an

essential factor when choosing to join or leave an employer. As Chris Lilley, Chief Human Resource Officer at electronics retailer Crutchfield Corporation, pointed out, "This generation really values their separation of work and home. They value work-life balance. They're also perfectly happy to work from home. They value their time at home and their social life."

When it comes to balancing work against pressing personal demands, the latter will often outweigh the former. Millennials are not careerists. They want to work with a company that shares their commitment to work-life balance. According to an online survey conducted by Monster.com, 37% of employers report that work-life balance and flexibility are the most important motivating factors for the millennial generation. Telecommuting and flextime aren't seen as *privileges*, but rather *requirements*.

Opportunities to Learn New Skills

Millennials are realistic. They understand that the term "secure employment" is an oxymoron. Their survival plan is to accumulate multiple skill sets so they can transition smoothly should the need arise. Since they are quick learners and need to be always doing something, training periods need to be brief and made more hands-on. Employers seeking to attract the best of the millennial workforce will have a robust training and development program. They are used to learning from YouTube videos and want the flexibility to hone new skills on their own schedules. When asked what they're looking for in a new job, 80% cite the opportunity to learn new skills as a top factor.

Frequent and Fair Evaluations

Just as they want to know their specific duties, they also want to know how they are performing. An advantage of contact center work is frequent quality monitoring evaluations. However, the traditional pattern of conducting a handful of evaluations per month, then following up with coaching days or even weeks later after the coachable event will not work with this group. The feedback needs to occur coincident with the coachable event so that millennial

workers can make the course correction now rather than later.

Access to State-of-the-art Technology

Millennials love technology. Ninety percent of them sleep with their smartphones. They expect workplace user interfaces to be as well organized and intuitive as those they use on their smartphones. They expect to have access to high-speed internet on the job and remotely if they are working from home. They know when systems are well-integrated and when they're not. Mobility is very important. They are comfortable communicating in multiple modes. Unlike older generations, they see advanced technology more as an opportunity than a threat.

Leading WFO Vendors Respond

VERINT

Millennials crave frequent performance feedback (preferably positive). They want to know how they stack up against their peers and how they can improve. Traditional quality management is labor-intensive and inflexible. Quality specialists are often unavailable during the off-hours millennials are working. Verint AQM (for Automated Quality Management) automates the entire contact center quality process, from scoring evaluations to assigning coaching. Automated quality scores enable feedback that is accurate, timely, objective and based on the agent's performance across all calls—not just a handful. Verint's user-friendly agent portals alert employees to their current and future schedules, performance scorecards and schedule adherence while providing access to assigned e-learning courses and coaching materials.

ASPECT SOFTWARE

Millennials are attracted to contact center work because of the promise of flexibility.

Millennials often have more than one job or are university students working part-time. Their availability is subject to frequent change. Aspect's recent enhancements to its workforce management software can send text alerts to individuals who are qualified and have expressed interest in picking up shifts on short notice. All communications are via smartphones. (No self-respecting millennial is ever more than three feet from their smartphone.)

Aspect shared the following case study of how this works: Asurion is a global provider of insurance services. The company has 17,000 employees and 280 million consumers. The company found that the traditional methods of communicating with agents were consuming too much time and caused agent satisfaction to decline. Agents were missing opportunities for voluntary time off and overtime. Asurion deployed the Aspect Workforce Management solution augmented by Aspect Inform, which enables mobile communications to agents. By going mobile, Asurion was able to send proactive notifications to immediately inform agents of time-off and

overtime opportunities. Agents receive the messages over their smartphones and can reply immediately through their devices. Now agents don't have to miss important opportunities. The solution averages 35,000 notifications per week resulting in higher levels of agent engagement, higher

morale and lower turnover.

TELEOPTI

Stockholm-based Teleopti has long been out front on work-life balance. Their latest innovation is a chatbot called "Grant." Teleopti describes Grant as an organization's own WFM concierge, handling all processes related to schedule requests. Grant is always available, and "he" analyzes current staffing alongside employees' unique skills and schedules to provide notifications when voluntary time off is available. If additional support is needed, Grant will soon be able

to provide notifications when overtime hours are on offer. Infused with natural language processing, staff can chat with Grant and let him know if they wish to accept the schedule options. Grant then automatically manages the schedule request for them through a friendly real-time conversation. Millennials are the most technically savvy generation ever. They are very familiar with chatbots and will perceive employers that have committed to AI-infused automation as organizations they want to be associated with.

NICE

NICE is strongly committed to predictive analytics and artificial intelligence. NICE has added a new capacity planning solution, called NICE Enhanced Strategic Planner (ESP), which leverages the artificial intelligence from the core workforce management to offer powerful modeling tools that can calculate optimal schedules while considering the dozens, if not hundreds, of variables that can affect schedules. NICE has incorporated over 40 algorithms in its scheduling and forecasting engine. Enhanced Strategic Planner can easily handle the added complexity of millennial scheduling preferences.

Millennials Are the Workforce of Today and Tomorrow

Boosted by immigration, the population of millennials expected to reach 76.2 million in 2036, surpassing baby boomers as the largest living adult population. Global outsourcing organization TELUS International reports that 80% of their agents are in the millennial age group.

Millennials are important generation for contact centers because they comprise both today's agent labor pool as well as the future. This underlines the importance of understanding what values they can bring to the table and what actions and technology are needed to capitalize on their unique skill sets. ☉

Millennials expect workplace user interfaces to be as well organized and intuitive as those on their smartphones.



Dick Bucci is the Founder and Chief Analyst at Pelorus Associates, which provides market research and consulting services to the contact center industry. (dbucci@pelorusassoc.com)

THREE WAYS CONTACT CENTER STAFFING AND TRAINING HAS EVOLVED

A modern approach to learning and development can help to attract and retain top talent.

BY RENEE DAVIS, MAJOREL



It seems like every day we learn about a new brick-and-mortar retail giant that is closing stores across the country. Sam's Club, Toys R Us, Sears and Macy's are just a few retailers saying goodbye to physical locations. While some are moving to e-commerce, others are simply no longer competitive. The result is a workforce of retail associates in need of work. Many may pursue positions in the food service industry or other retail opportunities, but contact centers are also a great fit for these workers' skill sets. While customer service jobs within contact centers are often overlooked, they present opportunities for career growth and development in a way that other alternatives cannot.

To attract and retain qualified workers, contact centers must key in on who they are

recruiting to fill positions. Millennials and some Gen Z cohorts are looking for employment opportunities characterized by flexibility, community engagement and a sense of purpose. As a result, companies must be more agile in their scheduling, hiring and training. In fact, according to a study by Bentley University, 77% of millennials feel flexible work hours would make the workplace more productive, and [half of millennials](#) are looking for their employer to invest in training and development. It is also important to understand generational differences when looking at your approach to hiring and learning, as more recent generations are seeking meaningful work, while less recent demographic generations may seek opportunities to learn about advanced technologies.

While a competitive wage and enticing benefits are important, organizations also have to progress their training and development programs to accommodate the aspirations of entry-level employees and empower customer service representatives to meet the needs of consumers. Below are three ways contact centers have changed their strategy as staffing has transformed.

Evolving the Curriculum

As the demographics of contact center employees have changed, the way entry-level workers learn has also transitioned. Rather than sticking with traditional instructor-led training, it is critical to shift to a blended learning approach. Training programs must embrace adult learning and performance-based curriculums that encourage active participation and job practice. Learning has become more interactive than lecture-style training, and most learners need more hands-on practice to cultivate problem-solving skills that are critical in customer engagement. Contact center learning has shifted from training to facilitation, and learners now demand shorter, yet practical application during knowledge transfer.

Integrating Technology

Today, consumers are constantly shifting their preferred customer service support channels. Keeping pace with evolving customer expectations requires an understanding of technology. With the rise of chat, email, social media and voice assistants, consumers expect fast

response times in the channel of their choice. To adapt to new communication structures, it is imperative that representatives are comfortable interacting with customers on a growing number of channels. Furthermore, the increasing use of chatbots and AI to automate customer service inquiries makes it even more essential that representatives have the technical capabilities to manage the transition from chatbot to human-human communication. Given the complexities, employees must be given practice using technology in the classroom, and training by device is critical.

View the learning you provide as a product that can attract employees.

Making Training Worthwhile
View the learning you provide as a product that can attract employees. A strong curriculum that allows people to grow their skill set

is a value-add for entry-level employees who are focused on professional development. By attracting candidates who are focused on additional education and creating a career in customer service, your employees will be more passionate about the company. As a result, customer service representatives will be willing to go the extra mile and share improvement suggestions, which can improve your contact center's customer satisfaction scores.

Customer service tasks are also becoming more complex. This means more demands are being placed on employees. Continuous and lifelong learning will become increasingly relevant for employee development. To retain motivated customer service representatives, microlearning and individualized training must be integrated.

As contact centers look to adapt to societal trends and find the right talent to deliver a high-quality customer experience, training and development are more important than ever. Whether it is evolving the curriculum to better meet the needs of today's learners, integrating technology to support the growth of omnichannel customer service or offering training that helps entry-level employees advance their careers, contact center staffing must progress in order to meet customer demands. ☉



Renee Davis is the Director of Learning, Organizational Development and Quality for the Americas at [Majorel](#). She designs the framework and leads a team of contact center training and quality professionals located throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico, who support companies with their customer relationship management interactions, providing top-notch customer engagement to some of the world's largest and most respected brands.

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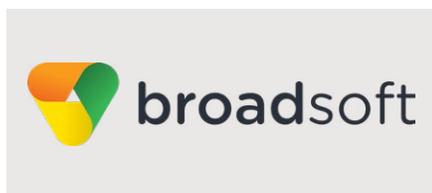
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The National Association of Call Centers' goal is to advance the call center industry by offering high-value-added information, research and products to its members for effective decision making.



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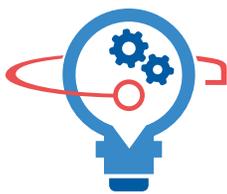
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