



Point of View:
*It's All About the Fundamentals- Managing Your
Contact Center Efficiently*



In today's customer-focused business environment, the Contact Center plays a significant role in defining your company to customers, reinforcing your brand, and enhancing your service identity. Handle the call effectively and you boost your image. Mishandle the call and the customer can easily turn to social media to spread their unpleasant experience.

Nothing illustrates this relationship more than results from a survey conducted by Purdue's Center for Customer Driven Quality which showed:

"92% of respondents reported that their call experience influenced their image of the company."

-The Impact of Call Centers on Company Image: Dr. Jon Anton - Center for Customer Driven Quality, Purdue University; Anita Rockwell - Benchmark-Portal, Inc.; Teresa Setting - Kelly Services

With so much riding on the Contact Center's performance, managing it is now, more than ever, one of the toughest jobs in the organization.

In our view, the absolute key to managing a Contact Center efficiently is to do it well day in and day out. With the need to answer customer calls a constant, reducing expenses associated with the Contact Center is difficult to achieve absent significant changes in technology or service philosophy, i.e., ease target service levels.

With quick-hit savings off the table, the true efficiencies gained and resulting lower expenses are achieved through limiting or eliminating costly errors, either human or organizational. For example, inadequately trained agents can cause longer talk times as they hunt for answers, or even worse, customers may be compelled to call multiple times to get a single problem resolved, negatively impacting all performance metrics and service. Likewise, inattention by senior management will discourage both agents and Contact Center management as they struggle with minimal support, with the unintended consequence being staff disengagement, absences and turnover.

These wayward trends can be reduced or eliminated by paying close attention to the key fundamentals inherent in all well-run Contact Centers. It is critical to maintain a set of core criteria and practices to ensure that your Contact Center continually operates at an optimum level. Conversely, if bad practices become ingrained in the staff, it will take a significant amount of time and effort to build service levels and operational efficiency to a level that's even acceptable. Think months or years, not weeks.

We've reviewed dozens of Contact Centers, and identified nine key fundamentals that contribute to effective and efficient operations. The centers with all or most of these fundamentals in place operated at a high level, with below average talk times, low abandon rates and solid employee engagement. The centers without these traits tended to have employee dissatisfaction leading to high turnover, unfavorable performance metrics, reduced agent efficiency and consistent service issues.

Fundamental	Criteria	Why It's Important
Senior Management Involvement	Senior Management is involved with and knowledgeable about Contact Center activities	Agents need to know Senior Management understands their job, supports their efforts and is willing to invest in them. With constant member contact, agents need continual reinforcement that Senior Management realizes the challenges they face. Never underestimate the value of a Senior Management walkthrough. Agents notice and appreciate the effort.
Employee Engagement & Empowerment	Good morale, low turnover, signs of employee engagement & empowerment	Critical to all Contact Centers. Employee engagement is the key driver of success. With engaged employees, management of staff is easier; time is spent on important tasks and projects instead of the wasteful time of monitoring and disciplining staff. Empowering agents to make decisions, such as fee waivers, increases their sense of value and responsibility to the organization.
Continual Training	Minimum of 2 hours monthly - sales, products, systems navigation, etc.	Training shows investment in the staff, which makes agents feel vital to the organization's mission. It boosts confidence, which results in quicker, more accurate handling of customer issues.
Call Quality Monitoring/Feedback	At least 50% of all calls are recorded; minimum of 3 reviewed monthly w/agent	As with Training, call monitoring, especially when focused on positive, coachable aspects, enhances the agent's self-worth and provides them with clear guidance to improve. Agents value and want the feedback.

Fundamental	Criteria	Why It's Important
Set Service Level Goals and Track Key Metrics	Telephone Service Factor (TSF) and other metrics set, monitored and reported to Senior Management at least monthly	The "science" side of Contact Center Management. Having clearly-defined and realistic service goals provides direction for management and staff. Department management can then focus on exceeding targets. Reporting to Senior Management affords them a better understanding of what drives performance. Metrics act as a trip point, indicating if performance is trending downward by providing clear measures of what is happening, and not just anecdotal evidence.
Frequent Department Meetings	Minimum of 2 department meetings monthly	Meetings provide a forum for agents to express concerns, be heard and learn. They foster a "we're all in this together" camaraderie. Listening to employees and responding to their issues is a key ingredient to increasing engagement. Meetings act as a conduit from employee to management, whereas Training flows in the opposite direction.
Scorecards & Clear Agent Goals	Scorecards used for monitoring, goal setting, job descriptions and progression plans; clear and objective performance expectations	Unlike other positions, agents need to be singularly focused on answering calls to maximize Contact Center performance. Additionally the larger department size creates an environment where unequal handling of personnel issues can impact overall performance quickly. Setting clear and objective expectations helps alleviate battles over schedule adherence and other performance sapping activities.

Fundamental	Criteria	Why It's Important
Call-Focused Work	Only call work, or clear control over paperwork and non-call work	One of the largest contributors to inefficient Contact Centers is non-call work that agents perform. This work distracts from the main task of answering the next call and creates opportunities to not answer calls, with little ability by management to accurately control adherence. Moving non-call work to designated off-phone personnel enhances overall department performance and provides management with ability to assign relevant metrics to non-phone staff and tasks.
Contact Center Manager - Outside Training or Experience	Experience in other Contact Centers and/or continual training opportunities with specific Contact Center focus	Contact Center management requires mastering both the Art and Science of Contact Centers. The Art being high engagement with staff, and the Science relating to the multitude of systems and metrics associated with a Contact Center. Both sides have to be mastered to be truly effective. Experience in multiple Contact Centers or specific Contact Center training provides a solid base of knowledge to handle the management challenges.

While adhering to these fundamentals is not an all or nothing proposition, each one contributes toward the end goal of a well-functioning Contact Center.

Of the nine fundamentals, Employee Engagement is by far the most critical. If employees are engaged, they show up to work, want to learn and do a good job, create few management problems, and their positivity is contagious. All of the other eight fundamentals feed into engagement either directly like training and meeting time, or indirectly through clear goals and experienced management.

In summary, Contact Centers will always play an integral role as the face of the organization. While the aggregate expense related to Contact Centers is typically high due to the personnel component, there are also call dynamics that limit “low hanging fruit” savings. It is far better to continually focus on effectively managing the Contact Center every day to ensure costs and service levels don’t climb due to errors, turnover or poor employee engagement.



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