Goal-Setting for Contact Center Performance

Who's on first?

Back in the 40s, the comedic team of Abbott & Costello made famous a skit called "Who's on First?" The premise of the act was about clarifying a confusion of names, and determining who exactly was on first and second base. While it may seem there's no correlation between yesteryear's comedy routine and today's contact center environment, the underlying theme of "Who's on First" is the most critical component of running a successful contact center.

Sure, today's contact centers are multi-channel in nature, and generate statistics based off of complex phone systems. Effective management continues to revolve, however, around three key questions: Where are your agents? What are they doing? And how long is it taking them to assist callers?

From here, you can replace the bases metaphor with seats, and begin to set solid goals for each agent that will clarify their responsibilities and improve contact center performance.

Goal-Setting

Keeping track of agent performance requires an objective, monthly scorecard of specific service targets that are updated and reviewed with each agent. It's important to keep the targets limited, and focus on drivers that directly affect department performance.

In setting individual goals, be sure to avoid group goals, or goals where the outcome is dependent upon others' actions to succeed. The three goals I describe below are proven to help elevate performance in a contact center environment, and are fully controllable by the agent, making it easy for them to succeed!

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Goal #1 – Agent Availability

Agent availability is the grand-slam factor in a high-performance contact center, and is defined as the percentage of time an agent is either engaged with a caller or is available to take a call. High agent availability means your staff is focused on

their main responsibility of taking calls. When availability is low, long ASAs, higher abandon rates and member dissatisfaction are sure to follow.

Be it a little research on a member problem, or a couple extra minutes working on loan documentation, agents may inadvertently

slip into a "not-ready" status. This tends to have a direct, negative impact on a contact center's performance. The most effective contact centers limit extraneous, non-phone agent work by assigning those duties to clerical or non-member facing staff.

Agent availability should be the number one metric on an agent's monthly scorecard, with a target outcome that's north of 90% availability. Remember, this does not include break times, training or other designated tasks; this represents time that agents are assigned to the phones. At 95% availability, this allows an agent a "not-ready" status for 25-minutes in an eight-hour workday.

Goal #2 – Ring, No Answer or Agent Wait Time

The number-one responsibility of an agent is to answer the phone when it rings. However, as with most areas of business, human behavior can cause us to divide naturally into the "vital few." When this behavior manifests in a contact center, you may notice that some agents will allow the phone to ring through their station, knowing it will bounce to another agent. Unfortunately, this can easily add 20-40 seconds to a call's answer time. Setting high goals for what is commonly known as Ring, No Answer (RONA) on phone systems, ensures that callers will be served quickly by the first available agent. With little reason not to answer each call, targets should be 95-97% answered, or within 1-5 seconds, depending on how the phone system reports this metric.

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Goal #3 – Schedule Adherence

Equally important to agent availability is schedule adherence. When one less agent is available, it can have a significant impact on contact center answer times. Schedule adherence goals encompass not only attendance and tardiness, but also scheduled off-duty and break time. While some leeway is necessary to balance the unpredictability of some longer-running phone calls, performance is generally strong when schedule-based goals are properly implemented.

As with the other goals, adherence should have a high target, while keeping in mind management's ability to accurately track this metric. In an eight-hour workday, twenty minutes of out of adherence time is equal to four percent. In most instances, that should allow for more than enough leeway for tardiness and life's little unknowns. A tight adherence goal, in conjunction with appropriate sick and tardy policies will go a long way in improving your center's performance.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, it's critical to keep agent goals objective and within their direct control. If subjectivity is brought into the review process, it can provide excuses for failure to meet set targets. By putting the onus on the agent to meet their goals, clarity can be obtained by all involved in the goal-review process.

Incorporating these three goals into a structured agent scorecard that also includes quality reviews, along with a solid employee engagement program, will provide the fundamentals necessary to move your contact center to the top of the standings.

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