How to keep your remote agents engaged

Jennifer Lee - April 10, 2021

In 2020 BP (Before Pandemic), contact center agents typically spent their days navigating between upset customers and harried supervisors. Stress was often high but the supporting structures of office and colleagues in proximity usually made it manageable. Then the pandemic sent agents home to work, cutting off those vital support structures.

The good news is that intelligent automation technology was already proving effective at helping customer service centers increase engagement, reduce costs and boost productivity. The better news is that it also provides the connection, camaraderie, and shared culture that agents need to stay engaged while working remotely.

Connection: teamwork starts here

There's certainly some truth to the notion that "people quit their bosses, not their jobs." But those bosses are not always to blame; often they're just overwhelmed, and simply unable to avoid passing some of their burden on to agents.

Manual execution of repetitive tasks is a big part of the problem, eating up time that could be used for training and coaching—which not only improve agents' skills but also nourish the vital connection between agents and supervisors. But when call volume spikes, training and coaching are quickly put aside. This can leave agents feeling like their professional development is not a company priority, which may in turn cause them to disengage from their work. The complexity of scheduling training and coaching in the context of unpredictable shifts in service-level demands got a lot more difficult when a remote workforce was added to the mix.

Intelligent automation attacks this problem from two angles: First, automating time-consuming, repetitive tasks yields back time that agents can dedicate to customer service, or to training; secondly, an AI-based solution able to process millions of data points can detect idle agents or a dip in calling demand in real time, and immediately deliver offers to complete training or coaching opportunities. This helps maintain the vital connection between agents and supervisors even when they don't share an office.

Camaraderie: we are family

A shared sense that "we're all in this together" has always been a useful antidote to the unrelenting pressures of call center work—especially for extroverted agents who thrive on personal contact. In the office, physical proximity made it possible for agents to compare notes and share stories

with each other, or for supervisors to detect troubled agents and call team huddles to correct personal or process problems that arose. But that's impossible when the whole team is working remotely.

An AI-based, intelligent automation solution—integrated with ACD and WFM systems and able to monitor activity in real time—can quickly identify struggling or idle agents and send offers of assistance, training or other ways to reestablish occupancy. Armed with real-time visibility into call flow and agent activity, supervisors are free to focus more on the human side of being team leaders. When supervisors and agents engage each other as human beings, it strengthens their shared commitment to working together to deliver the high-level service that customers demand.

Culture: appreciation creates a virtuous circle

Because customers demand a lot, and agents get an earful whenever a customer feels poorly served. That's not fair—the problem is almost never within the agent's control. To counteract agents' exposure to the wrath of unhappy customers, companies need to cultivate a culture of appreciation in their customer service departments. Sending messages of recognition for a job well done, birthday wishes, or offers to leave early when call volume falls off reminds agents that they're valued as people as well as agents. That contributes to their sense of belonging, which in turn deepens their commitment, which in turn results in better customer service. And around and around.

Intelligent automation encourages this virtuous circle. An AI-based solution, monitoring activity in real time, provides a dashboard of relevant stats—agent performance, relative seniority, call volume—that helps supervisors guide distribution of the personal, morale-boosting messages mentioned above.

Conclusion

Agents are often the face (voice, really) of your business, interacting directly with customers who are rarely calling to give a compliment. Anybody can have a bad day, or a bad moment, but when an agent does, it may cost your business a customer for life. And thanks to social media, that negative impression can be amplified further and faster than ever before.

A contact center agent's job was already stressful, and the shift to remote work has removed the connection, camaraderie and office culture that helped make that stress bearable. But intelligent automation technology reestablishes those vital links and enables customer service departments to thrive in the post-pandemic business world.

Categories: Blog • Contact Center • Editor's Pick • Employee Engagement • Service and Support
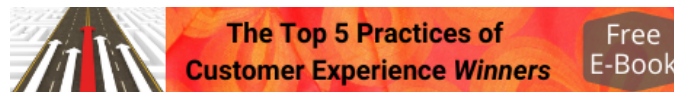
269 views

Jennifer Lee
Intradiem

Jennifer has 20 years' experience in the contact center industry with more than 15 years as a people leader. Throughout her career, Jennifer has served in a variety of roles in the contact center space, including operations, quality, workforce management, and client services. For the last four years, Jennifer led the Customer Success organization at Intradiem, where her team was pivotal in achieving the historic milestone of one billion automation actions. As Chief Strategy Officer, Jennifer now leads the teams that include Intradiem's Product Management and Product Marketing.

View All Posts »

New Editor's Picks

- 8 non-obvious examples of fantastic customer experience brands

- Your Customer Base Is Changing. How Ready Are You?

- 7 Ways How A Chatbot Impacts Your Business Growth

- How to make work at home work?

- Six Ways Internal Branding Can Make or Break a CX Program