

## Building a Better 2012 Workforce Through Good Decision Making

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Today's customer experience is changing. Customers who call into contact centers are more informed due to Internet research. They also have higher expectations for the service they will receive and often enter the contact center with more emotion, because they are frustrated, confused, rushed or angry.

In addition, industry changes are driving contact centers to become proactive versus reactive. No longer is "question asked, question answered" acceptable. So, how do smart organizations face these incredibly tough challenges to improve the service their frontline provides – and enhance the overall customer experience?

It comes down to building a better workforce and empowering them to make better decisions through strategic training and coaching. In short, the key to improving customer experience at the contact center-level is the trifecta of better recruiting, training and managing.



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### Step 1: "Hire Them Right" Through Better Recruiting

If the profile and expectations of the customers calling into your contact center is changing, then your reps' profiles – and your expectations of them – should be changing as well. The old philosophy of simply hiring a warm body to fill a contact center position is longer going to work.

It's well known that there is a certain profile of people who thrive in a contact center environment and of those who don't do well. To be smarter about hiring the right employees, start with the basics. First, conduct a phone interview; since that's the tool they will be using to communicate with your customers. Over the phone, you can hear tone, pace and inflection to make sure the candidate sounds good over the phone. Also look to hire people who intuitively understand customer service, because that personality trait is something that can't easily be taught.

Many top-notch contact centers use simulation tools during the interview process. Not only does it help the management screen employees, it allows potential employees to experience a real-life contact center first hand. This lets prospects self-select out of the interviewing process if they decide that they don't like

the admittedly challenging contact center environment.

### Step 2: "Train Them Right" Through Better Training

If you've recruited a higher caliber of contact center employees to meet the changing profile of your customers, the next step is reconsider your training program.

At the end of the day, the job of a contact center agent centers around making good judgment. Typically, when a call fails or goes awry, it's because the agent makes poor choices in the moment. The best way to bolster your training program is to include simulation-based eLearning as part of the training mix.

With simulation tools, agents are able to learn and practice in a safe environment rather than on your customers – a place where many agents today are honing their skills, to the detriment of the customer experience. However, with simulation-based eLearning, agents are able to make mistakes and learn from them, which is proven to be the best way to reach and reinforce key training.

### Step 3: "Manage Them Right" Through Better Managing

While contact centers invest heavily in developing their agents, it's crucial to develop their managers as well, so they can effectively lead and guide their employees to greater success.

Not only are agent profiles changing, but the profile of contact center managers are changing as well. They are often employees who grew up through the contact center ranks. They are no longer exclusively Baby Boomers, but are likely to be one of the younger generations of Gen X, Gen Y or the Millennials. One challenge found in many organizations is that managers often have employees older than them, who may have a different way of looking at work ethics and work gratification.

In order to promote a competent work culture from the top down, it's important to use the three "C" of good management: Communication, Coaching and accountability.

Communication: Managers need to communicate not just the "what" of the job, but the "why" and "how" as

well. It's easy to tell employees what they need to do for their job. But, for agents to excel, they also need to know why that is important and how, exactly, to do it. This is especially important for younger generations who won't unquestioningly follow directions, but need to know the "whys" and "hows."

Coaching: Coaching is proven to help agents reinforce key behaviors and skills. Without a coaching program in place, managers would have to ask agents to self-discover their own flaws and determine what they need to do differently on the job, which simply doesn't work. Instead, coaching allows managers to be direct and prescriptive in the feedback they give. This way, the feedback is behavioral, development and viewed as positive information, rather than criticism.

Accountability: To hold people accountable, you have to put programs and processes in place to do so. Managers also need to hold agents and themselves accountable for the goals they set and the behavior they demand. One way is to create motivational programs to reward employees for meeting objectives. It also includes developing a quality monitoring program to support and sustain your agents' progress.

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In short, building a better workplace in 2012 and beyond takes time. It involves hiring the right type of agents in the first place and giving them the tools to excel through better training, such as a simulated contact center environment for them to safely practice and make mistakes. It also means understanding the generational differences that your employees bring with them, so you can communicate with them in the way they need. Lastly, this progress involves developing managers, along with agents, so people at all levels in your organization have the skills to thrive.

**The result? A better experience for your customers – and better metrics for you.**