

Building an Efficient and High-Performing Team

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My family and I went hiking on a recent vacation out west. I was in the front, highly focused on the narrow, rocky path, making sure we didn't miss any crucial trail markers. My husband was in the back, tasked with the job of making sure that no one fell off the cliffs or got left behind, while our kids were comfortably ensconced in the middle.



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When our hike was over, my children kept talking about the amazing views. My husband and I looked at each other. "Views?" we asked each other. We were so concerned about our next foot placement right in front of us and making sure nobody fell of the cliff – that we completely missed the scenery!

How often does something similar play out in the hiring practices of your call centers? Are you just hiring to fill seats or are you trying to find the best fit for long-term success? I've often seen that people fall into tactical thinking – which my husband and I certainly were – or strategic, seeing the big-pictures views, like my children were.

When trying to see the forest from the trees, it's important to remember that the key to call center success is to "hire them right, train them right and manage them right," which is a mix of the strategic and tactical.

Step 1: "Hire them right" through better recruiting

At every organization, there are people who are owners and those who are renters. Owners are people who want to make a difference and a positive impact and who want to stick around for the long-term. Renters are just passing through, who aren't interested in getting to know their neighbors or their culture. They're just in it for the paycheck. Once you hire people who are owners, you're several steps ahead when training and managing.

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.



Step 2: "Train them right" through better training

Once you've recruited a higher caliber of contact center employees that are willing to own their place in

your organization, the next step is look at 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.

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.

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.

Coaching: Coaching is proven to help agents reinforce key behaviors and skills. 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.

Basketball great Michael Jordan once said, “Some people want it to happen, some people wish it could happen, others make it happen.” Building an efficient and high performing team won’t just happen on its own, but with a careful focus on the strategic and tactical sides of hiring performance development, you, too, can make that happen.