

# Call Center Management Review®

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In The Center with Beverly Kaye and Steven Sreb



## Unleash the Energy of New Agents: Re-Recruiting the First Year

**New agents come on board fully charged and excited about their potential. You can fuel that energy well past the critical first year.**

Organizations recognize that, if they want to retain and satisfy customers, they must successfully attract, retain and engage quality call center agents. With call center turnover rates hitting triple digits and even higher during that first year, recruitment and training continues to be one of the most costly processes.

Unfortunately, too often call center supervisors spend a lot of their time with their veteran agents and focus on these new-hires only when performance standards are not being met. Today, “re-recruiting” your call center agents is as important as hiring them in the first place.

### Extending the Handshake

Research continues to demonstrate how critical the relationship between manager and new-hire is to retention, performance, employee satisfaction and, ultimately, customer satisfaction and profitability. The best place to start building a solid relationship between new agents and managers is upfront by extending that handshake well past the initial training processes.

The problem is that today’s call center managers are overburdened with meeting customer demand and maintaining performance standards. Why should they spend the time building this relationship – what’s in it for them? They should consider the following:

- There’s a war on for great talent, and a labor shortage expected to last well into the next decade. Wouldn’t your ability to better attract, develop and retain the “best and brightest” be a major competitive advantage for you and your call center?

- It takes a long time to get new agents “up to speed” and some often don’t reach maximum performance levels. If you could efficiently decrease

the new team members’ time to productivity and get exceptional performance, couldn’t you better meet or exceed your performance standards?

- After a new-hire joins the team, there’s a brief window of opportunity to assess the “fit.” If new agents don’t feel you’re delivering on your promises, they will ultimately leave. If you could increase your first-year retention rate (and more rapidly identify hiring mistakes), how much could you save? How much more productive could your team be?

- During their first weeks on the job, agents get dozens of calls from friends and colleagues asking about their new job. What new agents say has a direct impact on your organization’s future recruiting success, your image as an employer, and your reputation as a manager. What kind of “brand” does your call center have as a place to work? How do you compare with others? How much could you save in recruiting and replacement costs if you were known as a great place to work?

- Some organizations report that up to 70 percent of their new-hires come

through employee referrals. How many people do you hire through referrals? If you increased those numbers, how much would that save in recruiting and selection costs?

■ **Call center agents want career growth, development and learning;** they want to work with great people and build relationships. How many of your employees are truly engaged? How much more productive would they be if you understood how to motivate and energize each and every one of them?

Assimilating and developing call center talent is too important a job to ignore or delegate. Imagine your impact if you were able to: Cut your new team member's time to productivity in half; lower your voluntary attrition rate; develop your agents to their fullest potential; and build a brand as the leader to work for in your organization. Improving first-year retention, decreasing time to productivity, and building loyalty and commitment is directly related to how quickly managers can develop high-quality relationships with their new agents.

### Unleashing the Energy

Managers and team leaders can unleash the energy of their new agents by engaging them in a series of structured, meaningful conversations over the course of the critical first few weeks and months of employment. By focusing compelling conversations on six sources of power – relationship, focus, passion, challenge, balance and intention – managers can connect early and foster a more productive, motivated and committed workforce.

■ **Power from relationship.** There is perhaps no greater predictor of retention and engagement than the quality of the relationship new agents can establish with their managers and colleagues. The closer these bonds, the more agents trust management and

the organization, the more they feel cared for and valued as human beings, the greater their focus, commitment, productivity and satisfaction. Employees and managers must talk and get to know each other well. New agents must find new friends among their colleagues.

*Relationship questions a manager might ask new agents:*

- Why did you decide to take this job? So far, what have you observed that leads you to believe that you've made the right choice? What have you observed or experienced that might lead you to question that choice?
- What will it take to keep you here? What kinds of experiences and opportunities will you need to stay interested and involved?
- How are you getting along with your team members? With whom do you most enjoy working? What works about those relationships?

■ **Power from passion.** People are more passionate about their work (and lives) when they're able to use their talents and skills to work on tasks and projects that interest them in environments that are consistent with the ways they prefer to work. Managers need to take inventory of and recognize their new agents' skills, honor their interests, and find ways to allow them to leverage their strengths.

*Passion questions a manager might ask new agents:*

- Which of your talents are likely to be most valuable in this work? How could you use your talents more on this job?
- What interests you about the work so far? What other interests would you like to explore further? How might you do that in the framework of this job?

- How well do you feel you fit here? What might help you to fit better?

■ **Power from challenge.** People get excited about their jobs (and stay excited) when they have the opportunity to learn and grow in ways that have meaning for them. Managers need to become better talent scouts, and recognize potential when they see it. They need to provide opportunities for continued development. They need to help agents to learn from mistakes rather than punish them.

*Challenge questions a manager might ask new agents:*

- What do you find most challenging about the job?
- How does your skills set match what we're asking of you?
- Which areas of your work offer the greatest potential for further growth? How might you take advantage of those?

■ **Power from focus.** Agents are more committed to their organizations when they understand what the organization is trying to achieve and how they can personally contribute to those outcomes. Managers have to help new agents learn to navigate the organization, understand its purpose, mission and objectives, and appreciate how their efforts serve those goals.

*Focus questions a manager might ask new agents:*

- Can you describe what we're trying to accomplish and how that fits in with the larger company goals?
- How do you personally contribute to what we're trying to achieve here?
- Who are our key customers and what do they expect from us?

■ **Power from balance.** Employees' lives extend well beyond the doors of the call center. They have families, friends, lovers and children to care for.

They have finances to manage and households to maintain. They want to stay vibrant and healthy. They want to play and have time for themselves. This is true of all the generations at work today. Managers must make room for new-hires' and their whole lives.

*Balance questions a manager might ask new agents:*

- What do you do for fun?
- What other challenges are you facing right now in your life that might impact your work?
- What interests do you have but find yourself unable to pursue here?

■ **Power from intention.** Managers and their new agents together must follow through on what they learn from these conversations to earn the commitment and loyalty they both want: What new skills will the agent develop the first year, and how? What new areas will they explore, and how? What relationships are going to be important to establish, and how will

that happen? How will the manager or new agent flex to make the relationship work best? What results will the new agent take responsibility for, and how will he/she be rewarded? What support will the manager provide? Yes, it takes more than talk – new-hires need to see tangible progress and results.

*Intention questions a manager might ask new agents:*

- What goals do you want to accomplish on this job?
- What actions can you take to pursue those goals?
- How could your colleagues or I help?

### **And the Return on Investment Is...**

These series of conversations require a significant expenditure of time and energy on the part of managers and new-hires. It might also require additional training or coaching for managers to enable them to conduct these conversations successfully.

So what does the organization get in return? Bottom-line results include:

- Improved first-year retention
- Decreased time to productivity
- Reduced recruiting costs
- Increased productivity

Making it possible for agents to do what they do best, allowing them to pursue their interests and building meaningful relationships with new agents will also lead to increased agent and customer satisfaction, and enhanced profitability. CCMReview

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