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## Motivating Your Workforce: Techniques For Your Contact Center

**1. How do you motivate agents/ reps to do their best in their jobs? Can you explain how this is measured? - Illustrate any games etc you use.**

Motivating agents is something that all call centers struggle with on a daily basis. Call center agents truly come from all walks of life and what works for some will not work for others. But, the old adage that the desire for positive recognition is better than currency definitely holds true in the call center. If we can find a way to consistently give the agent recognition for their successes, we find that they are inspired to continuously improve.

I believe the most important tool in motivating agents is the implementation of a consistent coaching and feedback program. Through this program we measure agent quality and then report the information in a monthly agent scorecard that shows the individuals how they are doing in relationship to their peers in the center and to the overall quality goals set by the company.



Bob Furniss  
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One specific idea for making the agents feel special is to create opportunities for interaction with the management team. One year, during International Customer Service Week, the management held a Customer Service Fair. We had all the carnival games that we played as kids and had BBQ catered for the event. We also had a dunk tank and pie throwing booth that allowed agents to "take out some frustrations" on several of the supervisors and managers. The feedback was great and the agents came away with a better personal relationship with the management team.

**2. Do you believe money is the only real motivator? If not, what are some good examples of motivational tools or incentives that you have used that work in your center?**

Money is rarely the primary motivator. If supervisors and managers put an emphasis on monetary rewards, then we risk losing key agents to competing call centers. When the call center across town is offering jobs with a starting salary of 20 cents an hour more, we risk our most vital reps skinning across the street because their primary focus is on monetary



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our most vital reps skipping across the street because their primary focus is on monetary rewards. We strongly believe in the below three-prong motivational approach.

- Coaching and Feedback - Implementation of a consistent quality program. As mentioned above, through this program we measure agent quality and then report the information in a monthly agent scorecard that shows the individuals how they are doing in relationship to their peers in the center, and to the overall quality goals set by the company.
- Fun, Different Work Place - We want to make the call center a fun place to work. We want an agent to wonder what can we do next that is crazier and more effective than the last time? The most important part of the call center is the ability to make it a fun, interactive and agent-focused environment. The nature of the business is repetitive and monotonous. Creating a pleasurable attitude about work can lead to a more motivated and productive work force - which, ultimately, leads to satisfied customers. I believe that the crazier the recognition and rewards, the better. One of my favorite examples is - riding through the call center on a bicycle passing out ice cream treats on days when the call volume is high.
- Career Path Opportunities - The call center is one of the most challenging places to implement a solid career path for entry and mid-level employees. Given the sheer numbers of call center agents, as well as the varied levels of goals and interest from the agents, it is a struggle to develop clear paths of opportunity. However, we have been successful with the following programs we have created:

1. Team Leader in Training (TLT) - a three-week program that an agent can qualify for, based on monthly scorecards numbers and manager recommendations. The program allows the agent to "shadow" a Team Leader/Supervisor and experience their daily tasks and goals. It also offers the supervisor a second "set of hands".

2. Cross Function Experiences (CFE) - agents can qualify to work in other groups (technical support, collections, outbound escalation group, web support, etc.) within the call center. This helps agents understand the functions of other groups and also allows them time away from the same day-to-day workload that is the reality of a call center agent position.

Top ten ideas for simple motivational ideas in the call center are:

- Deliver Ice Cream Sandwiches to the call center agents while riding a bicycle on a particularly busy day!
- Create a contest based on quality. Have managers wash the cars of the winners.
- If you have a LARGE parking lot - provide valet service once a month on Mondays for all agents who meet a certain criteria.
- DONUT and MUFFIN Day - have the management team serve coffee and donuts to all employees!! (Dress the part - don't forget afternoon/night shift)
- Make casual day more fun with an "Ugly Shoe Contest!"
- Write a hand-written thank-you note to an agent or supervisor who goes above and beyond the call of duty.
- Send flowers to the spouse of a manager or supervisor that works an extra shift or stays late working on a special project.
- Celebrate a special event (like International Customer Service Week) with a Stress Relief Festival - include dunk-tanks, pie-throwing and super water gun booths with the management team as the "target" personnel!
- Have poetry or writing contest to bring-out the hidden talents of agents. Publish the work in the company newsletter, on the intranet, etc.

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- Draw names or create a list for agents to have breakfast with an executive (President, Vice-President, General Manager or Director).

### **3. Have you been in any situations where you have had to motivate employees who have been merged, acquired, downsized? - If so how have you done this?**

One of the key problems that follows a merger or a downsized environment is the lack of effective communication between the management team and the agents. As managers, we often are able to articulate how it is "better for the company" but we are usually unable to communicate how it will make it better for the call center agent. Several years ago, while I was working for BellSouth Mobility, we combined several of our call centers into one regional call center.

We developed and implemented a successful plan called the Agent Communication Plan. The plan was created to help us with the merger of several call centers. In this document we attempted to answer all of the personal questions that the agent would want to know - including questions about human resource issues, pay questions, etc. (Examples: How our workforce management processes will affect their personal schedules; How sales incentives will affect their pay; Our management structure and how to escalate problems, etc.). We also put together a schedule on the types of communication that needed to happen via select channels (memo, email, meeting, one-on-one, etc.). We "over-communicated" to the agents - giving them information about new policies, processes and implementation plans. We held many team meetings and made sure that the managers and directors were available to answer questions and put fears to rest.

We continued to use the same motivation programs that were already in place, but also tried to be aware that the new agents were not really in a "fun" mood for several weeks after the merger. One of our most successful motivational ideas was to assign each new agent to a mentor/partner. The mentor was asked to "be their buddy" and to show them the "ropes" - to make sure that questions were answered and new processes were explained.

### **4. How can managers and supervisors create an environment where employees feel motivated at all times?"**

This is an issue that is addressed constantly among call center supervisors and front-line managers. Motivation of agents is important. But just like the coaching and feedback sets the tone for the overall daily motivation, the supervisor or manager has to have the ability to inspire the agent to want to do their best - not just motivate them. Inspiration does not come through rewards or goals. Inspiration comes from finding a way to reach the agent in a one-to-one relationship. Its important for supervisors to gain an understanding of what makes each agent happy, what makes them want to succeed in life.

Finding a way to reach the agent, at the personal level, is similar to what companies are doing with customers when they implement a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) strategy. They are attempting to reach the customer on a personal level. The call center is a place where we need to spend less money on CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and more on ERM (Employee Relationship Management) . If we find a way to manage the employee relationship at the front line, then the relationships with our customers will also be affected in a positive way. We can only understand what motivates them to succeed if we know what is important in their life!

Call center supervisors and managers can ask their agents the following questions to learn what makes them happy.

List each employees name and the following information:

- Are they married, single or dating?
- Do they have children? Grandchildren?
- If so, how many and what are their ages, gender and names
- Do they have special pets?
- What is the employee's primary activity outside of work? Music, sports, coaching, acting, etc.
- Where is the employee planning to go on his or her next vacation?
- Does the employee have aspirations to be a manager or a supervisor?
- Where did the employee grow up?
- What is their favorite sports team?

#### **5. Do you actively measure motivation, if so how do you do it?**

We have looked at several software vendors to attempt to understand what is available to help call centers track and manage employee motivation but so far we have not found the right solution.

#### **6. Do you think management should be rewarded financially on motivation scores of their staff?**

I am not sure how you can track true motivation scores. One option would be to track employee satisfaction via a semi-annual survey. In this case, the employee satisfaction score should be a part of the bonus plan for all levels of management. The program needs to be consistent (at least semi-annual) and objective (scored). Managers should know that the satisfaction and motivation of the agents is a key focus and therefore part of their annual management objectives

#### **7. How do you deal with un-motivated staff that can bring down the morale of other motivated staff in your center?**

The unmotivated employee is usually also the one that is not meeting expectations in other areas of measurement. In this case we are faced with "rewarding" negative behavior with negative feedback. Of course this process can also lead to an even less motivated employee if we don't do it right. The call center must have policies and procedures in place that allow the supervisor or manager to move the employee through the corrective process towards improvement - and to allow them to move them out the door if they don't improve.

Sometimes a change of management can make a major difference. All frontline supervisors have different personalities and sometimes just changing who the employee reports to can make a huge impact. I can think of one agent that made a transformation from less than motivated and really not engaged to become one of our best agents. I met with the agent and asked about the problems. She shared with that she did not get along with her current supervisor. We made the change and laid out a plan of action for improvement and the transformation was amazing. She immediately found her niche and went on to become a team leader in her group.

One other idea for getting an unmotivated employee engaged in the solution is to force them to participate. In some cases in the past we have put them on the employee motivation committee and ask them for their advice for improving the moral in the center.

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#### **About the Author**

As Founder of Call Center Ideas, Bob Furniss brings more than 22 years experience in the customer service field. While with FedEx's Customer Experience Marketing Group, Furniss worked as a consultant helping clients, including Delta Airlines, Corporate Express, Chase Bank and Mellon Bank design strategies and implement effective solutions within their call

Bank, and Mellon Bank design strategies and implement effective solutions within their call centers. Furniss also led the call center consulting group at iXL, held a consulting position with ALLTEL Call Center Solutions and was the Call Center Director for BellSouth Mobility's regional customer service call center. Furniss has been a featured speaker at various conferences as his unique speaking style brings to life the day-to-day struggles in the call center.

### **About the Company**

Call Center Ideas is a central source for call center executives, managers, supervisors and agents - providing simple "to the point" ideas that offer a fresh approach to managing and working in today's high-energy call centers. For companies that need to improve service and reduce costs in their call center organization, Call Center Ideas consultants can improve productivity, update tools and technology and increase employee morale. Our consultants have more than a combined 40 years of management and training experience across all customer contact channels (call center, Web, email, and chat). Our offerings in this area include specialized consulting services, motivational speaking, and customized training solutions.

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Date and Time Posted : 04/15/2003

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