



The Psychology of a High Performing Call Centre



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Creating a high performing contact centre doesn't just happen overnight. It comes as a result of creating the right environment for your call centre agents, through a number of tools and tactics.

A photograph of a call center or office environment. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair in a ponytail is seen from the back, wearing a headset and looking at a computer monitor. In the middle ground, a man with long dark hair is sitting in a black office chair, wearing a headset and adjusting it with his hand. In the background, another man with glasses is working at a desk. The office has large windows and modern decor.

Introduction



As an outbound contact centre, meeting your targets hinges on five key factors every day, all of which are directly tied to your staff:

- Lowering absenteeism
- Improving morale
- Reducing employee turnover
- Increasing profits
- Improving customer satisfaction

Creating a high performing contact centre doesn't just happen overnight. It comes as a result of creating the right environment for your call centre agents, through a number of tools and tactics.

Your agents are the heart and soul of the business, acting as the dominant interface between the company and the consumer. The image they project to the customer is a critical one. It only makes sense to take care of your staff.

If you're struggling with contact centre performance, or are keen to maximise your team's productivity, focusing on the psychology of how to motivate people may be just the key you need.



Motivation, Productivity and Staff Retention

When a team member isn't motivated, they aren't likely to be productive, and when they aren't productive, it's hard to meet the challenging targets you may be tasked to achieve. Let's take a closer look at the connection between motivation, productivity, and staff retention to help you see where you can make changes to improve all three.

MOTIVATION

Your team may be motivated by any number of things, but most obviously, it's their salary and bonuses at the end of the day.

For most agents, the reward isn't the achieving of targets or the results the company achieves, but the money and other benefits they get put in theirs as a result of their work.

And yet there is something else to be considered when it comes to keeping your team motivated.

Recent Gallup polls show only 24% of employees are engaged in their daily work, yet that high engagement translates to 22% higher productivity.

This means it's important to talk to your staff. They're the best source of information about what you can do better as a company. Ask for feedback about company policies, and really listen. While you may not feasibly be able to implement all of their suggestions, there may be a common theme you can take action on that will help boost motivation.

We'll talk more about motivating your call centre staff in chapter 5.

PRODUCTIVITY



Motivation helps fuel productivity, but highly motivated agents can't be immediately productive in a vacuum. To be productive, your agents must have access to the tools and training they need to be successful.

This starts with having clear and defined processes specific to your company, and ensuring you have a clear induction program for all agents that covers these processes and your company culture even if they have previous experience in outbound call centres. Keep the training focused and up to date, so skills stay sharp.

Define metrics of success ahead of time, so employees know what to expect. Whether it is the number of outbound calls made, the sales made, the length of time on the call, or other details, ensuring your employees know what you expect of them keeps them focused and on track.

Your middle performers are producing an average of 1,300 productivity units per month, so 60% of your company is giving you 60% of your performance. The top 20% on the other hand, produce about 33% of your performance, and the bottom 15%? They're responsible for about 7% of your performance. You'll get the best ROI if you motivate the middle and improve their skills.



As a whole, employee turnover costs Australia about \$3.8 billion in lost productivity.

STAFF RETENTION

When you have motivated and productive agents, they're much more likely to stick around. Retention is a large piece of the puzzle simply because turnover can be costly.

Estimates range from at least the cost of the employee's annual salary, to an average of 2.5 times the annual salary, due to factors including low productivity during new agent training, the cost of recruitment and potential overtime from other team members filling the gap.

Research from PriceWaterhouse Coopers shows that nearly one in four employees leave their jobs before they've been employed with a company for a year, and this figure is even higher for the contact centre industry in Australia where turnover can be as high as 40%.

As a whole, employee turnover costs Australia about \$3.8 billion in lost productivity, and additional \$385 million in recruitment costs that could have been avoided.

STAFF PROMOTION

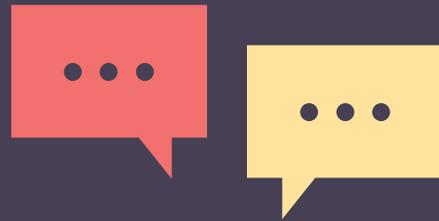
Staff who are actively engaged and motivated at work are more likely to remain with your call centre when they see there is opportunity for advancement. Clearly outline your promotion guidelines and advancement possibilities so recruits understand what they could be working toward from day one with your company.

One study showed that internal hires often perform better than external hires for several years after the position is filled. External hires don't always understand how to get started right away, and need time to become acclimated to the company and position, whereas internal hires are already familiar with the company culture and what the promotion

entails. Even though it can be tempting to look externally to fill vacant positions, for the potential of more experience, more education, etc., this line of thinking could be harmful for employee retention and morale.

After two years of working, many external hires are performing on par with internal hires, but there's always a chance the external hires won't last that long. The same study revealed that external hires are 61% more likely to be fired from the new job than those who are promoted from within.

This resets the clock on getting new hires to the productivity level of fellow staff, and creates additional costs associated with recruitment.



Creating a Great Working Culture

WHAT DOES A GREAT CULTURE LOOK LIKE?

A great working culture can be the tipping point between success and failure for your call centre, ensuring your employees are fulfilled and productive. Your culture also plays a key role in attracting top talent.

Building a culture that inspires and unites the team happens with every decision made in regards to hiring and in your day-to-day operations.

Your culture is based on your values, your company's vision, and your criteria for hiring, managing and promoting employees.

CLEAR VISION

Think about where your team will be in a year, in three years, in five years, in 10 years. Your vision is a clear picture of what you expect your team (and success) to look like in the future. It provides answers to a plethora of questions, such as:

- What does the team look like? How big is it?
- How does the team feel about their job?
- Does the team respect one another and the company?

Taking time to think about the vision you have for your team will help you when making business decisions. It's not the strategy for building your team, but it will help you create a plan to build the team the way you want for company success.

CLEAR VALUES

Refer to the company values and see how they align with the current team, and the team you're looking to build. Make sure the team is aware of what those values are, and what you expect of them. When positions open and you must recruit new talent, focus on employees who already believe and support them. You will attract employees that share those same values. Let the ones who don't go work for other companies.

THE RIGHT PEOPLE

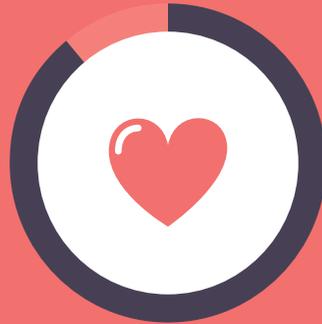
For your team's culture to become what you want, and for it to maintain its greatness, you must have the right people in the right positions. If you're building a laid back culture, you don't want employees who are rigid and cold.

Fostering a great culture comes from hiring a group of like-minded people who not only support the company's vision and values, but one another in their endeavours for success.

TEAMWORK & COMMUNICATION

A great culture is one based on teamwork and communication. The team should hold each other accountable. Staff at every level within the company should be encouraged to present ideas for the betterment of the company. Clear and open lines of communication with employees and management helps to keep employees happy and engaged. Encourage your team members to come to you with any issues they may have, and work to develop a solution together.





Research shows 90% of employees want an honest manager and working environment.



HOW TO MANAGE THE ENVIRONMENT

Great managers accept they still have a lot to learn, and are open to learning from their employees. They strive to set a good example of what they expect their employees to be.

HONESTY

Honesty is the best policy for a reason. Research shows 90% of employees want an honest manager and working environment. Honesty shows not only that you have confidence in your team, but that you respect them. When employees feel respect from you, they'll give it in return.

Honesty also helps prevent crisis. Keeping everyone honest helps prevent one call agent from destroying the work of the team, and causing resentments.



FAIRNESS

The same survey indicated 89% of employees want a manager and work environment where everyone is held accountable. Treating all employees fairly helps create stronger relationships with them, and builds a foundation of trust and respect. This doesn't mean you treat all employees the same way – as no two employees are the same. Each employee will have their own set of skills, strengths, and weaknesses. You have to know how to treat each employee based on their contributions to the call centre.

Let's say you have two agents, John and Jane. They both get their job done, but Jane works hard to go above and beyond meeting her quotas, while John simply works to meet the quota.

If you treat John and Jane the same – Jane may become upset she wasn't recognized for the hard work and effort she put into her job this month. The lack of recognition may cause her to stop working so hard, and may build resentment for you, and for John.

Treating them fairly, however, means thanking John for his work, and rewarding Jane for hers accordingly. Maybe it's time Jane gets a raise? Or, at the very least, a little something extra to show your appreciation. It's not favouritism because Jane worked hard to earn the reward.

RESPONSIVENESS

Employees want to know they're being heard. Even if you don't have the answer right way, responding to their concerns plays a key role in keeping employees happy.

When you're responsive to employee needs, your employees work harder to help you, and your call centre succeed. Take the time to listen to your employees. Do what you can to help them accomplish their goals. Take concerns to your superiors to do your part in helping the call centre succeed.



What to Monitor and How

VOLUME

How many calls are your agents making? Are they wasting valuable time waiting for calls to connect or with wrong numbers, when a predictive dialer or lead cleaner could be used to make more sales? Are enough outbound calls being made to hit your sales targets?

If the volume is enough to meet targets, what can you do to increase that volume in the future? Will you need to hire additional staff? If the volume isn't enough to sustain targets, what are your options?

QUALITY

What is the quality of each call? Are calls being recorded and reviewed for quality assurance and training purposes?

Review calls often, from as many agents as possible. Check for common threads. Which agents are providing the highest quality experience? Which agents are struggling? This information can help you when it comes to deciding when and what kind of training to offer, as well as what kind of motivation and incentives may be needed.



SALES

How many sales are made? How does the sales volume compare to the call volume? If there's a low sales success rate for the call volume, it may be time to evaluate processes, call scripting or even the quality of the lead list you're using.

Consider:

- Whether or not the offer to customers is of value to them.
- Employee experience - are sales down in general, or with just a few employees?
- Training - is the current training adequate?
- How many contacts must be made with a single customer before a sale is made? Is lead generation and nurturing failing to provide the best prospects to your agents?

SCRIPTS

How are the scripts affecting sales? The words of the script can affect sales just as much as the delivery of the scripts. If the offer hasn't changed, but sales have - could the script be the reason why?

Test multiple scripts for the same offer and see which performs better. Ditch the scripts that perform the worst, and model any future scripts for similar offers after the higher performing options in your library.





STAFF SCHEDULING

Ensuring staff schedules align with what the business needs is critical to success, but juggling rules, contracts, flexible working hours and shift patterns is a huge task to handle manually.

Giving staff the freedom and flexibility to work how they want and when they want is a key motivation factor, so a scheduling tool to help automate scheduling in a way that both suites staff and meets organisational requirements is paramount.

All of these elements can be a difficult to monitor, if you don't have the right tools available. However, with advancements in contact centre software, all of these tasks are managed in a fraction of the time.

Look for a system that includes

- Your choice of diallers so you can choose the one that works best for your call centre
- Automatic call recording for quality assurance and training
- Integrations with other enterprise software solutions
- Integrated script designer tools
- One-click follow-up emails, automatically filled with details
- Live reporting
- Automatic call back tracking and reminders



How to Motivate a Team

Building a successful team starts with giving them the tools and training they need to be successful, but after that, the key lies in keeping them motivated.

START OFF WITH INCENTIVES



Are your agents happy with the rewards and bonuses they're receiving? If not, then it's may be time to review the incentive program you're offering. If your team couldn't care less about what they're receiving on top of their general salary, they're not going to be motivated to do more and to do better.

Employee incentives don't have to crush the budget to be effective. From small cash rewards to physical gifts like tablets, gaming consoles, gift cards, etc., you can find incentives that will motivate your team to succeed. Whatever the incentives may be, make sure there's a choice of rewards employees find desirable.

Try starting a weekly incentive program that begins with a payout on Monday, and continues until Friday. You'll get the agents motivated at the beginning of the week, when they're not necessarily looking forward to being there. That motivation will set the tone for a good week and carry them through until it's time to clock out on Friday.

You could do smaller rewards every week, and let those be cumulative for a bigger prize at the end of the month. Take it one step further and let those monthly rewards work toward an even bigger prize at the end of the year.

You can base your incentives on a number of metrics, depending on what you need to improve, such as:

- Number of calls handled
- Calls in queue
- Customer service scores
- Sales volume

Consider team-based incentives as well, to foster teamwork among agents in addition to motivating the individual agents.

No matter what incentive program you work out, provide feedback throughout the process. Feedback is emotionally rewarding, and will let your agents know how they're doing so they know whether they need to keep doing what they're doing, or whether they need to make changes.

When you pay your incentives, pay them immediately, and separately from payroll. This ties the reward more closely to the activity, so you get better reinforcement.

Employee incentives aren't limited to cash and prizes. There are a number of ways to reward employees that don't cost a penny – from acknowledgement of their work and public praise to including them in the decision making process.

A 2004 global Gallup study showed employees who received more praise were more productive, more engaged, and more likely to remain with their company compared to those who did not. These employees also receive more customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Additional research from a 10-year motivation study shows managers who are generous with employee praise have lower turnover rates, get better results for the organisation, and are seen as stronger in terms of communication, accountability, trust, and goal setting.

Hearing praise releases dopamine in the brain – the chemical responsible for making us feel good that's also been linked to creative problem-solving and innovative thought. The key is to remember the effects of praise are short lived, so it needs to be consistent and offered regularly.



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GAMIFICATION

Gamification takes tasks that are otherwise boring and transforms them into something fun, making it an excellent way to motivate a team. A 2013 Aberdeen Group study showed companies that used gamification saw a **48% improvement in employee engagement** and a **36% reduction in employee turnover**.

Gamification requires a lot of planning and effort to implement correctly, since you want a game that not only helps you accomplish your corporate goals, but one that employees will actively want to participate in. You'll need to consider:

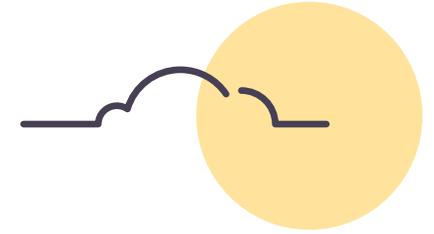
- **Corporate goals:** Do you want to use gamification to train your employees? Do you want to use it to help make them more productive?



- **Game style:** What would your employees be most likely to respond to? How can you build elements into the game that will appeal to all gamer personalities?
- **Rewards and incentives:** If your game allows players to earn currency, whether it's points, gold, diamonds, etc., what real-world rewards will that translate to?

Gamification can be done in a variety of styles to accommodate a wide variety of interests and gamer personalities. To make sure you're designing a game your employees will actually want to play, ask for their input and feedback.

REDESIGN YOUR WORKSPACE



The space your agents work in plays a role in motivation and productivity. If your budget allows, meet with senior management to discuss making some changes. Research has shown everything from the amount of natural light to the furniture used, and even the colour of the office has an impact on productivity.

NATURAL LIGHTING

Can you let more natural light into the call centre space? If not, enquire about light bulb options that do a better job of mimicking natural sunlight. Research shows those who work in offices with windows get 173% more white light exposure during their work hours. As a result, they get an average of 46 more minutes of sleep per night, compared to employees in offices without windows.

The same research shows employees working in windowless offices received lower scores on measures of quality of life, and worse outcomes on quality and efficiency of sleep. This is a result of artificial light disrupting circadian rhythms. Natural light, on the other hand, doesn't, allowing for better sleeping and thus, better productivity.

ERGONOMIC FURNITURE

Research from New Zealand shows using ergonomic furniture in combination with effective use of space can result in productivity increases of up to 64%. By reducing awkward and unnecessary postures means employees can get more work done faster, and more accurately.

COLOUR

The colour red for instance, when used on office walls may affect focus. Beyond increasing the speed of reactions, it also increases the strength of those reactions, to a degree that most are unaware. Though at first this seems like a good thing, it generally leads to worry and distraction, which ultimately drains mental resources faster.

On the other hand, opting for an all white workspace lends to the office feeling more like a hospital, which creates an atmosphere of intimidation. It's not ideal for productivity.

Rather than going for bold and bright, choose subtle and subdued colours. They aren't as hard on the eyes, so it's easier to concentrate. If painting the workspace isn't an option, use colour in other possible places. Turn to blues and greens for their calming effects.

ADD PLANTS

Add plants throughout the office, and let employees know they can bring their own for use in cubicles or offices. Adding plant life to the office has been shown to reduce stress and increase productivity by up to 12%.



ENQUIRE ABOUT OFFERING UNLIMITED VACATION

Unlimited vacation doesn't mean employees can take half the year off and get paid for it; it just means your employees have a bit more flexibility in their time off. This approach is working for several tech giants, such as Twitter and Netflix, and may be a good option for your call centre as well.

Though it sounds counterintuitive, the freedom of unlimited vacation allows employees to take time off to recharge when they need it. Studies show the more an employee works, the less productive they become.

The unlimited vacation policy also builds trust between the employees and management team. Most of the time, employees respond by planning how they'll still get all their work done around the time they're taking off.

When your employees are happy, they are productive. But, it's a good idea to make policy changes gradually. Making too many changes at once could overwhelm the employees.

It's better to organize a meeting with everyone, so you can get their feedback about the changes they want to see, and then do your best to make them work.

A hand holding a telephone receiver over a keyboard, with a computer monitor and plant in the background. The image is dimly lit and has a dark blue overlay.

Sales Tips & Techniques

KNOWLEDGE

For your employees to be effective, they must know as much as possible about their products or services they're selling. Customers will no doubt have questions about the offer, and if an agent is unable to answer them, it will be a turnoff.

Consider using gamification and incentives to help employees learn what they need to learn, and get rewarded for knowing what they need to know.

HANDLING OBJECTIONS

In a perfect world, customers would always say yes. They would never be rude, and would always welcome calls from an outbound contact centre. However, in the real world, customers are going to object, and in some cases, treat the agent poorly. That's why agents must go through training to learn how to appropriately handle objections - not only to keep the brand's equity intact, but to learn how to not take the objections personally.

GETTING PAST THE INTRO

Getting past the introduction can be difficult, as many people won't answer the phone, will hang up the phone, be rude, or simply refuse to let the conversation proceed. This can be disheartening for agents.

To get past the initial hurdle of getting a customer to answer, consider using call centre software that makes the call appear as though it is coming from a local number.

Once the prospect answers, it's a good idea to have agents introduce themselves, address the caller by name, or ask to speak to a caller by name if the contact didn't answer. Say who they're calling for, and why. Then, if previous contact history is available, reference the

contact before asking if they could have a moment of their time.

If the prospect says they're not interested before the agent has the chance to explain the purpose of the call, it's ideal to have them say they respect that, and ask if they can provide more details before the caller makes a final decision.

If the prospect responds positively, move through the rest of the script accordingly. If they're not willing to listen to more details, simply thank them for their time, and suggest the company could be of assistance in the future.

Encourage the agents to ask probing questions so they can learn more about why the customer is objecting, so they can respond accordingly.

“You're too expensive”

Ask questions to find out more information. These could include:

- “What is the price you'd expect to pay for this product or service?”
- “Do you have an idea about what our products/services cost?”
- “Have you gotten a cheaper quote with another provider?”

Alternatively, go with something like:

“We may be priced a bit higher than XYZ company, but you mentioned before working with a reputable company is important. We focus on quality and efficiency to provide only the best for our customers...”

“I’m not authorized to make the decision.”

Ask about who can make the decision and how you can contact them. Then, contact them and introduce yourself, using the previous point of contact as a reference.

“I’ll give it some thought...”

“Thank you for that. Is there any additional information you’re looking for that I can provide? When is the best time for me to contact you again?” Call centre software allows call backs to be scheduled, letting the same agent pick the conversation back up at a more convenient time.

“We used your products/services before and weren’t impressed.”

Ask for details about when they used your products or services, and what happened. Apologise

for their experience. Then provide information about what has changed since then and how you can help them. If company policy allows, offer a little something to sweeten the deal, such as a free gift, or a discount.

“We already use your competitor.”

Find out if they’re happy with the experience. If this is the case, there’s not much that can be done, but they’re aware of you as an option in the future.

Find out if they will consider allowing you to discuss product and service offerings, since there’s nothing to lose from considering all possible options. Ask if you can send information for them to keep on file.

It’s important to never speak negatively of your competitors, since this can project a negative image about your company. The idea is that you want to be in the customer’s mind in case they have issues with their current provider and want to make the switch in the future.

“We’ve never heard of your company.”

Figure out why they’re worried. Ask questions to find out their specific objections. Maybe they’re worried about reputation or the company’s ability to manage their needs.

Whatever the case may be, offer reassurance in a non-defensive manner. Then, ask if they knew their needs would be met, if they’d be interested in speaking with you further.

PRACTICE SESSIONS

Even if your employees have experience working in an outbound call centre, hosting practice sessions as part of your ongoing training can help keep skills sharp.

These practice sessions are a good idea when products and services are changing, and employees need to make sure they have the necessary knowledge to handle any questions. It's also a good way to help agents practice handling objections, so they get used to it.

Organize your agents into pairs, and have them take turns with various scripts and objection scenarios. Switch the partners around so each agent gets to play the role of the customer and the agent.

**Ensuring Outbound
Calling Keeps Brand
Equity Intact**

FOLLOW ALL REGULATIONS



Make sure you're following all rules and regulations for telemarketing calls. Do not contact numbers that are listed on the Do Not Call Registry. Keep your databases

up-to-date, regularly washing numbers that are added to the registry. Even if you purchase lists, this may be good practice, and using a lead cleaning service can also improve dialer efficiency by removing all disconnected numbers from the call list.

CONNECT CALLERS WITH A LIVE AGENT RIGHT AWAY

Make sure callers are connected with a live agent right away if you're using an automatic dialer. You're calling customers, so they're not likely willing to wait to speak to a live person. They'll hang up, you'll upset them, and risk creating a bad reputation for the company.

MAKE USE OF ADDITIONAL DATA

When possible, use additional data about the customers you'll be calling. Use demographic information, such as age, gender, location, and occupation to create a more personalised sales approach. If you know your company will be calling a large group of a certain demographic, adjust call scripts accordingly. You'll develop a reputation for better, more customised service.

AVOID MAKING CALLS AT DINNERTIME

You're already potentially disrupting a customer when you call. Calling during dinnertime hours is one way to set the tone for a negative experience. Of course you can always offer to call back at a better time, but wouldn't it be a better overall experience if you know you're not bothering a customer during their dinner in the first place?

Outbound call centre management isn't an easy undertaking, but with the right tools available, it is simpler. When you know your team has everything they need to run smoothly and efficiently, you can focus your efforts on keeping the organisation moving forward.



Noojee Contact Solutions designs and builds high performance call centre software to support small to mid-sized businesses with cloud-based inbound, outbound and hosted PBX phone solutions. We make it simple to manage a high performing contact centre that maximises customer service, while making outbound sales and appointment setting easier.

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