How to Improve Agent Performance in Three Easy Steps

by Rachel Miller, CUSTOMER SERVICE PROFESSIONAL, IMPACT LEARNING SYSTEMS
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Write this down: Technology is not enough. Your call center may be using the latest CRM system or workforce management software, but unless you have a strong support network for your agents, they will not be able to sustain desired performance levels. People and processes are just as important as technology in optimizing agent performance.

Many performance issues can be corrected with a little effort from management. Follow these three easy steps to effectively increase agent performance and reduce employee turnover in your call center.

Step 1: Analyze Agent Performance
You have a poor performer. Every team has at least one or two agents who consistently perform below average. Before you decide to cut your losses, take time to evaluate the agent’s strengths and weaknesses. Does he or she have poor product knowledge but great telephone etiquette? Does the agent lack confidence to upsell and cross-sell product or services effectively?

Diagnose performance, not personality traits. It is easy to confuse personality traits with performance weakness. Not everyone is happy-go-lucky—be sure to focus on observable, measurable behavior that directly affects the agent’s ability to successfully complete his or her job duties.

Step 2: Create an Action Plan
Behavioral changes require daily reminders. Creating an action plan for performance improvement shows the agent that you and the company are serious about his or her future. The action plan should outline a reasonable and logical plan for improving agent performance, broken down into daily steps with weekly revision with a supervisor.

Setting goals for the agent is motivating. Daily, attainable goals will keep the agent on track and inspired to keep improving. Do not expect the agent to improve overnight. Sustained, measur-
able improvement takes time and dedication.

**Step 3: Follow Up and Coach**

This is the most important step to improving agent performance. Coaching call center agents combines acknowledging desirable behavior, with giving constructive feedback to correct undesirable behavior. Follow up with the agent by setting specific evaluation criteria and scheduling regular meetings to assess agent improvement.

Empower the agent to self-coach and evaluate their own progress. Self-assessments will give insight into how the agent thinks they are improving. Continue following up with the agent until you are confident that they are able to consistently maintain their performance.

Employees who receive regular coaching are happier, more productive employees. Coaching can be done at any time—not just at scheduled meetings. Our clients report that informal, spur-of-the-moment coaching is most often more effective. If you see agents smiling while taking a call, make a note and acknowledge them later in the day. Small but genuine compliments will boost the agent’s self-esteem—and you’ll feel great giving them, too!

Improving agent performance and increasing employee retention is essential to keeping call center costs low and profits high. Investing in the success of existing employees is much more economical than recruiting, hiring and training new employees. Use these three easy steps to effectively increase agent performance and reduce employee turnover in your call center.

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