

The Service Level Group's Better Contact Center Series

Getting More from Your Quality Assurance Program



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In every call center, providing a high-quality interaction should be just as important as meeting telephone accessibility objectives. The benefits of an effective quality assurance system are many:

- It enables you to leverage recorded calls to identify opportunities for service improvement within the center, as well as organizationwide improvements.
- It offers an excellent way to identify customer needs and potential long-term service issues.
- It provides another way for the call center to show the value it provides to the organization.
- If you don't already have a quality program in place, you need one; if you have one, even a good one, consider the following ideas to get more from your time and technology investment.

Factors that Influence Agent Performance

We recommend developing a formal process for saving caller comments that identify opportunities, such as uncommon complaints, new customer challenges, feedback about competitors, and anything else that might help your organization improve a process or clarify information for customers. Once captured, this feedback can be analyzed for trends and shared with company executives, as well as the appropriate internal areas that can improve the processes to enhance the customer's experience.

The results should also be correlated with call center activities to identify additional training opportunities. It's a good practice to take into account factors that influence agents' attitudes and monitoring results, such as:

- The agent's experience level.
- Call center metrics and call volumes. Factors like service level or time of day have an impact on agent performance and, ultimately, quality metrics (e.g., agents may not use the correct greeting during high call volumes; they may sound rushed; lengthy call queues may result in irritated customers from the onset of the call, etc.)

- Customer satisfaction level as measured against the call center and the other products supported (which can identify issues directly within the control of the call center).
- Operational changes within the call center.

Quality Monitoring Options

There have been very positive advancements in call center quality monitoring technology — we've seen many of our clients realize significant improvements after implementing new technology. However, as with any type of technology, keep in mind that it's only a tool and shouldn't be relied on as the only way to improve quality. Whether or not you use QA technology, it's important to continuously review alternative methods of monitoring call quality and providing feedback. Following are three monitoring processes to consider:

Agent self-monitoring is gaining popularity in call centers that have invested in silent monitoring systems. Agents appreciate being a part of the evaluation process, and we've found that they're often more critical of their own performance and more open to improvement opportunities. There are several different approaches — the key is to find the one that makes your agents and managers feel most comfortable. One method is to allow agents to self-score their calls and compare the results with their team leader or the QA team. For example, schedule agents for 30 minutes a month to sit in an evaluation room and listen/evaluate five calls. The agent then shares the results with his or her team leader or supervisor and, together, plan improvements based on the session.

Peer monitoring is also becoming more frequently used. It is most successful in environments that have established quality monitoring programs. Although some organizations dismiss peer monitoring for fear of potential HR issues, we suggest it as an option for those centers that have an effective quality monitoring program that has been in place for several months, and with which both agents and managers are comfortable.

Traditional coaching techniques are still effective. Methods like side-by-side coaching allow supervisors and QA staff to spend time on the floor, providing direct,

informal, timely feedback. This creates a highly visible and effective way to reinforce the quality commitment to the entire workforce.

Motivate Agents to Provide Quality Service

Because quality is one of the few performance measures that is within an agent's control, it should become a regular part of the call center's reward and recognition program. There are several ways you can focus agents on the positives of quality monitoring. Following are a few recommendations to help move your program forward:

- Throw "Call of the Month" celebrations. Establish a formal program for identifying and rewarding top calls that is recognized and supported by the senior executives.
- Make it a part of your existing programs. Add a quality measure to all of your existing reward and recognition programs.
- Promote the "control" angle. Educate agents on the fact that they are in direct control of quality objectives, and how they can improve their performance. Take an inventory of your existing performance indicators and replace those that are not within agents' control (e.g., calls per day, handle time, etc.) with quality measures.
- Make quality goals a job promotion requirement. Once your staff is comfortable with the program, consistent high scores can be a requirement to gain the next skill or job level.
- End team meetings by listening to a great call. Spend the last few minutes of every team or staff meeting celebrating an agent's achievement as a group.

Set Measures that Drive Quality Behavior

Developing performance measures that agents have control over will help you to get better results from your quality program. If you want to ensure your agents are focused on quality, any external pressures and metrics must be applied in a way that allows agents to be successful.

Although many organizations promote quality, often the real frontline focus is on

speed — emphasizing measures like calls per hour or availability drive this behavior. Without a doubt, any measure that encourages speed or a reduction in handle time will end up negatively impacting the quality provided to customers.

Call centers can modify performance metrics to encourage efficiency without discouraging the right behaviors. We are a proponent of the phone adherence calculation that tells management whether or not the agent is "in the right place at the right time." More information on driving the wrong type of agent behavior through metrics can be found in other articles available at www.ServiceLevelGroup.com

About the Author:



As a seasoned industry executive, popular speaker and highly regarded consultant, Tim Montgomery has guided thousands of contact center agents and leaders to improve individual and team performance, and exceed operational objectives. Drawing from these interactions and his extensive real-world experience, Tim founded **The Service Level Group** to help contact centers leverage the competitive advantages they have right at their finger tips. During his career, Tim has held a variety of leadership positions – everything from Call Center Manager to Vice

President of Sales and Operations. His hands-on contact center leadership experience was fine-tuned by working for three of the most celebrated service companies in the world – **USAA, The Coca-Cola Company and The SCOOTER Store**. Prior to founding **The Service Level Group**, Tim spent three years as a Consultant, Seminar Leader, and Technology Advisor with **Incoming Calls Management Institute (ICMI)**. Tim's expertise in customer service and contact center operations allows him to lead a wide range of consulting engagements for companies in a variety of industries. His consulting partners have included some of the most recognized companies in America - **AIG, Lifetouch Publishing, Mitsubishi Motors, Premera Blue Cross, Deluxe Printing, Allstate, Kodak, Liberty Mutual, Cinergy, Meguiar's and The Gartner Group**. Tim has written articles and whitepapers on a variety of management, customer service, and call center topics and has been featured in many global publications. Tim earned both his BBA in Accounting and MBA degrees from the University of Texas @ San Antonio. Tim can be reached directly at TimM@ServiceLevelGroup.Com