

# Six reasons why contact center employees disengage



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A key and enduring challenge for call center team leaders revolves around addressing agent disengagement. Mitigating this all too common outcome is tied directly to several key accountability metrics, such as:

- Improving customer service delivery
- Boosting employee and organizational productivity
- Reducing costs

A disengaged agent will damage all these key metrics, and ultimately contribute to costly turnover. Call centers are notorious for having high turnover, and even the layperson can probably venture some guesses as to why.

This article attempts to dig deeper into the nuances of some of the common (and not so common) reasons behind agent disengagement. It is part 1 of a 3-part series about improving call center agent engagement. This piece will cover the problems, the next part will explore characteristics of engaged employees, and the final part will detail solutions found in successful employee engagement improvement programs.

# 01 | Poor onboarding

First impressions matter. An organization's onboarding process is a critical first step in cultivating long-term success for employees. Typically, you only get one shot at getting it right.

Many companies conflate training with onboarding. They are both important, but they are not the same thing. Call centers usually have a highly optimized training process, paired with weak or completely non-existent onboarding.

Onboarding is a carefully curated employee experience that:



Integrates them with the company culture



Shows them the purpose of the work (beyond simply making money)



Explains how to access information



Explains how to interface with management



Makes them feel welcome and part of something important

Leaving these pieces out signals that the main purpose of the job is wages. It can obscure the path of communication between employees and the wider organization. It inadvertently admits that "culture isn't really important here."

## 02 | Impersonal task assignment

In the quest to optimize the quantitative elements of the call center, the qualitative aspects often get left behind (since they're harder to measure). Agents are drilled on the same metrics, and treated as simple resources that execute tasks.

Imagine there is an agent who is utterly brilliant at text messaging, but is nervous and rather curt on the phone. In an organization that doesn't track personal skills data, this person might find their time assigned to the phone based solely on the month's volume. Meanwhile, she could have single handedly done the work of three people in the chat assistant channel—but those slots were already filled (for whatever reason).

Each agent is a unique and interesting human, but this idea tends to find little traction in the game of nuts-and-bolts cost reduction and optimization strategy.

But a mismatch between a person's tasks and their not-so-obvious skills will inevitably contribute to disengagement, which, of course, does impact the bottom line.



## 03 | Poor feedback mechanisms

People tend to learn best when feedback is immediate. This works both ways:



Fast rewards for good behavior



Quick fixes for unwanted behavior

Call centers with outdated methods and/or technologies tend to suffer from deeply delayed (or non-existent) feedback mechanisms. End-of-month numbers roll in and people end up being surprised and disappointed by lackluster stats. Or maybe there are slackers in the organization who've found some loopholes to avoid taking long calls—there are no good systems to counter this quickly, so others learn and adopt the shortcut.

Maybe there's a star performer who consistently goes above and beyond, who should immediately be filling a vacant supervisor role. But it takes too long to find them, and the role gets filled by someone much less competent. Meanwhile, the star performer starts to adjust their input downward as they come to terms with the idea that they're getting paid the same as the slackers.

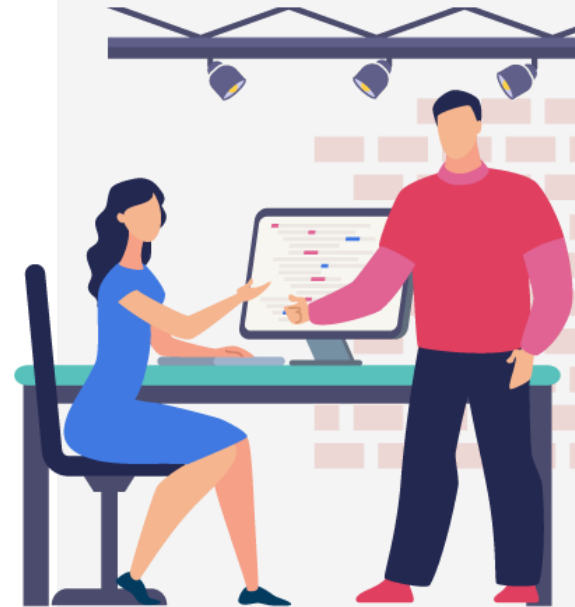
## 04 | Low information fluidity

Practically every person who has ever gotten the “run around” on a customer service call knows the pain of low information fluidity. This is when information about the call is not equally available to all agents—and/or it can't be easily updated.

It's a frustration downward spiral: the end customer is upset because they have to keep re-explaining their issue. It's not the agent's fault, but they have to take the brunt of the negative energy, and keep using tools that cause the situation to keep coming up. This can frustrate the agent, who may now not be as empathetic or kind to the customer.

All this leads to having bad days for the employee, which will only exacerbate any disengagement risk that already exists.

Many call centers use some sort of “account notes” functionality to help mitigate the problem, but there are much more advanced and user friendly technologies out there to further reduce the dreaded run around.



## 05 | Mismatched scheduling

Call center volume variability is almost inevitable. Failing to predict it accurately is not.

Organizations that are reactive instead of proactive will often find themselves with both under and overstaffing issues. Both of these situations are bad for efficiency, and both can lead to employee disengagement.

- Overstaffing leaves people with not enough work to do. Bored employees are usually not your happiest or engaged ones. These risks can be mitigated by having processes in place for people to add value when not doing their primary tasks.
- Understaffing stresses people out with too much work to do. Most people can tolerate the occasional surge in work—but if it happens too often they will start to evaluate whether the stress is worth it. These risks can be mitigated by having ample overtime rewards and recognition.



## 06 | Lack of fun, joy, and purpose

We all want to feel good about what we do. To try to compartmentalize 'work' into an experience exempt from these basic desires is a mistake.

Being a customer service representative may not be the most glamorous or hyped up job on the planet, but that doesn't mean it's impossible to enjoy doing it.

When call centers treat employees as resources to be spent instead of humans, disengagement is rampant.

Leaders do not have to be expert entertainers to help inject a little fun, joy, or purpose:



Friendly competitions or gamified metrics can add fun to the job



Knowing how, when and why to reward, recognize, or complement can be a strong source of joy



Understanding how to communicate and exemplify the company's purpose will help agents understand why the work matters

The more fun, joy and sense of purpose one has, the more resilient to disengagement they become.



# Technology as a driver of employee engagement

Most of us use highly advanced technology every day of our lives—whether we notice it or not. The modern employee is inundated with websites, apps, and smart tech.

If they go to work in a place that feels decades 'behind the curve,' many of the problems discussed above will manifest faster.

On the flip side, the strategic use of Contact Center as a Service technology can not only modernize employee experience in general, but actively help in bolstering engagement itself.

Are you looking for a call center solution for your organization? Learn how a Cloud CX platform can improve employee engagement across the board. Get in touch with GTS today.

