

# Call Center Times

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By Bob Webb, Pipkins, Inc.

**Interaction Management – Knowing Your Customers**  
By Rob McDougall, Upstream Works

**Why Culture Matters in Contact Center Outsourcing**  
By Marilyn Tyfting, Vice President Human Resources, TELUS International

**Nontraditional Employee Benefits Can Help Win the War for Top Talent**  
By Erika Blanchard, Social Media Coordinator, VIPdesk

**Turning Adequate Customer Service into a Memorable Customer Experience**  
By James Koller

**Dealing with Difficult People? Be Prepared With Five Helpful Strategies**  
By Diane Berenbaum, Senior Vice President, Communico Ltd.

**Creating a Successful Hispanic Customer Win-Back Program**  
By Jim Iyob, Vice President Global Development, Etech Global Services

**How to Integrate Social Media, the Newest Customer Contact Channel, into Your Quality Monitoring Program**  
By Envision and Connie Smith, Envision Consultant and President of SpotOn Enterprises

**Employment Opportunity: Ralph Lauren.com Hiring Seasonal Customer Service Representative - Full Time and Part Time**  
Reach Decision Makers at Call Centers – Today!

**Leading Providers of Call Center Products and Services – A Call Center Times' Guide**

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**Customer Relationship Management - Empower Your Response, Empower Your Customers**  
By Dustin Biddle, Implementation Consultant - Astute Solutions



# HERE ARE THE LOGOS OF THE LEADING PROVIDERS OF CALL CENTER PRODUCTS AND SERVICES...CLICK ON LOGO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH COMPANY!





# RANTS & RAVES!

## Randomly Timed Musings

### Which Is It ... Supervisor or Super Agent?

By Kathleen M. Peterson  
Chief Vision Officer, PowerHouse Consulting, Inc.

Contact Center Supervisors are the first tier of management at the front line of the Customer Experience. *But are they REALLY Supervisors or simply Super Agents?* Webster defines Supervisor as “one who is in charge of a particular department or unit.” *Are your Supervisors really “in charge?”*

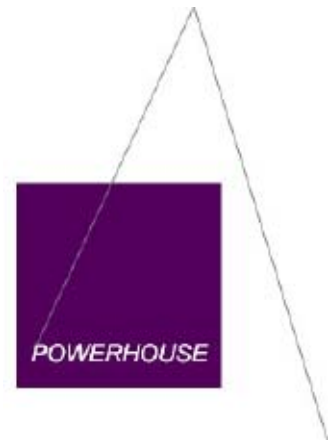
My experience lately has been to see the role of Supervisor weakened to the point of no longer fitting the “in charge” definition. Too many operations have Super Agents rather than effective and empowered Supervisors. For example, the Supervisor may get on the phone or handle chat/email when the Contact Center gets busy. When I pose this question to groups: “*Should Supervisors take calls or handle contacts?*” the answers are often impassioned with responses like, “Agents like to see their Supervisors pitch in to handle customer contacts.”

While this may be true, it reflects an incomplete thought with potentially unintended consequences. The consequence here is that if Supervisors handle contacts to manage the queue ... who handles escalations, requests for assistance, etc.? Questions like this must be addressed before a decision is made to “jump on the phone.” As well, the motivation must be evaluated. Assuming the Supervisor was promoted from within they may actually be retreating to a safe comfort level. Handling customers is often “easier” than handling employees! Supervisors may in

fact take calls in some cases; however they do so as part of an informed and deliberate plan, one that considers the unintended consequences. A decision based on evaluation of the *entire situation* is how a true Supervisor who is “in charge” responds. On the other hand, Super Agents retreat to their comfort zone, or even worse, bank on enjoying some “heroic” rewards from the rank and file.

Supervisors are often the “go to” person to detangle messy service situations. They conduct the forensic analysis required to resolve customer issues when systems and processes are convoluted, poorly documented, and full of “exceptions.” It is within these situations that the Supervisor is transformed into what is really a Super Agent. They typically have been with the company long enough to have developed a kind of “industrial wisdom.” They know the work-a-rounds (etc.) necessary to search inside “messy” processes and procedures. Of course, this generally falls into the Supervisory category of “escalation” management. But if your Supervisors are spending hours every day of every week in detangling tasks ... well, they may be more aptly defined as Super Agents. Supervisors and other Management really ought to be thinking about process improvement rather than just working within the Customer Service labyrinth.

Supervisors in the most basic of terms are the parties responsible for the performance of their “teams.” Granted, this takes on many forms. For some, it is simply that the Supervisor role has “administrative” duties for a group of staff. This may include activities such as approving time off; signing off on time cards;



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and making sure everyone is showing up on time, is dressed properly, and is up to date on the most recent memos. In this design, the Supervisor does not often sit/meet with their team or build performance plans with team members. *They do paperwork, not development work.* This too is more Super Agent than Supervisor.

The role of Supervisor must be clearly defined in order to be implemented successfully. As well, Supervisor training and development is a necessity. Contact Center Supervisors are often promoted from within, have no management experience, and are assigned large numbers of staff ... often 14 to 20. (This is a rather daunting number for a first time leader). The organizations with the best models are those in which the Supervisor has a group of direct reports (no greater than 12), a position description that is very clear on tasks and activities, and a training program that is ongoing and addresses all aspects of the job. Supervisors need to understand not only the core business, the transactions, the interactions, the brand etc., but also Contact Center Management and Coaching. Both disciplines require specific, unique, and continued training.

Don't let your Contact Center Supervisors be little more than Super Agents. Document desired tasks and skills and determine the necessary training objectives that bring the best and brightest back to work every day. The smarter the person, the more likely they recognize and appreciate the support needed versus the support provided. If the Supervisor position is not supported by clearly defined responsibilities and organizational respect, it is likely

your best and brightest may be looking elsewhere for advancement and opportunity.

Just for the record, there is nothing wrong with Super Agents ... just don't call them Supervisors.

*(#51, Which Is It ... Supervisor or Super Agent?  
September 2011)*

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\*Highlights indicate added and/or corrected data.

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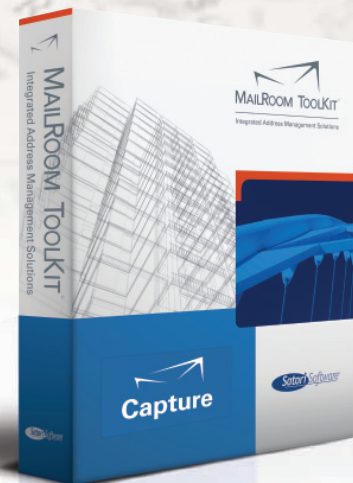
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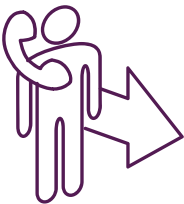


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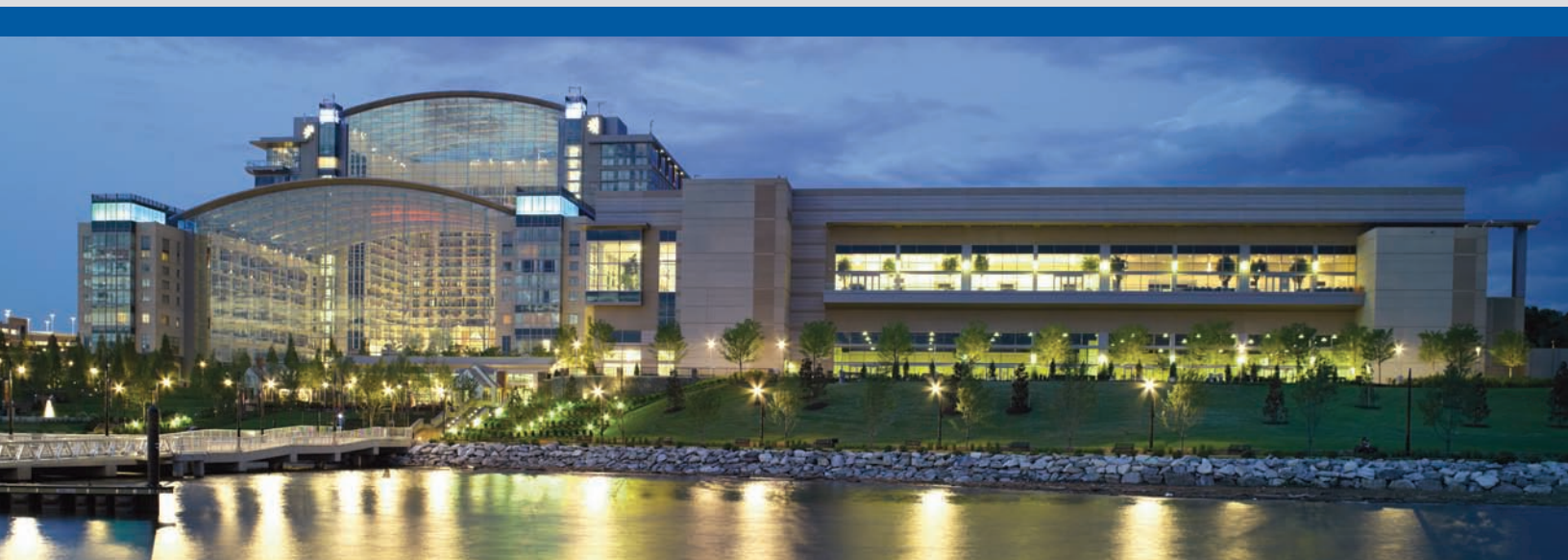
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# Call Center Times

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