What's Hot? Contact Center Trends that Will Impact your Organization in 2007
By Connie Smith

I've just completed an 18 city roundtable tour bringing together contact center professionals to network and discuss best practices. I thought I'd share six top trends that may change the way contact centers conduct business in 2007.

Centralized Quality Teams

A good number of contact centers have made the move to a centralized quality team to evaluate and coach agent performance. There are several drivers for this shift in responsibility. First, supervisors do not have enough dedicated hours allocated to complete evaluations and coach on a consistent basis. Second, if the supervisor is incentivized by the performance of his/her team, there is an obvious conflict. Third, a centralized team allows for greater consistency in evaluating. Quality is an important piece of the performance puzzle but it is only one piece.

Handing off this day to day responsibility allows supervisors to focus on the overall performance of the agent and gives them the time they need to meet on a frequent basis to discuss skill gaps and trends.

Analytics

There has been much talk about analytics over the past year. Put simply, analytics is about the information, knowledge and action collected from raw data. It turns reactive organizations into proactive ones by answering questions like: "What makes our customers purchase?" "Why do our customers leave us to go to a competitor?" "What are our customers' expectations and how can we meet or exceed them?" While analytic adoption rates are still low, many centers now recognize that analytics is key to increased performance, customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention. We will no dobt hear much

more about this trend in 2007.

VoIP

"By 2009, there will be no sales of traditional phone systems," quotes Jeffrey Snyder, Manager of Enterprise Communications, Gartner. While that may be a bold statement reports show that VoIP sales are overtaking traditional circuit-based sales. Security concerns, questions about reliability and quality of service are no longer worries and VoIP adoption rates are skyrocketing. VoIP has significant advantages for multi-site organizations including the ability to route interactions throughout the network regardless of location. Other returns include a reduction in hardware, network administration and per minute telephone costs. For most companies it is not a question as to "if" they will move to a VoIP platform, it's a matter of how soon.

Full-Time

Recording

In the past, only centers with regulatory or compliance requirements purchased full-time recording while others utilized selective recordings to meet their quality needs. Today it is a much different environment. Contact centers are moving to full-time recording because it is no longer cost prohibitive. Storage space is cheap and the need for trending and collecting customer intelligence has become increasingly important. Full-time recording allows enterprises to analyze interactions, take action and to review the changes to ensure they satisfy customers over and over again.

Voice of the Customer (VOC)

Call recordings are no longer used just to evaluate agent skills. The entire enterprise is getting in on the act by

CALL CENTERTIMES tin#75-2915747
P. O. Box 118451, Carrollton, TX 75011-8451
Bus. 972-395-3225   Fax 972-395-9205

Date:_____

Invoice #: 20617

Rate Guide Sign Up Form/Invoice

- Resource Directory/Call Center's Buyer's Guide: (through 12/07)
- Corporate Logo Promotion (Website & Monthly Newsletter): (through 12/07)
- Monthly Newsletter Classifieds Advertisement: (through 12/07)
- Website Classifieds Advertisement: (through 12/07)

Total Amount Due - $1,200

Return by fax to (972) 395-9205. Please note that all transactions are final. There will be no refunds.

COMPANY NAME / Contact/ Address/ Telephone/ Fax/ Email: _____

_____

_____

For your convenience, we accept MasterCard, Visa and American Express credit cards.

Please indicate your method of payment:

_____ MasterCard   _____ Visa   _____ American Express   _____ Company Check

_____   _____
Credit Card Number   Expiration Date

_____
Name as appears on Credit Card (Print Please)

_____
Authorized Signature

Remit To:
Call Center Times
P. O. Box 118451
Carrollton, TX 75011-8451
Fax (972) 395-9205

listening to calls to understand how their products, services and processes are meeting customer needs. If you think about it, there is a lot of valuable information locked inside these calls. All you need to do is listen to a couple random calls to pick up dissatisfaction about a company policy, misunderstanding about a self service feature on your website or the customer telling you about a great promotion your biggest competitor is running. Are you tuning into the voice of your customers? You better be because chances are, your competitors are doing just that.

Integrated Suite Solutions

Single administration, lower cost of ownership and ease of use are all reasons why companies are taking a closer look at integrated suite solutions. In the past the mentality was "best of breed to succeed" but that is quickly changing. Companies have found that linking together separate technologies is costly, cumbersome and utilizes far too much resource. Technology vendors have jumped on the bandwagon to support this trend by either

developing integrated suite solutions or purchasing other technologies to work towards an integrated suite offering.

We are planning another roundtable tour in 2007 and we would love to have you join us. To find out if we will be in a city near you go to http://www.envisioninc.com/events.

Speaker Biography

Connie Smith has been involved in the contact center industry in various roles for more than 20 years. She has built operations and fulfillment contact centers from the ground up including multi-site, retail and wholesale, reengineered multiple site centers and built one of the first true multi-channel contact centers in 1998 including integrated telephone, e-mail, Web chat and callback technologies.

She leveraged her cumulative experience with all aspects of managing contact centers and became a consultant, helping more than 30 world-class contact centers with building, relocation, mergers, assessments, vendor selection, workforce

management, metrics, telephone systems, CRM and CTI applications, customer service skill development, training initiatives and quality programs.

Today, she is the Chief Evangelist for Envision (formally Click2Coach), and her passion is to educate the industry on the importance of workforce management, quality monitoring, coaching, eLearning, performance optimization, business intelligence and voice analytics.

Speaker Contact Information
Name: Connie Smith
Title: Chief Evangelist
Company: Envision
Phone: 206. 225.0800 ext. 257
Fax: 206.225.0801
E-mail: connie.smith@envisioninc.com

Company Information
Envision Telephony, Inc. is a global, award-winning provider of software and services that improves performance from the contact center to the enterprise. The company's flexible, integrated solutions enable Global 2000 customers to consistently deliver legendary

customer experiences by improving agent effectiveness, contact center and enterprise performance.

Envision's software includes business intelligence, speech analytics, workforce management and Click2Coach® (Envision Quality Monitoring and Envision eLearning). Learn more: www.envisioninc.com or call 206.225.0800 ext. 500.

###

A Random Act of "MAGIC" Can Do a World of Good
By Diane Berenbaum

"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Wherever there is another human being, there is an opportunity for selfless service—the kind of service that goes beyond the ordinary or just what's expected. It's a helpful gesture that can put a

smile on someone's face and leave him with a newfound understanding of what great service is all about.

Consider taking a fresh approach in 2007 and helping the world become a better place, simply by sharing the best of who you are. We call this kind of selfless service, MAGIC, which stands for Make A Great Impression on the Customer. Random acts of MAGIC can be very simple; even small steps can make a big impact on someone's day and, perhaps, their perception of the world. When you choose to serve another in an unexpected way, you may find that it will not only enrich the experience of the receiver, but it will enrich your life as well.

I'd like to share two stories where people chose to do the unexpected to help someone else. I hope these stories open your minds, and your hearts, and encourage you to practice Random Acts of MAGIC.

Extra Help During the Holidays

One of our friends, Meg Reilly, shared her very memorable experience with Florence of EZ Book Clips who went "above and beyond" during the busiest time of year.

"During the holiday season, I came across these inexpensive but cool book clips while searching on the Internet. They came in many different colors, so I decided to order some as stocking stuffers for my family. Like me, many of them enjoy reading hands-free while on an exercise machine, cooking, working on a project, etc. So I shelled out $27.90 for six items. The price included shipping and I got to pick any six colors I liked—pretty good deal, I thought.

"I received an immediate e-mail response acknowledging my payment. A busy week went by and I hadn't given it another thought until I received a second e-mail from the vendor. Here's what it said:

Hello Megan:

Thank you for your order. We shipped it last week, but it just came back today because the address label came off in the mail. I could tell it was yours by your specific color choices. So we will mail your order out again tomorrow. You'll have your book clips by the end of next week. I apologize for the delay, but am glad I was able to sort out the orders and find that it was yours that was returned. I'm packing in an extra book clip for you as an apology for the delay.

Best regards,
Florence

"I thought, 'Wow! That's MAGIC!' Florence could have stuffed that ripped address label back into another bag and just shipped off those book clips without so much as a word to me. I would never have known the difference. But she chose to inform me of the delay (of which I was unaware), figure out that it was my order from my color choices, repack it, apologize, and throw in a free clip! Who knew that $27.90 could buy such excellent customer service!"

A Good Deed for a Stranger

Our associate, Steve Loso, decided to practice a Random Act of MAGIC when he found a lost item near our office. Here is his story.

"I was crossing the street one day when I found a large, black binder in the middle of the road. I asked my associate, Lilli, if we had any visitors to our office that morning who might have dropped a binder. She said no, but offered to try to find out who the appointment book belonged to.

"Much to my surprise, she was able to track down the owner of the book. When I called him, he was thrilled that someone had found it. He told me that the book had been stolen out of his car and evidently discarded on the road right in front of our office.

"He offered to pay to have it shipped back, but once I learned that he lived in the same town as me, I offered to return the book to him that evening. He said he would be out that night and suggested it would be too much trouble for me to return the book the next morning. I assured him it would be my pleasure, and we arranged a time for me to deliver it to him the next day.

"He was totally overwhelmed with the effort that had been made for a total stranger. I was happy to see the look of relief on his face and felt great that I helped someone in need."

Make a Commitment to Practice Random Acts of MAGIC

These are just a couple of examples of people taking the time and caring enough to do something

extra for someone else. Perhaps these stories triggered one of your own pleasant memories, or sparked your interest in being more proactive yourself. Let the best of your humanity shine. Open your eyes for these opportunities, act when the spirit moves you, and make a commitment to do a random act of MAGIC for someone else—every month, every week, or every day.

Share Your Stories and Inspire Others

As George Eliot said, *"Our deeds determine us as much as we determine our deeds."* So, join us in bringing more selfless service to this world and help us spread the word!

Send me your stories and experiences—just email me, Diane Berenbaum, at diane.berenbaum@communicoltd.com or call at 203-226-7117, extension 125. And, encourage others you know to practice random acts of MAGIC too. I look forward to hearing from you.

Diane Berenbaum is Senior Vice President of Communico Ltd., a customer service training and consulting company based in Westport, CT (www.communicotld.com). She is a co-author of the book, *How to Talk to Customers,* which will be published by Jossey-Bass in April 2007.

When the Phones Go Dead
Disaster Recovery for Call Centers

Editor's note: Tim Ruff is the president of Telecom Recovery, a Utah-based telecom disaster recovery company, who begins a three part conversation on the topic of what call centers can do to best prepare for and recover from phone outages. This is part one of the series.

A telecom outage is typically more damaging to a call center than to any other type of business. For most businesses the 'disaster' in 'disaster recovery' refers to earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes. In a call center, any time the phones go down is a disaster.

Disaster recovery planning for a call center is comprised primarily of effectively handling telecom outages of any kind or duration, whether caused by a hurricane, power outage, equipment or carrier failure, or a careless backhoe operator working nearby. Since telecom outages are far more common that natural disasters, a call center's disaster recovery plan must be faster, more flexible and more telecom-focused than typical disaster recovery plans. The plan must also be cost-effective or it may never see the light of day.

Before a telecom recovery plan can be implemented there must be an understanding of the potential threats to telecommunications and the available recovery options from those threats. Below is a list of some telecom vulnerabilities that call centers face that should be prepared for. (Natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes are not listed because they're not considered direct threats, but they can certainly cause power outages, carrier outages, and transportation obstacles, which are direct threats.)

Telecom Vulnerabilities for Call Centers

Power outage
Cable cut / backhoe fade
Equipment/software failure
Local Telco outage
Long distance carrier outage
Technician mistake
Transportation problems (highway, evacuations, pandemic)
Facility problems (fire, flood, accidents)

Since there is no way to predict which kind of disaster or outage will occur—or which facilities, networks or devices might be available to aid in the recovery—it's impossible to know in advance which recovery options will be best. Since every call center depends on reliable telecom service, it's prudent to cover as many bases as possible by implementing as many of the available options as financially feasible.

Below are lists of the options currently available to call centers to help recover from

telecom outages. These lists—one for Inbound Call Centers and one for Outbound Call Centers—are by no means exhaustive, but they serve as a good starting point for implementing a telecom recovery plan. It's also important to understand that no plan, even if it included every available option, will offer a 100% guaranteed recovery; there will always be vulnerabilities. A good plan simply improves your odds of recovery.

Recovery Options: Inbound Call Centers (in order of preference)

Same phone system, multiple carriers (yes, this is possible with toll-free numbers)
Same phone system, satellite backup of local loop
Divert calls to sister location (only if agents are capable and capacity is sufficient)
Using a system similar to Telecom Recovery's, distribute calls to agents via alternate paths and devices such as cell phones, VoIP phones, alternate land lines, hand-held satellite phones, etc. (this option allows agents to be located anywhere, including at the same building or at home)
Backup phone system
Divert calls to answering service
Divert calls to voice mail
Divert calls to emergency message

Recovery Options: Outbound Call Centers (in order of preference)

Same phone system, multiple carriers
Cell Phones
Same building, VoIP phones (through internet)
Same building, satellite backup of local loop
Backup phone system
Hand-held satellite phones

The Foundation for Telecom Disaster Recovery: Multiple Carriers

The starting point for disaster recovery for every call center, whether inbound or out, is to have multiple carriers connected to the same switch at the same building with the same agents. Of course, having multiple carriers doesn't help if there's no power, the switch has failed, the building has a problem, or the agents can't get to work, but it is a critical tool that can allow a call center to quickly and inexpensively recover from some of the most common sources of outages: carrier outages and cable cuts.

Moving traffic from 'down' carriers to 'up' ones can also be quite seamless to callers and agents for both outbound and inbound call centers, if done with thoughtful preparation and precise execution. For outbound call centers, switching between carriers is relatively easy and controlled on-premise in the switch. For inbound call centers, moving traffic between carriers can be a bit trickier.

Toll-Free Service Over Multiple Carriers

With toll-free numbers, moving traffic between long distance (LD) carriers over the same toll-free number requires three things:

The willingness of your RespOrg—who may or may not be your carrier—to split your traffic among multiple LD carriers, either full-time or in an emergency;

The willingness of your LD carriers to establish your toll-free numbers in their networks and allow traffic either full-time or in an emergency, even when those carriers may not be the RespOrg of the toll-free numbers;

The availability and willingness of your RespOrg to promptly make changes whenever you may need them, around the clock, 365 days a year.

There are some long distance carriers that are willing to do all three of these items, and there are third-party RespOrgs who make a business out of doing just these three things. It's also possible for any entity to become a RespOrg and have direct control over the SMS routing of its own toll-free numbers, though this does require some up-

front costs as well as strict compliance with the SMS RespOrg guidelines for servicing toll-free numbers, which can be onerous.

Satellite backup of the Local Loop

Satellite backup of the local loop is a promising new capability, and though up-front equipment costs can run into the thousands of dollars, and per-minute usage can be expensive, it has several distinct disaster recovery advantages that other options cannot match.

For starters, a backup satellite loop can deliver PRI service and connect directly to any existing PRI T1 card. So switching from your 'down' local carrier's PRI circuit to the satellite backup can be as easy as dialing a special sequence of numbers from any extension on the system, or unplugging the cable from one jack and plugging it into the other. Delivering PRI signaling means that agents can sit at their same desks and use the same phones and phone system they were before the outage, taking

inbound calls and making outbound calls, even if an army of backhoes has torn every local loop in sight and the phone system is running on generator power. Just as important, it also means that callers will have the desired call experience, the one already programmed in the switch, with all the menus, greetings, directories, ACDs and other features and capabilities that streamline call processing. POTS lines are even easier.

In Parts 2 and 3 of this series we'll continue the look at all available telecom recovery options for call centers, their respective strengths and weaknesses, and explore some new technologies that enable multiple recovery options to be implemented cost-effectively even for small call centers. In the meantime, if you would like the full article sent to you or have specific questions about disaster recovery for your call center, please contact Telecom Recovery's Director of Marketing, Mark Hood at mhood@telecomrecovery.

com or 512-330-0309.

###

Winning Coaching Tips

By Anne Nickerson, Principal, Call Center Coach, LLC

Coaching often takes a backseat to the other responsibilities on a busy customer service manager's plate. But coaching is essential if you want to transform your customer care center into an environment that provides "knock your socks off" service. Use this strategy to coach your reps and develop their service skills:

Identify the critical behaviors your customers expect.

Define customer expectations and translate them into performance standards. Describe what these standards look and sound like during a telephone interaction. Finally, communicate them constantly and consistently to your representatives. For example, if "having confidence in the accuracy of the answer" is most important to your

customers, what can a rep say or do to meet this expectation? Here are some of the behaviors reps would need to display:

Listening carefully for the customer's core issue

Taking steps to resolve the problem or answer the question

Following up with the customer

You would need to instill these behaviors in your reps, and then coach them to make sure behaviors in every interaction with their customers.

Provide appropriate feedback.

Giving appropriate feedback is a skill that takes continuous practice. A good rule is to catch a representative responding appropriately to a customer, and then point to exactly what the rep said or did and the impact it had on the customer's satisfaction. State the benefits for the customer and representative.

For example, "Pat, when you said to the customer that you would make sure the account would

be reinstated and you offered a discount on this month's rates, you recovered from our mistake, met the needs of the customer, and regained his confidence in us."

If you need to give more constructive criticism, take this approach:

∑ Specifically point to exactly what was said or done, what should be continued and what should be done differently.

∑ Model what the correct behavior sounds and looks like.

∑ Describe the impact the proper behavior will have on the customer and the representative.

For example, you might say, "Pat, when you were looking up the account information and trying to solve the problem, there was more than three minutes of silence. Instead of ignoring the customer during this time, keep the customer informed about you're doing, ask permission for the customer to wait, or ask if the customer would like you to call him or her back. The customer will also appreciate being informed, be more willing to wait, and have more confidence in the information he or she receives from you."

Coach 50 to 75 percent of the time on the job.

Listen to representatives side by side and be available on the floor more than half of your working day. As you spend more time on the floor, you will become better acquainted with the performance issues that need your attention, and you will know exactly which reps require the most coaching support.

4. **Focus on one change at a time.**

Begin with an end in mind. As you listen to a call, you will notice several points that could be improved in the call. You may be tempted to run down the list and share all the ideas for improvement. However, the reality is that you can only change one behavior at a time.

Select the key behavior that will make the most difference to the customer, and focus on that first. Build from one behavior to the other during subsequent coaching sessions, and watch as reps take pride in developing their skills.

Follow up.

Coaching is not a one-time event. Follow up with reps within two days, and let them know that you've noticed the behavior change they've made since you last met with them. For example, "On the call yesterday, we were talking about working on having a confident voice at the beginning of the call. I listened to your last five calls this morning, and you aced them every time! Keep up the great voice tone!"

6. Catch Them Doing It Right!

We are so busy that we easily forget to praise and celebrate the growth of those we're coaching. It is a natural tendency to focus on only those things that are going wrong. When CSRs begin to realize you're serious about being supportive and willing to help them become successful, they no longer become afraid of feedback, and often begin requesting and welcoming it.

One of the ways to create this is to balance giving as much praise as you do changes. Watch your temptation to say "but," which lessons the impact of your catching them doing it right! For example, you're sitting side by side with the CSR, double jacked into their call. They do a fantastic job of taking initiative to wow this customer. When they hang up, put the phone on auxiliary, and let them know then and

7. Model and Suggest Options and Examples

Begin with the end in mind. When we're learning a new behavior, it helps to hear a demonstration of what it might sound like. For example, in the above example, you could model saying "What is the problem" using a strong and confident voice, and then allow the learner to practice along with you. Another option is to record different ways of saying phrases, and have learner identify those that are appropriate. Have CSRs listen to their own taped voices so they can fine

tune their recognition of the differences. Giving explicit information and examples of how the expected behavior might sound increases the chances of real change.

8. State Benefits and Results

For any of us to change behavior, there has to be some motivation to do so. When you give feedback, state the benefits to the customer as well as for the CSR, for example: "When customers feel they have a confident voice on the other end of the hone, they are more likely to believe the answer you give and trust your competence;" or, "When you have a strong start to a phone call, it is easier for you to take control of the rest of the call."

Coaching Tips are from Anne Nickerson, Principal of Call Center Coach. Contact her at info@callcentercoach.com for additional tips, or your own personal telephone coaching session.

Preventing Burnout and Reducing Agent Turnover

We are all faced with the critical goal of keeping our top performers motivated and supported as well as growing all staff to become top performers. Here are some tips:

1. Public Praise and Recognition

There is nothing better than to receive affirmation for a job well done.
Even those of us who don't like to call attention to ourselves beam inside when our efforts are recognized. As a call center manager you can take the opportunity to share "wins" by posting improvement results, throwing a party or giving out awards. One center made available a pad of paper "hands" that all members of the center were encouraged to use when someone gave a helping hand. It was quite a colorful floor with hands covering cubicle walls.

2. Opportunity to Show Off a Winning Call or Winning Phrase

Ask your representatives and quality coaches to choose a "call of the week" by selecting a customer interaction that was handled exceptionally well. You can hold a contest for different themes—for example, "wowing a difficult to please customer", "went above and beyond the call of duty", "determined a great solution for a difficult to solve problem."

You can also select calls that met or exceeded standards and expectations. For example, "used great probing questions to determine core issue", "gave an clear explanation in user friendly terms."

One company actually puts the recorded calls on a voice mail system for a week so that reps can dial in and "hear" what a great call sounds like. What a great way for refresher training!

3. Shared Customer Feedback: You've Made a Difference

What a great sense of accomplishment and pride comes when a letter is received from a customer telling about how helpful you have been! If you haven't made those letters public, find a space now to do so. And change them often. One call center took each letter and made in poster size with a goal to create a "wall of fame" using customer letters. Another call center invited their customers to a roundtable discussion and representatives sat in to hear what a difference they had made. Photos were taken and decorated the call center walls to remind them of the "face behind the call."

4. Earned Extra Paid Time Off

When we've asked representatives what would motivate them, they often say that they would prefer an offer of a few hours of paid time off that doesn't get counted against vacation time. This can be accomplished by working your forecasted schedule so that they can come in later, or leave earlier. For less than $50, you can both win and have a more willing employee go the

extra mile when you need them.

5. Available Re-Training and Personal Development

With the stress of today's call center, many managers are finding that making classes available for representatives for both their personal and professional development is often the one factor that keeps them dedicated to their job. Representatives want to remain challenged and learn new skills as they work. Look into offering computer software training, new product training or building the skills required to handle different types of calls. Some call centers are offering stress and time management courses, parenting classes, and even helping spouses live through third shift schedules. Employees who feel taken care of will take care of your customers!

Coaching Tips are from Anne Nickerson, Principal of Call Center Coach. Contact her at info@callcentercoach.co m for additional tips, or your own personal telephone coaching session.

Ray Hansell has been involved in the Teleservices and Direct Marketing Industry for over 25 years. He was the CEO of RMH Teleservices, an international call center operation that he co-founded with his partner MarySue Lucci in the mid 1980's and took public in 1996. During this same period, he also performed consulting services for dozens of Fortune 500 companies regarding their in house call center operations.

Currently, he is the co-founder of MaraStar Communications, a direct marketing software company founded in 2000. MaraStar produces animated training and communications products that are used in training and motivating employees, particularly in the call center industry.

###

Meet & Greet vs. Trick or Treat:

How Does Your Company Orient New Employees?

By Ray Hansell

Which way is your employee orientation program oriented? When company executives take the time to "meet and greet" new employees, walking them through the basic processes and logistics of their job environment, as well as introducing new employees to their co-workers, there is a good chance that the new employee will feel great about their decision to join the company and get off to a great start.

In sharp contrast, when employees begin their first days of employment in a random fashion, uncovering their new job requirements on their own as they wander about the company, they are far more likely to get off to a shaky start, leading to a state of confusion and anxiety from the start.

I refer to this approach as "Trick or Treat" because it resembles the Halloween activity that we are all familiar with, where the new employee in their unfamiliar 'costume' searches from department to department for the friendly 'treat' of a warm

welcome, but often is 'tricked' up by the ambivalent reception he or she actually receives.

In the absence of a formal structured orientation process, new employee introductions are left to chance and are hence more likely to create a 'scary' impression to the new employee.

In larger employee-intense environments, it is particularly important for the relationship between management and staff to establish solid ground from the outset, since so much depends on teamwork and the requisite interworking relationships. When left to chance, the problems emanating from these poor beginnings can snowball to the entire employee population.

Unfortunately, as we have seen from our experience in consulting with dozens of midsize to larger companies, this is not always the way company executives approach orienting employees to their company. Rather than paying more attention to this important step, it appears that is all too

often given short shrift.

It seems that many executives feel the job is done once the new employee paperwork is complete. Since corporate trainers may not actually begin to train new personnel immediately, there is frequently a gap lasting between days, weeks, sometimes even months while the new employee is left to fend for themselves in getting started. During this time, many employees will simply give up and quit their jobs.

Often, to deal with these potential problems, many companies will use a fragmented approach to orientation, taking the time to make sure employees have the necessary tools to do the job, e.g. computer, workstation, etc. and related processes necessary to start work, but then stop short of completing the orientation. In effect, they do the hard stuff but not the softer stuff. Unfortunately, these softer areas are very important and can make a real difference to the new employee who is just getting underway.

Typical softer areas include steps like employee introductions to other employees, an overview of the company and general welcoming interventions to get the employee off to a good start.

One technique many companies use to communicate new hires to the general population is to post new employee information on company bulletin boards, including a picture of the new employee together with their position and relevant personal data; e.g. acceptable nicknames, hobbies, interests, etc. By taking these steps, the new employees are more easily recognizable by the existing employee population.

As a result of our experiences, we at MaraStar Communications have created an innovative way to deal with these issues. We offer "Welcome Aboard" messages, which can be emailed to all relevant co-workers; see the attached animated message, which is entirely customizable for each employee [(click](#) [here to see animation)](#). These animated messages can be sent out to a group of e-mail addresses or posted to a common Intranet site for general viewing. The static image can also be printed and subsequently posted to company bulletin boards, as well.

After some basic information on new employees is communicated, the face to face introductions to co-workers should commence. Having already communicated basic new employee information is a way to facilitate these introductions, making for a smoother connection.

All too often, these fundamental steps are skipped and the employees who wind up staying are the ones who have survived the somewhat abrupt treatment by management and co-workers.

In addition to the high cost of turnover and substantial incurred hiring cost, probably the biggest impact to the company is the low morale caused by workers with an "attitude lacking gratitude." When employees feel that they are not being treated with proper respect, they frequently begin to demonstrate their displeasure in less than acceptable performances at work. These performances can infect other existing employees and consequently impact the performances of other employees, subsequently affecting the morale of the group as well as the satisfaction of the customers who are served by these employees.

So, what steps can employers take to avoid these costly missteps? Well, let's review a short list of the best orientation practices from our experience in both operating a dozen call centers and in consulting to dozens of others.

For larger populations with dozens or more new hires per week, we recommend more formal processes consisting of some or all of the following steps:

Video orientation presenting an overview of the company, supported by material for the new hire to read

to get a good general picture of the company landscape
Formal process of visually posting new hires to the company Intranet, supported by pictures of the new employees posted to company billboards
Company newsletter insertions including new hires with pictures and appropriate anecdotal information about the new employees
Animated messages, like the one provided in the MaraStar Communications link above, sent to the general population or posted to the Intranet, to introduce new personnel

A comprehensive orientation agenda for the first week of employment, including introducing the new employee to their coworkers

For smaller, less frequent hiring groups I recommend less formal but structured steps like these:

Brief conference room PowerPoint orientation program presented by

Management or Human Resources staff to accomplish the basic overview
Bulletin Board postings accompanied by animated email messages like the one from MaraStar Communications, provided in the link above
Physical introduction of new employees at company meeting or via face to face meeting with the new co-workers

Simple steps like these, when done in a thoughtful and considerate fashion, are a good way to establish a trusting relationship from the get go.

Once these steps are taken on the job, follow-up by a mentor/co-worker can help facilitate the requisite job processes necessary for workers to get underway.

Having established a good starting point during the orientation period makes it much easier to build the knowledge and skills via formal and informal training interventions that enable the

employee to begin making a contribution to the company.

Taking the time to start off in the right direction sets the correct course from the start. Even a slight variation on the correct course can mean a huge difference in the employee's journey down the road. So take the time to set the course right from the start, avoiding all the tricks, and you're likely to be treated by an enthusiastic employee ready to make their mark and demonstrate their appreciation for the positive reception they have received.

START OFF THE NEW YEAR WITH IMPROVED AGENT ADHERENCE

By: Bob Webb

Do you understand the impact that agent adherence can have on your bottom line? Consider this: if 2% of agents are not at their assigned positions, the percentage of calls answered within the center's performance

objective typically will drop by 10%? And, if 10% of agents are out of adherence, one-half of the center's incoming calls will likely not be answered within the targeted time frame. A reduction in workforce caused by agents' non-adherence to their schedules can result in abandoned calls, irate customers, lost sales, and an overall inability to meet service level agreements. This can cause lasting damage to businesses when customers are driven to competitors. Wasted labor expense and associated problems are also related to the same issues.

Call center supervisors need preventative strategies for adherence violations. If only a few agents are out of compliance, overall performance probably will not be compromised. But if too many agents are out of adherence for too long, the results can be catastrophic. Monitoring adherence on a real-time basis can identify the problem early enough to permit corrective action to be taken before the problem becomes a supervisory

nightmare.

Real-time adherence tools available with many of today's workforce scheduling applications can help by automatically alerting managers when agents are out of compliance. This makes it possible to flag minor lapses before they turn into major crises. One excellent option is the use of pop-up messages sent to agents' computer screens when they are out of compliance for a certain period of time, as determined by the supervisor. This feature can be used to notify agents when they are logged into the wrong queue, not logged on at all, and in other situations that can affect overall operations. Supervisors can view adherence status at any time in a special window that is refreshed every 30 seconds or on the timetable of the user's choice. When an agent's "state" does not match the schedule, the system typically spotlights the discrepancy by a visual device such as color-coding. The more comprehensive systems arm supervisors with important additional

information by indicating the nature of the violation (e.g. late start, improper activity, logged out early) as well as the agent's current state (e.g. ACD inbound, logged off, after-call work) and the duration of the problem.

In addition to offering real-time insight into what agents are doing, call centers can set adherence targets that define the amount of time an individual agent should be engaged in scheduled activities on a weekly or monthly basis. These targets are then used in reports that track each agent's performance over time to aid in personnel evaluations and ongoing quality-of-service efforts.

Try implementing these practical steps to enhance the use of real-time adherence tools:

Determine the Root Cause

Sometimes numbers are misleading. An agent who appears to have fallen below the center's adherence targets in a given week or month may actually be a victim of someone's failure to record exceptions in the

schedule. Perhaps a supervisor neglected to log an illness-related absence, a switch to a lunch schedule, or a reassignment from phone duty to email duty. Perhaps call volume was twice what was expected, causing planned meetings to be cancelled.

Set Realistic Adherence Goals

For most call centers, adherence goals should be in the 90% to 95% range —- that is, individual agents should be engaged in scheduled activities 90 to 95% of the time over the course of a week or a month. This provides some latitude for minor scheduling oversights, unforeseen developments, and necessities like bathroom breaks. Of course, due allowance needs to be made for this when calculating agent numbers.

Build Grace Periods into the System

Adherence systems should include grace periods that must be observed before the agent is deemed to be out of compliance. It is impractical as well as

oppressive to penalize an agent for returning to his or her desk at 2:02 instead of 2:00, even in the busiest and strictest call center environments. Being too rigid will affect morale and, again, customer service.

Ideally, the system should allow different thresholds to be established for different activities. A late start at the beginning of a shift or a late return from lunch may have a grace period of 2 minutes, for example, while a late lunch start may have a grace period of 5 minutes. These policies are necessary to accommodate the realities of call center work, where an agent scheduled to go on break at 10 am may be delayed by a call received at 9:59.

At the end of the day, the goal of real-time adherence monitoring is simply to reduce unproductive time by keeping agents in their seats when they're supposed to be. The more agents a center has, the more can go wrong, and the greater return can be reaped from a real-time

adherence system. The value of a schedule depends entirely on how well agents follow it. Inadvertent and even deliberate violations are inevitable. The best defense is a good offense.

Bob Webb is Vice President/Sales for Pipkins, a worldwide supplier of workforce management software and services to the call center industry. For more information, visit www.Pipkins.com or 800/469-6106.

###

How Do You Spell S.U.C.C.E.S.S?
By Kimberly King, President, InterWeave
Email:
kking@interweavecorp.com
Phone: 813-933-4432

As a new year begins, we are presented with opportunities to begin anew, to become better, both personally and professionally. People around the globe began 2007 by making resolutions to become more successful in various aspects of their lives. Often, those resolutions are short-

lived and forgotten in just a few weeks. How can you make your resolutions stick, especially those goals that you set for your organization? As a mentor, how can you help your team achieve success? Embrace and share with your team the steps of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. outlined below. They can be instrumental in reaching the pinnacle of your potential!

Seek to Understand
Reading and talking with others opens your eyes to new ideas and opportunities. Learning grows your knowledge and sustains your accomplishments. Now that you are in a situation, learn as much about how others have succeeded in the same position that you now find yourself.

Uncover New Possibilities
Be open to new ideas. Do not be afraid to think outside the box and explore options that you may not have thought of before. New situations have a way of scaring us and familiar circumstances have a way of stunting our growth. Put aside your

fears and break out of the status quo in order to breathe new life into your old thought patterns.

Communicate With Others
Bounce your ideas off of others. Once you set your goals, be sure to involve others to assist you in obtaining your objectives. Let others know your plans and solicit their help. Do not work in a vacuum.

Commit to the details
The details will be the key to unleashing your plan. With every statement that starts with *"I will…"*, be sure to ask yourself *"How?"* Your plan is critical to achieving your greatest aspirations.

Execute Your Plan
Now that you have committed to the details, you must act to make the details happen. Now that you have planned your work, you must work your plan in order to cross the finish line a winner!

Study Your Progress
Introspection is important at this stage in order to achieve true success. During this stage, you are back to uncovering

new possibilities. Even new ideas become old ideas once you have been doing them for awhile. Don't let yourself get stale. Keep studying and continue making changes to your plan. Even if things seem to be working, you never know what else is possible.

Support Yourself and Others
Congratulate yourself on your achievements. Celebrate your success and share your insight with others. The more you help others realize their goals, the more you will learn, grow and achieve **SUCCESS** in your life.

*InterWeave's **Coaching to WOW** process and supplementary products and services will assist your organization in achieving SUCCESS all year! With over 23 years of call center experience, InterWeave president, Kimberly King, models being a WOW mentor and provides you with the tools you need to drive change. Visit www.interweavecorp.com or call 877-969-3283 to find out how you can embark on the **Journey to WOW**!*

###

Offshore Call Centers: A Closer Look
By Ken Wisnefki

It initially seemed like a savvy business decision for U.S. companies to establish call centers off shore. It has been previously projected that it was to be so profitable, that 3,000 U.S. call centers would close down to move offshore by 2008 making the number of agent positions elsewhere reach in the 250,000 range. The 'hotspots' were to be in India, the Philippines, Canada, and Mexico. This flux has been ameliorated by the lax of U.S. authorities enforcing their pertinent laws in these locales. Though mortgage programs and credit card acquisition programs have been the biggest companies to take leave for other locations, this phenomenon has been taken advantage of by other companies as well.

U.S. law enforcement theorized that at least $100 million in U.S. dollars has been accrued illegally by Canadian call centers and this number quadruples considering illegal activity in South Asia. It has been speculated that on any given day in India, there are at least 300 call centers engaging in violations of U.S. telemarketing rules, but this number is conjectured to be lower than actuality. Improvements in low-cost services since 2004 have made it much more conducive to operate call centers off shores. Technology has paradoxically enabled the existence of violations by making it virtually impossible to track the origin telemarketing calls and making it easy for telemarketers to falsify the origins of the calls placed to the U.S. from overseas.

These call centers are becoming even more bold by the lack of attention the U.S. enforcement is giving to these violations. There is a concept known as "call blasting" in which an off shore call center will utilize a recorded message in American in order solicit calls to sell credit cards. This particular violation is multi-faceted. For one, sales of credit cards are illegal in the U.S., as is the use of recorded messages (besides public safety and campaign announcements). Some U.S. states require an agent to ask the potential consumer's permission to carry on with a call; more stringent laws prohibit the use of call center rebuttals or other calls after a denial.

Just to gain an insight into how valuable these call centers can be, lets peer into one credit card center in India. Each card sale gains $110 to $240 from a U.S. purchaser's bank account. Due to 'holes in the system,' these representatives are only speaking with interested customers producing an extreme sales rate compared to legitimate practices. The call center is paying these agents about $2 dollars and hour and paying long distance rates to call the U.S. at about $1 an hour. These astronomical numbers in the illegitimates' favor make it absolutely impossible for any legitimate company to compare.

Recent efforts to stop these violations most likely have spawned from growing concern from legitimate U.S. businessmen putting pressure on law enforcers. Before recently, there was only one legal action taken place on the federal level (the call center was located in the U.S.) and no legal action has been taken at the state level. U.S. authorities recently have recognized the odious repercussions of these call centers.

This is a current issue that is taking place and will hopefully result in newfound integrity and fear of companies engaging in these encroaching behaviors. The following is a list of things stated have been done or in the process of being done to prohibit further flourishing of these heinous companies:

The publishing of consumer protections and telecommunications rules in readily accessible format online. Sting operations to allure illegal operations to covert enforcement personnel

Lists purchased by telemarketers can be speckled with fictitious identities that would appeal to these companies (low credit scores but average bank balances). These telemarketing companies will not put out the money to verify each names validity Techniques to identify and bring to justice everyone verified as being engaged in illegal telemarketing operations. This will identify not only the off shore locations but the U.S. originators Persecutions are to be publicized, especially for those operators who fail to appear, cooperation from over sea enforcement, and confiscation of all assets to violators Registration and bonding rules will become more uniform and become free to encourage compliance. Annual renewals should be mandatory in order for all information to be the most current

It shall not be looked upon that bringing these violators to light will not reach fruition. It will be a meticulous and long haul for the U.S. officials

who have let this slowly but surely slip out of control. Failure to enforce consumer protection rules is placing legitimate U.S. businesses at a disadvantage and is making our great system look hypocritical to our selves and other countries that proudly look upon the United States.

###

Washington Summit to Address Political Climate of the Teleservices Channel

Indianapolis, IN— Over the last several years, the political climate of the Teleservices channel has been riddled with strict regulatory legislation, heated debates, and intense compliance scrutiny of both inbound and outbound contact centers. The American Teleservices Association (ATA) has taken a strong stance to balance the business interests of companies with those of consumers. The ATA's political mission dedicates efforts and funding to assisting their membership with compliance through e d u c a t i o n a l

opportunities, legislative representation, regulatory guidance and advocacy for standards that promote responsible business practices.

The ATA's legislative event, the 2007 ATA Washington Summit, will take place April 22-25th, 2007, attracting industry leaders within the teleservices channel from all over the United States. Attendees will consist of CEOs, Vice Presidents, Compliance Officers, Government Affairs Officers, Attorneys, and other professionals, all seeking guidance on new regulations and compliance standards, pending legislation that will affect their business practice, and, perhaps most importantly, having the opportunity to meet with policymakers about issues that affect the livelihood of their industry. This year's Summit will be host to three influential speakers, including Paul Begala, political contributor and Democratic strategist on CNN's *The Situation Room*; ATA CEO, Tim Searcy; and Bill Greener of Greener & Hook, who performs strategic consulting structured around public opinion,

public policy and political considerations.

The Teleservices channel currently employees nearly 4% of the United States' workforce. Contact centers employ over 5.2 million people in almost 57,000 locations. These statistics are just one piece of evidence that demonstrate the necessity of this channel to work closely with both Washington policymakers and consumers to strive toward a symbiotic balance of interests.

Anyone interested in attending the 2007 ATA Washington Summit should contact Zachary Rice, Director of Government Affairs, at 317-816-9336 or via e-mail at zach@ataconnect.org.

PLANTRONICS CS 55 WIRELESS HEADSET

CALL CENTER TIMES SPECIAL $199.90

YOUR COST AFTER REBATE $149.90/$174.90

CALL BIG D COMMUNICATION FOR THIS SPECIAL OFFER

ASK FOR BRUCE

214 349-6044   800-444-5217

$25-$50 REBATE

($25 without old headset trade in $50 with old headset trade in)

see www.plantronics.com/wi

These wireless office telephone headset systems combine hands-free communication with wireless mobility, giving office professionals the ability to stay in touch as they move around their workplace. The lightweight wireless headset is self-contained and uses digital encryption to provide secure communications. The headset also features a noise-canceling microphone for clear conversations and a convertible design so it can be worn over the ear, over the head or behind the head. Both wireless systems use digital technologies designed for their respective geographic markets. In addition, the new office systems have been designed as a platform that can accommodate other wireless technologies. Convertible headset for added comfort,wear over the head or over

The Plantronics CS55 wireless headset system combines the clarity of traditional corded technology with the mobility of wireless, so employees can move around the office to wherever business takes them—without interrupting or missing a call. Continuing our tradition as a technology leader, Plantronics presents CS55 as the first headset in the United States to implement 1.9GHz UPCS voice-dedicated wireless technology. With the included Plantronic

Product Features:

- Roam hands-free up to 300 feet
- Extended hands-free talk time—up to 10 full hours
- One-touch control over calls and volume
- Enjoy the flexibility of three convertible styles
- Ensure call privacy with digitally encrypted security
- Reduce the wait: battery recharges in three hours

To take advantage of our rebate offer you must purchase any Plantronics wireless office headset system between August 8 and January 15, 2007. Follow the link above for rebate redemption procedures.

Corporate Sponsors

It all connects with
IEX
A TEKELEC COMPANY

CARAS

Communico

THE CALL CeNTER SCHOOL
custom learning solutions

BIGBY HAVIS & ASSOCIATES, INC.
ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND CONSULTANTS

eGain
Trusted by Leaders™

PIPKINS

NEXIDIA™

envox

CALL CENTER SCHEDULER

SER

VICORP

Intelemedia

CORPORATE SPONSORS

MaraStar™

PERFORMIX
TECHNOLOGIES

ENVISION™
THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER™

Veritude™

Spoken™
self-service guaranteed™

Synergy Solutions

WITNESS SYSTEMS

R RICHARDSON
THE POWER TO SELL

Arial
International

NOBLE SYSTEMS
CUSTOMER CONTACT TECHNOLOGIES

TALISMA.

ALIGNMARK

Fiserv | Lending Solutions

M.E.R. | McDaniel Executive Recruiters
Search, Placement & Consulting Solutions

Call Center Times

tin# 75-2915747

P. O. Box 118451, Carrollton, TX 75011-8451
Bus. 972-395-3225   Fax 972-395-9205

Dear Vice-President of Sales/Marketing:

Here Is How We Can Help Increase Your Bottom Line!

_____ *'2007 Call Center Book of Lists Directory'*:
◆ *1,275 Call Centers Listed*
◆ *Each Call Center has at least One Decision Maker Listed*
◆ *Complete Contact Information*
◆ *715+ E-mail Addresses*
◆ *The Directory is in CD-ROM (Excel Spreadsheet)*
◆ *FREE Quarterly Updates*   Cost: $425

_____ **Resource Directory/Call Center's Buyer's Guide**: This section of our website is the most elaborate advertising program that we provide: Your company will be profiled on our website, www.callcentertimes.com, for 12 consecutive months You will be listed in the Rolling Banner for 12 consecutive months   Cost: $517

_____ *Monthly Newsletter Advertisement:*   Cost: $275

_____ **Corporate Logo Promotion (Website & Monthly Newsletter)**:   Cost $500

Simply check the applicable column(s) and return by fax to (972) 395-9205. Please note that all transactions are final. There will be no refunds.

COMPANY NAME/ Contact/Address/Telephone/Fax/E-mail: _____

_____

_____

_____

❏ MasterCard   ❏ Visa   ❏ American Express

_____   _____
Credit Card Number   Expiration Date

_____
Name As Appears On Credit Card (Print Please)   &   Signature

Regards,
Nosa Eke, Publisher