

Building a people focused contact centre

Part 2 of 3 - Retention

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This is the second of a 3 part series where we will look at building an engaged workforce culture from both a centre-wide and individual level. Part two focuses on strategies for retaining top talent.

It's great to have single digit turnover rates, but if 80% of your workforce is disengaged; you've got a big problem on your hands. In an Ipsos Ried poll, 22% of Canadian employees expressed decreased loyalty to their employers. And in companies where salaries have been frozen and staff has been cut, that number jumps to 31% and 36% respectively.

Loyalty is the key to retention. But simply retaining employees is not enough. So how do you create loyalty, when all your employees see is: continuous restructuring, cost cutting, down-sizing and doing more with less? You need to show your employees that you care and that you value their contributions to the company – every single day!

This starts at the executive leadership level. The president/CEO sets the tone for the rest of company to follow. Bryan Pearson, President of LoyaltyOne (providers of AIR MILES Reward Program) wrote a book called, "The Loyalty Leap". In his book, he talks about giving the employees the wheel to drive loyalty. He says, "Enterprise loyalty is about liberating your employees to be spontaneous customer advocates. Just like you need to set data free across an organization, it's time to free your associates to use their teaching, talent and common sense to move the company forward."

Quick Points to consider when recognizing and rewarding

In line with showing that you care about your team(s), at a personal level, it is important to understand what makes each person tick. The following demonstrates 4 personality profiles you should be aware of:

- D** Dominant, decisive, doer, fast paced speech, task-oriented person. They respond to and love greater responsibility
- I** Inspiring, people orientated, great ideas, fast paced speech individual love to have FUN, and typically respond to the "BIG SHINY STAR" with lots of fanfare! Since they typically are the life of the party, they love the additional attention and public recognition.
- S** Steady, stable, introverted person, slower paced speech. They typically do not crave lots of fanfare. A genuine appreciation of their efforts is what garners the best response in this temperament. Even though recognition in the corporate sense is generally public in nature, it is wise to find the time to recognize and show appreciation for our staff with an S temperament.
- C** Cautious, compliant, slower paced speech, task oriented person. Responds to being valued for specific actions and tasks being done correctly.

Show them that you care

"Caring" is defined as: displaying kindness and concern for others. A "Thank You" note for a job well done, a verbal pat on the back for doing extra work, a Tim Horton's (or Starbucks if you prefer) gift card for handling a difficult customer, or letting someone leave early to deal with a personal situation. Some of these things may seem small and insignificant, but to employees who are struggling to balance their workload or are unsure of their place in the company, it can mean the world. But caring goes much deeper than that. It is an important human characteristic that allows people to connect on an emotional level and create stronger bonds with each other. It includes elements of trust, respect and compassion. When you have a leadership team that truly cares about their employee's personal and professional wellbeing, you have one of the best retention strategies imaginable. Care has to be heartfelt. It cannot be turned on and off with the push of a button. Take the time to get to know your employees

and understand their goals and challenges in life. The extra time spent on this will create huge dividends in employee loyalty and dedication down the road.

It is so important for all levels of management to be self-aware of their respective communication styles and how it is received by their staff of differing personalities.

Caring has to be heartfelt. Having empathy towards others is critical in understanding others points of view, thoughts and feelings. Dr. Daniel Goleman, author of best-selling book Emotional Intelligence, noted that there are three levels of empathy. The three levels are Cognitive, Emotional and Compassionate Empathy.

Great leaders with the highest performing Direct Reports are those that have Cognitive Empathy. This is "mind-to-mind, giving us a mental sense of how another person's thinking works. It is one of the three kinds of empathy, each with a premium in the workplace and in relationships anywhere in our lives."

We shall explore the other 2 levels empathy much deeper in our next article around Team and Staff Development.

Recognize, reward and value their contributions

Most all employees want to know that their organization appreciates the work they do and the effort they put forth. It's a validation that their work is meaningful and that they are contributing to the success of the organization. Through my work with a variety of contact centres, one thing is consistent – employees want to feel proud of where they work and what they do. This is reinforced through the leadership words and actions. When executive leadership recognizes front line employees, the impact is significant and long lasting.

Rewards and recognition are critical to maintaining an employee first culture and keeping people engaged. However, statistics tell us that employees don't always feel they are being rewarded for providing excellent customer service. This is a big "red flag" for managers. Rewards and recognition should be designed to encourage positive behaviours, drive

performance goals and help employees feel valued for the work they do.

FedEx has something called the Bravo Zulu award (Bravo Zulu - a US Navy term meaning 'well done'). This is a monetary reward managers can give to any staff member for exemplary service. Managers reward employees for outstanding efforts and achievement on the spot. Rewards may include "quick cash" bonuses, theater tickets, dinner gift certificates, and other gifts of similar value.

It's important to make it visible. Customer compliment letters posted in a highly visible area in the contact center are a great way to announce the good work performed by individual members of the team.

Remember, rewards and recognition do not always have to be public or on a large scale. They must be genuine and specific to the individual. Each personality connects to and responds differently to the various types of recognition.

Believe it or not – Pizza parties and the "Big Shiny Star" will not be valued by all employees in the same manner.

Train and support them

Enlightened contact centers are aware of the affect targeted training and development has on customer satisfaction. They also know the effect it has on employee morale and retention. In fact, from our Best Practices Report, Training and Development scores as one of the highest employee satisfaction categories for Employer of Choice® certified contact centers.

It's important to understand that training and development programs are becoming more than just product knowledge and skills improvement sessions. They are becoming an integral component of the overall customer experience strategy for the contact center and organization.

Is your training relevant and ongoing? Do you have testing and tracking capabilities built into your program? Do you solicit feedback from your employees to determine if the training was impactful? Do you benchmark with other organizations to ensure the most current and effective training methods are being utilized? These are just a few of the question you need to ask yourself to ensure your training is hitting the mark.

From orientation through to succession planning, make sure you are training and developing your employees to be successful in not just their jobs, but in their careers and lives as well.

Understanding learning styles and personality blends will help in ensuring that the learner actually learns. The goal of a trainer/instructor/coach is to ensure that the learner receives the information as intended. It is critical to understand that there is great diversity in learning styles that accompany the various personality blends and communication styles.

For the following 2 personalities (D and I), a slow, monotone teaching style with lots of charts, graphs and figures will not produce favourable results to engage these learners. Typically, retention and engagement will be less than desirable.

D – Dominant, driver, fast-paced personality: Responds to bottom line, to the point, faster paced with a purpose for the lesson or story. Typically, starting at a high-level and then getting into specifics at a fast pace works best for this personality type.

I – Inspiring, fun loving and fast-paced personality responds best to relevant stories, minimal details, delivered with lots of energy and enthusiasm.

For the following 2 personalities, speaking too quickly, too loudly, and too general (big picture) Learners also respond and receive information according to their own personality and communication styles will also lead to disengaged learners.

S – Stable, steady, slower-paced communicator responds best to instructors/trainers speaking in a friendly, slower-paced manner with lots of relevant stories and examples. They typically do not respond well to surprises and like to know what to expect throughout the lesson.

C – Cautious, analytical slower-paced communicator responds best to instructors/trainers that have detailed agendas, charts/graphs to support the lesson or the stories. They do not respond well to lots of activities as they typically find the FUN activities to be silly. These learners love the details, facts, figures, case studies all to be delivered factually.

There will always be a percentage of your workforce looking for another job. In fact, a certain amount of turnover is healthy. Most contact centers we work with are targeting a

10 – 15% annual voluntary turnover rate. This is a realistic range and allows the centre to help people progress into new positions at a manageable rate.

Band-aid solutions are no longer acceptable. Organizations need to start focusing less on short-term retention strategies and more on a developing better workplace cultures. Creating a strong workplace culture isn't merely a way to keep people employed at your company. It's a way of being.

Of course, you need to hire the right people, nurture, train, develop and support them. You need to understand what they want to achieve and to help them achieve it. But if you go deeper and connect with your employees on a personal level through your words and actions, then they will not only stay because they need to, but because they want to.

Retention is really about caring leadership and employee pride. If you can build your culture to exemplify these attributes, you're well on your way to attracting and retaining the talent you need to succeed.

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Sangeeta Bhatnagar, GTACC Chair and proud Room to Read supporter