



# CUSTOMER REACH®

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## Closing the Revolving Door – Part1

By: [Colin Taylor](#)



Staff and Agent retention was a ‘hot’ button topic in the call center industry 20 years ago and still is one now. So how is it that the same issue that ‘dogged’ call centers two decades ago is still a ‘front burner’ issue today? I think there are a number of factors that contribute to this:

- The nature of turnover and staff attrition is such that you are never done this process,
- Successive regimes have built up and eroded successful programs that addressed this topic,
- Regular and expected fluctuations in employment levels and labor availability ‘hid’ the problem for periods of time.

Addressing turnover and attrition is a never ending process. With labor costs representing approximately two-thirds of your center operating costs, it is a

battle you need to wage and a battle you really want to win.

In this article we will look at what you can do, today, in your center to reduce attrition. There are many ideas, methods, tools and tactics that you can employ to reduce attrition that require time to implement, develop the business case, ROI calculations and secure funding and management approval.

But what can you do today, right now, at little or no cost that will actually improve retention in your center immediately? Specifically we will look at rewards and recognition, ways you can involve, engage and motivate your agents, today.

### Proven techniques

A number of proven techniques that can improve staff retention and we will address these under the headings I have named:

- Understanding Rewards and Recognition
- It’s not just the Money
- Recognition is over rated
- Motivating without money
- Building Community
- Challenges equal Opportunities

Before we examine how to improve retention it is critical we have a good understanding of what our current situation is. Do you know what your turnover rate is? Do you know why people are leaving your center?

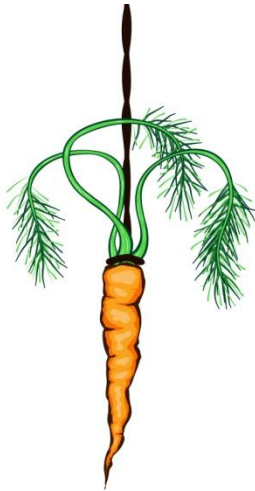
We have worked with many managers that have answered yes to these questions only to later ask to revise their answers. It is critical that you know or at least believe you know the answers to these questions as we begin drill down through the challenges of retention

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management.



All centers today employ rewards and recognition within their centers, some with robust unified programs and others moving through a series of one-off tactics. However many of the centers in both of these camps do not have a good grasp of human nature or what truly motivates people.

The recent recession has caused many call centers to scale back, they have thinned the ranks of management, fewer VP's per square inch, and have reduced or frozen headcount and budgets. So doing more with less; really has become doing more with none.

#### **A changing staff**

On top of the budgetary and economic issues we have seen a change in the agents we have working in our centers. Gen X and Gen Y employees are different. They have different expectations, motivations and a different view of what is important. They represent new challenges in engagement and motivation. You need to approach Gen Y employees differently in order to engage with them.

Finally we must remember that tactics are short term. One off campaigns, contests and incentives will be quickly forgotten.

Wherever possible you want to develop Reward and Recognition programs and incentives that are strategic, that is to say support and align with the goals of the center and those of business. Strategic and structural programs endure and become a part of the fabric of the center.

Having said this, don't discount the value of using money as an incentive...It is still the right size, shape and color, but it should not be the only tool in your rewards and recognition arsenal.

One fact that many centers have reported to me is that their staff has become more transient. Staff is not career focused...some just want a job and not a career. Some may be working in the center until they find a job...what does that say about their perception of the call center and the company?

Turnover is a fact of life and will always be a concern to call center operators.

And like it or not our Supervisors are likely not as well selected or trained as we would like them to be. All of these factors were true in call centers 20 years ago, so has anything really changed?

#### **Recognition is not enough**

Time and time again you will hear experts and pundits espouse that recognition is all you require to have a happy and engaged workforce. Unfortunately that isn't correct. Recognition is wonderful and makes those being recognized feel special and valued, but alone it is not enough to solve retention issues.

By themselves recognition programs have a number of shortcomings: Event and time based programs end, 'First past the post' generally results in the same cadre of agent winning all of the time- remember our Mastery agents...they should be winning all the time! If you can not win, you will quickly give up trying. In this situation the reward program that was implemented to motivate and incent agents is actually a disincentive.

The key to long term success and ease of management is to implement programs that are aligned with the objectives of the center. They support the attainment of the objectives and goals established for the center.

For example if one of the centers objectives in 2010 is to improve First Call Resolution by 5%, then an incentive or recognition program tied to FCR or reducing repeat callers or increasing the percentage of customers who identify "fully resolved" on the post call survey are all examples of aligned programs. Programs that recognize those who achieved a 10 second reduction in AHT is not aligned with the objective unless its' scope is expanded to include a while improving FCR. In fact in the AHT example it is quite likely that this program would actually reduce FCR at least in the near term as agents rush callers off the phone and struggle to find faster ways of doing things. Similarly programs that incent sales can be great, but if that is not a center objective it is not aligned.

Lots of achievements that can be seen as positive improvement in a call center, but not all of them will be aligned with the stated and published business objectives of the center; reduce AHT, reduce costs, increase sales, improve center profitability, reduce calls, reduce cost



per contact, increase FCR, increase CSAT, improve ESAT etc. All of these can be identified as call center business goals. But none of these operates in a truly independent manner. We know that a call center is an interconnected web of processes, people, technology and methodologies and many of these elements are connected...some in obvious and others in far more subtle ways.

### **Cases of non-aligned incentives**

The following are a couple of real world example of non-aligned incentives.

One services company set the center objective to reduce costs...this is likely one goal we are all familiar with. So the center management decided to offer an incentive for agents who attained an AHT of under 200 seconds. For each call they handled under 200 seconds they had their name entered into a draw for prizes. At first the results appeared stunning almost every agent reduced their AHT from 220 -230 seconds to sub 200. It was on the third day however that the center manager noticed that the call volume was rising significantly above the generally accurate forecast. They were at a loss to explain why.

On day four it twigged. They found through monitoring that they were getting lots of complaints from customers reporting that when they called in the agent would hang up on them before they were finished. Closer scrutiny found that yes; in fact the agents were hanging up on customers. In fact some even told the customers that they would have to call back because the agent had used up all of their time for the call – Ouch

In a real outbound example, one company had an inside sales team that sold new business to a large prospect database. Now the database had been cobbled together from multiple sources and had a lot of holes in the information, missing addresses, postal codes etc. The manager determined, reasonably, that if they had better information in the database then they would have fewer orders with incorrect and/or inaccurate information which required rework.

So the Manager implemented an incentive program that paid the rep \$.50/ updated record. This worked, in fact it worked so well that once the agents realized that they could make as much if not more incentive dollars by simply updating records versus selling the service, they stopped selling. Now I ask you what should be the primary role of an inside sales team?

We know that other companies and organizations struggle with the exact same issues as we do. How do these firms motivate their staff?

### **Existing Recognition/reward programs**

Before we dive any deeper on what programs could be deployed, let's look at some of the recognition and reward programs that other organizations are employing.

- Rotating Trophies for Top Performers each month.
- Decorating agents' workstations whenever they meet their daily and/or monthly goals.
- Managers calls: where the center Supervisor and Managers take the reps calls for an hour while the Rep coaches the manager.- The Scooter Store
- Reps pick songs and select management staff who must perform them.- Freedom Communications
- Call swapping- If an agent gets 100% QA score on 3 calls, The manager takes 3 calls for the rep.- Galileo Processing
- Top performers each month have their Manager pick them up every day for a week and drive them to work
- Earn a chocolate for a perfect call or a call resolved in X minutes. Each resolution (or perfect call) gets a round of applause from the whole center.- Wipro BPO
- 80/20 Elite Team, the Pareto principal rewards the top 20% of agents. They get a separate lounge, flex shifts, first choice of time off and are groomed for management roles. This is run and reviewed each quarter. – Wipro BPO
- Placing a rose on the seat of an agent who has gone above and beyond.
- Campaign pins, like military ribbons or scout badges placed on the agents nameplate on their workstation.- Embarq
- Producing 'Baseball' cards of your star performers- Embarq,
- We rely on Dr. Bob Nelson book "1001 Ways to Reward Employees", it has been invaluable.- The McNaughton Group,
- Earning points for every call with FCR over 90, points redeemed out of a catalogue
- Call center radio, top performers get to pick the songs that will play in the lunch and break rooms

There are lots of good ideas here, but most are tactical, one-offs and some you can see that are a part of larger, over arching program. Many of these tactics could however be integrated into a strategic program.

One other thing you will notice is that almost all of these reward on the 'best', we know from experience that these types of programs do little to motivate or engage the 'rest'.


### **Tactical versus strategic**

How can we move beyond the individual recognition event?

The answer is to move beyond the tactical and develop an aligned culture and community that delivers superior service? This requires



structure and design, both of the real world examples I cited earlier shared the design flaw that the managers didn't think through the process. They also didn't appreciate that agents are smart. If there is a way to 'game' or cheat a system, they will find it and exploit it. The second part of this article will explore the creation of an enduring structure in the call center that will foster employee engagement and motivation and permit the deployment of aligned reward/recognition programs that meet the objectives of the center and the business.

Let us know what you think of this article, please visit [www.thetaylorreachgroup.com](http://www.thetaylorreachgroup.com) or send us an email at [info@thetaylorreachgroup.com](mailto:info@thetaylorreachgroup.com). 



Happy Holidays and Best Wishes for a  
Great 2012



## Is It Time for your Call Center Check Up?



By: [Colin Taylor](#)

Clients frequently ask me what is the single most important activity they should undertake to ensure that their center is operating and performing at an optimal level. Like all of us they are looking for the magical, simple solution to their issues and challenges; just one thing; the magic pill, silver bullet, panacea that makes their jobs as center managers easier and more productive. Unfortunately there is no 'Silver Bullet'.



What I tell these call center operators is that to be effective they need to know their center...at this point I get a look of indignation...”of course I know my center., what are your suggesting?”. They are thinking and assuming that this consultant has finally lost touch with reality. But what I mean is that to be effective you must really, really know and understand your operation. There is a Zen dialogue where a student asks the teacher what the secret to meditation is. The teacher tells the student the secret is Attention, “what is attention”, the student asks and the answer from the teacher is “Attention means Attention”, We must pay attention to each and every activity in the center, every day.

While this sounds simple or at least simplistic, this can be a huge challenge. Most managers manage from point to point in a sequential process, “OK, today I will focus on the new cross selling initiative and tomorrow on agent occupancy and then Thursday on the forecast revision that we need to do based upon the new marketing materials we are using next quarter. This sound perfectly reasonable and it is, but it reflects our linear and sequential management approach...first this, then that and later the next thing. This approach is great for knocking tasks off a “To Do” list, but by its’ very nature it ignores all of the other aspects and activities that are not on the “To Do List”.

### **Fire Fighting or Fire Prevention?**

We know that there are literally thousands of activities that take place in a call center. Each call may involve tens or hundreds of discrete activities, knowledge points, applications, processes, clicks and keystrokes. It is these activities that are the ‘meat and potatoes’ of a call center operation. It is also these activities that receive very little attention until something goes wrong. Once there is a problem then the specific activity in question is a candidate for inclusion on the “To Do List”. For many organizations the “To Do List”, devolves into little more than ‘firefighting; dealing with crises rather than proactively improving the call centers’ operation, fire prevention. But given the vast scope of potential customer interaction activities in the call center what other options are there for staying on top of the ‘thousands of moving pieces’ that are occurring in real time every minute of every day?

How do we effectively manage these interconnected processes and systems; the ‘thousands of moving parts’ that make up every call center? I suggest that we look at how we manage the most complicated interconnected, technology intensive and integrated entity we possess...our bodies. The human body is comprised of ‘thousands of moving parts’, interconnected and interdependent systems. While we are the ‘operators’ of our bodies we see an expert, our physician each year for a checkup. This is where we discuss all of the things that aren’t working as we would like and look for solutions. We know that the way we operate our bodies results in various outcomes; we are genetically predisposed to some diseases and others we cause with our lifestyle and environment. The same is true for a call center, the company we work in, even the vertical or industry can make us more susceptible to certain call center maladies and others are purely the result of our own actions or inactions.

### **Gauging Call Center Health**

Just as a complete and thorough physical seeks to assess the function and capabilities of our bodies individual systems, our concerns and questions lead a trained professional (our doctor) through a sequence of questions to uncover root causes rather than just the symptoms. A call center Assessment or Audit seeks to test and assess all of the systems, processes at work in our call center. Completing a call center assessment annually is great way to ensure long term sustainability.

The objective of an Assessment may be simply put in the following four questions;

Are we doing the right things?

Are we doing them in the right way?

Are we doing them in the right location?

Should we be looking at alternatives, for instance home agents or outsourcing?

Behind the questions and under The Taylor Reach Group, Inc, assessment model we examine and categorize the center against four categories of activity;

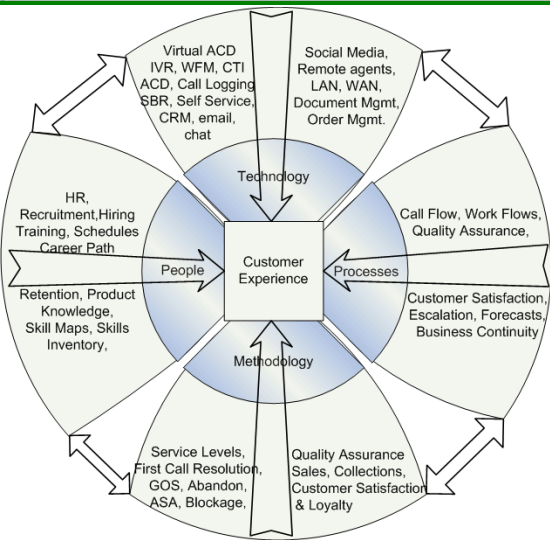
People,

Process,

Technology,

Methodology,

These four ‘pillars’ cover all of the activities within a call center and all of the moving parts.



The process for assessing your call center employs more than one hundred discrete activities than can be represented by the block diagram below;

### Strategic Assessment



By overlaying the assessment process overtop of the four 'pillars' it is possible to produce a report card that illustrates how the center is performing today opposite each of the four 'pillars' and to identify the opportunities for improvement. In much the same way as your doctor will administer blood tests, x-rays, EEG and EKG tests to determine your relative state of health the Audit or Assessment conducts numerous tests to determine the health of your contact center. Your doctor then makes recommendations to improve your health; get more exercise, watch what you eat etc.

The Strategic assessment makes recommendations to improve your call center operational health; fix dysfunctional processes, correct alignment conflicts etc.

Employing a traditional approach to annual review/ assessment generally takes between 2 to 5 weeks from start to finish depending on the size and complexity of the center, or centers and usually not more than a few hours of management effort to answer key questions, a few days (2-5) on site with the assessor inspecting and reviewing key details, stakeholder interviews and detail analysis. The final report should be forthcoming with a detailed presentation to senior officers.

Recently there has arrived on the scene an alternative to a traditional assessment or audit and that is a SaaS (Software as a Service) offering which allows you to assess or audit your own center. This allows a center to complete an assessment at a fraction of the price of a traditional audit.

Regardless of how you complete an audit, the result can provide you with a roadmap for operational change that is grounded in your call center, your company and your goals and objectives. This degree of specificity isn't possible through benchmarking or best practices alone, but only when completed as a part of an overall assessment.



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Snapshotonline<sup>®</sup> is a Cloud based customer service self assessment tool, which has multiple applications

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- Leadership development tool

Easily deployed (within 5 - 10 minutes) and available on demand. Easy to use and delivers immediate professional reporting with multiple applications to power your destiny!

Assess, measure and prioritize what's right for your customers, organization and center. Develop a continuous improvement program based on robust analysis allowing you to track measurable progress. Incorporate into your current objectives and vision, the tasks and strategies identified to bridge the gaps.

Drive your center to heights that will delight and WOW your customers, your organization, your center and YOU!



To find out more call us today on 647-729-3991  
or by email at [snapshotz@thetaylorreachgroup.com](mailto:snapshotz@thetaylorreachgroup.com)





Failure to conduct regular assessments of your call center can result in; missing a diagnosis early on, when chances of correction are best (and easiest), continued erosion in terms of performance and increased costs. All of which can negatively impact on customer satisfaction brand loyalty, market share and ultimately our own career prospects.

It was best stated in those old Fram Oil filter TV ads which commented on the interdependency of the oil filter and your cars' overall health... "You can pay me now or pay me later."

Ed- I recently recorded a webinar on the "Evolution of Call Center Audit" for CCNG, You can view the webinar [here](#)

## Interim Management Services available from Taylor Reach

Running a call or contact center can be a challenge at the best of times. But this task can become significantly more difficult when there is a vacancy at the top of the call or contact center operation. Regardless of the cause of the vacancy: leave of absence, restructuring, center consolidation, or other organizational changes. The operational effectiveness and efficiency can begin to suffer within days without an effective leader. Morale and culture soon follows.

What is an organization to do in this situation? Promote a junior member of the call center team? Unless they have been groomed and trained for this role, the experience can overwhelm them and contribute to further erosion of service and frustration for all involved.

Recruit a replacement is likely the best option, but it could take months to find the right candidate. How do you keep the center running effectively meanwhile?

The answer for many firms is interim management; people with the experience to hit the ground running fast to keep your organization, call and contact center operating smooth while you look for a permanent solution. Taylor Reach provides experienced Call and Contact Center experts who possess 15, 20, 25 or more years of experience building and running call centers, contact centers and customer service operations.

To stop the bleeding and to get your center back on track contact [Taylor Reach](#) today

## Case Study

*In this regular column we review the successes that Taylor Reach is part of.*

### ***Assisted a Major Financial Institution Implement an Outsourced Quality Program***

#### **The Challenge:**

Our client a large financial institution was faced with inconsistent quality monitoring activities. The bank had previously implemented a number of ineffective quality monitoring improvement initiatives. When they contacted The Taylor Reach Group (Taylor Reach) the client wanted to implement an effective and consistent quality monitoring process that would standardize the quality measurement across 24 call centers.

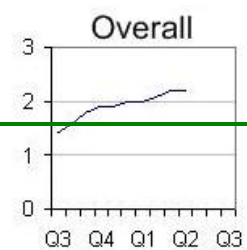
#### **The Process:**

Taylor Reach and the client reviewed and revised the Quality guidelines, scoring matrix and reporting requirements. In addition technical challenges had to be overcome including how to access call recordings, storage, retention requirements and policies. Finally Taylor Reach had to pass a rigorous security assessment for both physical and logical security.

#### **The Solution:**

With guidelines revised and approved, new reporting was developed to assess not only the agent

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performance, but also the team, center, and Line of Business. The reporting would roll up from an individual agent up to the Senior Vice President. With the technology access, security approval and protocols in place, Taylor Reach conducted an in depth calibration process with the client to ensure that the quality of the assessments and their consistency was constant.

**The Result:**

Within weeks changes were noticed, first by the front line staff and supervisors, then within a few months by senior management. By increasing the transparency and consistency of reporting, managers knew within 20 days how their supervisors and teams were performing and which supervisors were actively coaching and mentoring their agents. The scores and results were clear to everyone in the management hierarchy. The result of this attention showed everyone that quality was important to the institution.

For more than five years the program continues to support the quality and improvement of the agent performance in all of the call centers. The program has been an unqualified success and has been recognized by senior officers of the organization as a key to ensuring customer satisfaction.



## Testimonials

Colin is a rock-solid business professional with a deep knowledge of the contact center industry. With honesty, integrity, and excellent interpersonal skills, Colin will tell you what you need to hear, rather than what you want to hear. His exceptional communication abilities allow him to deliver a message without the nonsense, and he is a trusted listener and advisor to colleagues and subordinates alike. He really understands what “partnership” is all about. He is a hands-on leader, who completely understands the requirements, committing and delivering on-time/on-budget projects by rolling up his sleeves and getting the job done. He will do whatever it takes to complete the project and do so with style.”

Vice President, ING Bank

“Colin's years of Call Center experience have resulted in him becoming one of the premier experts in this field. He has helped countless companies improve their Call Center and Customer Service processes, and his monthly Newsletter provides valuable information and advice for all of those who are lucky enough to subscribe. In one place, you can find industry happenings, statistics, advice on problems/questions, case study information and much more. It's invaluable, and an easy on-line read, which makes it even more valuable in my view. I would recommend contacting Colin if you find that you are having problems providing the service you want in your call center. Although his business is recommending and providing call center solutions, he will not hesitate to be honest with you and tell you that with a few changes, you can manage everything on your own. This is an honesty that I value highly.”

Senior Customer Service Executive, Readers Digest Asia

“Colin is one of the leaders in the Contact Center industry. He really understands the key drivers of this business. He always showed me a better way to understand each side of this very complex business. He really helped me to develop my knowledge and view of Contact Centers.” EDS

“Colin's vision, direction and management style was motivational and inspiring as he grew the business. Working along with him on many new and exciting ventures I admired his ability to build strong relationships with customers and suppliers, his strategic and visionary thinking, business savvy, and his supportive nature for his employees.”

Customer Care Manager, BMO

“John was retained by Advantex to lead a prototyping effort to outsource the sales cycle of a new business concept.



John and his team worked diligently on this Proof of Concept, proving that business could be sold over the phone; this was an important step forward for Advantex, in terms of validating the opportunity to decrease the cost of sales, as well as confirming that it was a viable alternative to feet on the street. John took a complex offering, which worked in person, and broke it down to a workable over-the-phone pitch. John was a pleasure to work with every step of the way on this POC.”

VP Advantex

“Colin's depth of knowledge greatly enhanced the results. His recommendations made good business sense, and created a good outcome for the company and the employees. I trusted the research and the deliverable he and his company provided in a timely manner.”

Customer Service Executive, Rodale

“Colin understands the complex service requirements needed to support large multi-channel companies and he is able to articulate those needs to a range of audiences. Once the needs are defined, Colin has the ability to create a roadmap and structure for a given project, communicate the plan effectively, and deliver the desired results within the defined timelines. Colin is a creative thinker and has deep industry knowledge that would make him an asset to any company that engages in his services.”

Senior Contact Center Executive, Best Buy

“John is a true pleasure to work with. A leader, in every sense of the word. John has the ability to motivate, guide, and instill confidence - All within a 3-4 minute phone call. You can always depend on John to give a swift and direct cure to any dilemma you may get stuck in.”

Outsource Service Provider



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- Quality Monitoring & Assurance,
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