

# Ten Secrets of High-Performance Call Center Management



BY ANDREW D. CARR

The engine behind Warm-Transfer's success is superb call center management. Company co-founder Andy Carr shares top tips from his 27-year career managing the qualification and delivery of millions of sales leads.

- 1 Monetary incentives do not always determine sales agent behavior. But when your people are clearly acting to maximize their incentive payout, you can safely ignore more subtle motivating factors.
- 2 Extremely low employee turnover in call centers is generally regarded as a hallmark of good management, but that's not necessarily so. Some call centers have low turnover because **A.** performance expectations and enforcement are too low and **B.** pay is above market. The latter two causes effectively cancel out the benefit derived from low turnover.
- 3 Communicate your expectations. People are basically good and want to do a good job for their employers and customers. But if people are not told specifically what constitutes good work, they will make up their own definitions. Once they have invented their own definitions of good work, or of how to accomplish a given task, it is almost impossible to get them to change their behavior.
- 4 Beware an obsequious manager in your call center. A subordinate who behaves obsequiously to you is very often overbearing to his or her own subordinates.
- 5 Surprisingly, a well-handled firing lifts morale in the organization. If you communicate a set of clear performance guidelines, offer remedial assistance, and deliver a series of warnings to a poor-performing employee, the eventual termination will bring relief and cheer to everyone else.
- 6 Three success factors to necessary staff reductions: **A.** Make the reductions all at once, not extended over multiple events. **B.** Deliver an immediate reassurance of job security to those remaining. **C.** Clearly explain to the team how the people were selected for termination.
- 7 Call center staff usually produce better value when they are working from an office. Working from home is possible, but the extra training and management expense often more than offsets the cost benefit that comes from reduced overhead.
- 8 To overcome people's natural aversion to selling, you need to communicate frequent, clear measurements, with penalties and rewards.
- 9 A well-designed incentive plan works wonders. Engineer it so that, in any given month, about a third of the team will be "out of the money." For the other two thirds, \$50 serves as a good number for the minimum payout. The top payout should be at least 50% of base pay.
- 10 Big improvements in call center performance can come from small improvements over a large number of transactions. Consider the account look-up process. You're better off finding a way to cut 15 seconds off the lookup that will work 95% of the time, than find a way to cut 30 seconds that will only work half of the time. 

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