

The Ugly Truth:



You Suffer from Agent Apathy

All too often, business leaders defend their case for improving systems, processes, and metrics with the fervor of a cornered animal but without being nearly as justified. When it comes to the agent experience, however, there is substantial room for improvement yet little interest from business leaders to do so.

Case in point: Most contact center agents today are underequipped to do their job and you know it. **92% of respondents in ICMI's recent research survey believe that their agent facing applications could be more effective**, while 74% acknowledged that they prevent the agents from providing the best experience possible. If you don't do something about it, you just become part of the problem.

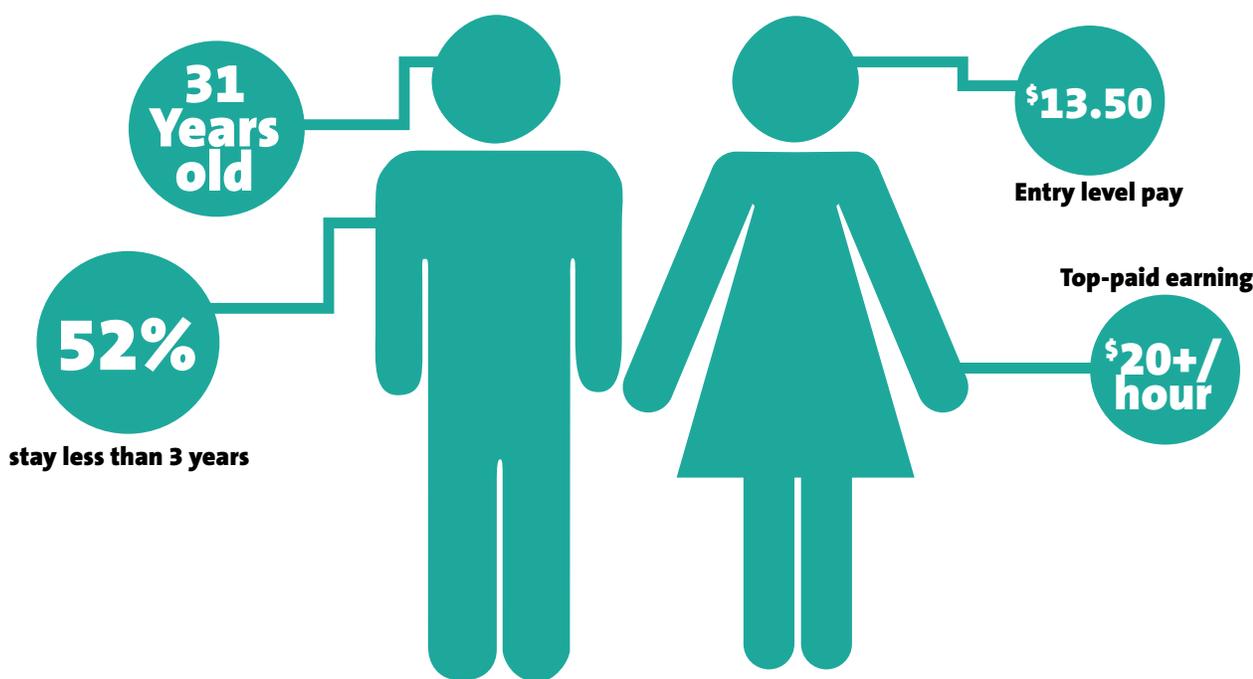
What is it about the contact center and its agents in particular that drives business leaders away from investing in resources there? Is it a sustainable and fiscally responsible decision to continue with that type of mentality, or could the secret to achieving customer experience stardom be unlocked by better equipping the contact center agent?

ICMI's recent findings indicate that contact center agents have the greatest potential to affect the customer experience. Making improvements at the agent level could yield significant gains for the greater organization in both customer satisfaction and employee morale and retention. As a result of improving the agents experience, the potential for a positive impact to both the direct and indirect costs associated with those key executive focus points is undeniable.

Who are these "agents"?

If you work in a contact center today, ICMI's research would indicate that the agents in these contact centers aren't that much different from a historical version of many of you. In fact, 59% of contact center leaders were formally agents. While this number may be unsurprising, it should be discouraging, not because contact centers have a habit of promoting from within, but because these leaders aren't doing anything to correct the same problems and stressors that they experienced when they were on the frontline.

The Typical Agent



Being a contact center agent is no easy gig. 87% of the respondents to ICMI's agent survey recognized that their agents experience a moderate to high level of stress during their workday. *The self-defeating part of this statistic is that 71% recognized system and tool inefficiencies and difficulties as the top contributor to the agent's workday stress*, while 92% stated that they believe their agent facing applications could be more effective. This degree of ineffectiveness is going to cause a lot of more problems as the agent's job becomes more complicated.

Agents today carry more weight than ever before.

48% of agents support multiple channels and that number is only going to rise significantly in the coming years as the customer journey takes them across numerous channels. Organizations are very much aware of this and 75% of them plan to increase the number of agents that support multiple channels. In addition, the contacts that are arriving to the agents are not as easy as they used to be. Evidence to this arose during ICMI's recent survey in which 73% of contact center leaders acknowledged that the actual complexity of their customer contacts was increasing. When coupled with the agent's lack of efficient tools and resources, these growths in channel support and contact complexity signal a disastrous outcome. Here's why:




**100% BELIEVE THAT AGENT MORALE/
SATISFACTION DIRECTLY AFFECTS THE
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

**OVER 99% BELIEVE IMPROVED AGENT
MORALE/SATISFACTION CORRELATE WITH
IMPROVED AGENT PERFORMANCE**

**WHETHER OR NOT AGENTS HAVE THE
NECESSARY TOOLS TO EFFECTIVELY
PERFORM IN THE POSITION IS THOUGHT TO
HAVE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON
THEIR PERFORMANCE**

IN SUMMARY

**LACKING THE NECESSARY TOOLS =
NEGATIVE AGENT PERFORMANCE AND
DECREASED MORALE & SATISFACTION =
POOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES**

There is nothing that changing your metrics, overhauling your hiring procedures, or investing in team building activities can do to change the fact that if the agents don't have the tools and resources to do their job both the agent and the customer experience will suffer.

Unhappy agents is hardly a business case

While a majority of organizations (85%) say that agent loyalty is an important priority to them, their actions tend to be a bit contrary. While an overwhelming percentage find their systems inefficient, and acknowledge that it's preventing the agent from providing the best customer experience, it doesn't seem to be reflected in what would actually motivate them to invest in a new agent facing application. The primary motivator there? Lowered costs. Actually improving the agent experience was at the bottom of the list of things that would motivate them. **It would seem that agent loyalty is only a priority for the right price.**

But, what if, the secret to achieving those lower costs was to focus first on the agent experience?

It becomes a different conversation when you finally connect the dots that improving the agent experience can decrease expenses associated with agent turnover and customer retention, and improve revenue and value associated with heightened agent performance and improved customer satisfaction.

This is where a majority of decision makers get stuck because they don't perceive it as easy to quantify the value of improving the agent experience. The convenience of saying no to the unknown and making their decision off of a line item makes it a bit easier to sleep at night.

Getting at the root of metrics such as customer lifetime value, cost of agent onboarding, lost productivity, and the costs of retaining existing customers versus attracting new ones are all ways of quantifying the value of the agent experience. The potential for a positive financial impact on the business far supersedes the costs of improving the agent experience; it is just a matter of taking the time to understand how much money a mediocre agent experience is costing you every day. You can rest assured that it is costing your business greatly, and every day that you consciously take an apathetic approach to the agent experience is a day closer to your customers defecting to the competition.

If customer satisfaction really matters

Losing customers to the competition should be your greatest fear. The cost of attracting new customers is significantly greater than retaining your existing ones and, not to mention, word of mouth referrals often account for the largest percentage of new business growth for many organizations. Don't you want satisfied customers who are loyal to your company and advocates for your brand? ICMI's research indicates that customer satisfaction (CSAT) and loyalty are incredibly important to organizations and that CSAT is the most important agent metric to contact center leaders, agents, and customers alike. So, stop preventing yourself from providing the best customer experience possible.

The top 5 metrics that contact centers measure on agents are



The agent metric most important to contact center leaders is Customer Satisfaction **CSAT** 34%

The agent metric most important to contact center agents is **CSAT** 26%

The agent metric that is thought to be most important to customers is **CSAT** 40%

If you truly believe that the contact center agent is the most important role in providing a great customer experience (and ICMI's research has overwhelmingly affirmed this) you simply cannot treat anything else as if it is more important. Do your agents have the authority to do what is necessary to resolve the customer's issue? Are their tools and technologies as efficient and effective as possible? Are you holding them accountable for things that they can actually affect?

Until you align what you say is important with what you treat as important, you will never get ahead.

The time for you and your organization to treat your agents as the most important position in your organization is here.

About ICMI

For nearly 30 years, ICMI has been in the business of improving contact centers. Whether it be your people, your processes or your strategy, we want to partner with you to take your customer service to the next level.

Also known as the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI), we are the leading global provider of performance improvement resources for customer management professionals – from frontline agents to executives. Since 1985, ICMI has helped more than 50,000 organizations in 167 countries improve customer experiences and increase efficiencies at every level of the contact center. Through training, events, consulting, and informational resources, ICMI's experienced and dedicated team of industry insiders, trainers, and consultants are committed to helping you raise the strategic value of your contact center. Visit icmi.com to learn more about one of the most established and respected organizations in the call center industry.

About Five9

Five9 is a pioneer and leading provider of cloud contact center software, bringing the power of the cloud to thousands of customers worldwide and facilitating more than three billion customer interactions annually. With extensive expertise, technology, and an ecosystem of partners, Five9 helps businesses take advantage of secure, reliable, scalable cloud contact center software to create exceptional customer experiences, increase agent productivity and deliver tangible business results.