

The CX leaders guide

to motivating disengaged agents



What motivates agents to do a good job?

How can contact centres get the best out of their frontline?

Whilst CX leaders across contact centres have been asking these questions for decades, they've taken on a particular prescience now. Thanks to the ongoing impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, how we work - and therefore how we inspire our teams to work - has changed overnight.

As well as dealing with the effect of the pandemic on their personal and professional lives, your agents are:

- ✓ Working in a multichannel environment that is often stressful, repetitive and low paying.
- ✓ Dealing with increasingly complex enquiries for the amount you pay them, thanks to large increases in self-service and chatbots dealing with more straightforward customer queries.

This means today's agents not only have to show up on time and work at pace, but they also need to show empathy, demonstrate initiative and remain focused on excellence.

And that's a difficult thing to do when you aren't engaged in your job.

How can this guide help me?

According to recent research by Gallup, companies that prioritise employee engagement substantially better customer engagement, see higher productivity, lower customer/employee churn and achieve 21% higher profitability.

As a CX leader, it's therefore essential for you - and team leaders across the contact centre - to identify employee disengagement and take action to re-engage demoralised employees.

- ✓ Understand the disastrous impact disengagement has on contact centres.
- ✓ Spot disengagement across different employee teams.
- ✓ Motivate and re-engage agents to inspire better performance.

Why is employee engagement so important for contact centres?

Traditionally, contact centre leaders have centred their approach to management entirely around efficiency and optimisation.

Doing so whilst neglecting (or in some cases, at the expense of) frontline agents isn't just damaging to your employees' sense of worth - it makes those goals of a lean, cost-effective and high-performing business impossible to obtain.

If you want your contact centre to be truly customer centric, you need:

- ✓ Agents who are enthusiastic about their job and engaged in customer outcomes
- ✓ A workforce with a good amount of experience and operational knowledge

If your service teams don't enjoy their work and leave frequently (leading to expensive, chaotic employee churn), this is impossible to provide. Engaged employees, on the other hand, can be the difference between a successful contact centre, and a struggling one. They constantly do everything they can to ensure the success of the business, and the wellbeing of those they work with.

As you might have guessed, increasing employee engagement isn't an easy task - but by using the right tools, providing the right support and committing long-term to building a positive workplace culture, it is absolutely possible.

What do disengaged service teams look like?

The first step in tackling any problem lies in being able to recognise its symptoms.

Service team disengagement isn't an 'either/or' issue. Your teams could be super engaged, entirely disengaged, or at several stages in between.

You might find it helpful to break things down into identifiable levels of engagement.

These will also help as you implement improvements. Actively disengaged teams won't turn into your company's biggest cheerleaders overnight, but if you can watch them progress through the levels gradually, you'll know your efforts are paying off.





Actively Engaged

- Very happy with their work most of the time
- Always trying to ask themselves what they can do to help others
- Doing their utmost to resolve customers' enquiries satisfactorily
- Proud to be an ambassador of the company



Engaged

- Consider themselves to be a key part of the contact centre
- Often very busy and sometimes stressed
- Hit and exceed targets often
- Will leave if a better offer comes along



Partially Engaged

- Inconsistently show signs of engaged or active engagement
- Know they're part of something bigger but not sure how they fit in
- See little or no opportunities
- Can be easily tempted to leave



Disengaged

- Spends a lot of time avoiding work
- Actively looking for other opportunities
- Doesn't get on with management and colleagues
- Not interested in improving performance



Actively Disengaged

- Only there because they have to be
- Doesn't care about the customer at all
- Goes out of their way to make life difficult for the business
- Leaving as soon as possible

Once you understand roughly where different teams (and different individuals within those teams) fall, your next move is to keep highly engaged teams motivated whilst moving non-engaged teams up the scale.

Make employee recognition central to your workplace culture

We've likely all had jobs where we weren't recognised for the work we put in. Remember how that felt?

'Lack of recognition' is constantly cited as one of the main reasons people leave their jobs. Meanwhile in a survey conducted by HubSpot, 69% of employees said they would work harder if they were better appreciated.

Feeling underappreciated puts agents on a fast track to disengagement. They become resentful, negative and apathetic towards their work. This eats away at team morale and performance.

Contact centres which recognise the work their employees, on the other hand, put in have a significantly lower turnover and employees who are motivated to work harder. As a result, customer satisfaction levels increase and the organisation performs significantly better financially as a result.

Provide recognition to those who deserve it

Praise shouldn't be a once-in-a-quarter process. Nor should it be solely reserved for those who top the leaderboards each month.

Praise hard work constantly, and make a point of praising and recognising any improvements in effort or results you may see. Be specific - not only will this create a sense of positivity for the individual in question, but other agents will be motivated to work harder to get a pat on the back from their manager too.

If there's one thing you can use here, it's those mass communication tools that so many more contact centres have adopted since the COVID 19 pandemic. A public shoutout for hard work on your team's Slack or Teams channel goes a long way.



Deliver feedback that empowers employee development

You probably have a Quality Assurance team at your contact centre that monitors and evaluates agent call quality and provides suggested areas of feedback.

If you and the team leaders that work across your business leverage this well, it can be one of your top tools for turning disengaged agents around.

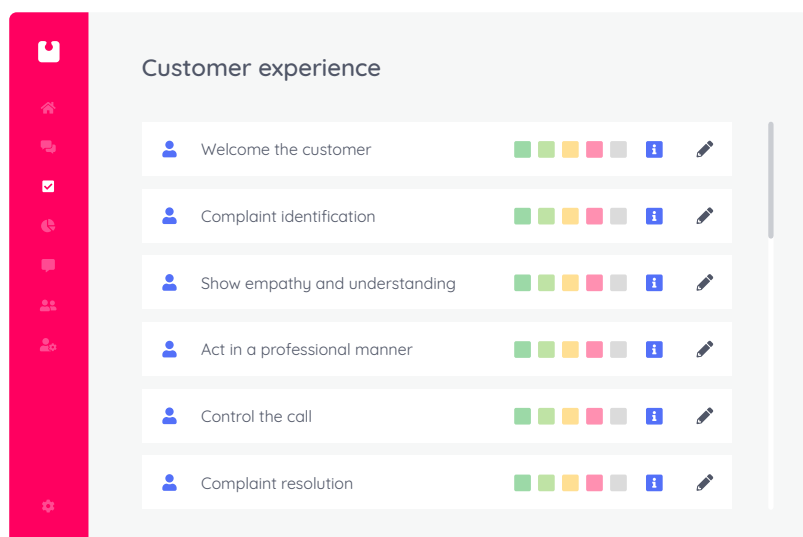
Every feedback conversation is an opportunity to start disengaged agents back on an upward trajectory - as long as they see the feedback as intelligent, constructive, fair and actionable. In fact, a survey published by Harvard Business Review found that 92% of respondents agreed with the assertion, "Negative feedback, if delivered appropriately, is effective at improving performance."

Take a smart approach to QA

Whilst automated monitoring tools are useful for evaluating a large number of customer contacts, relying on them exclusively will likely damage employee engagement even more.

Instead, keep it human. Whilst automated tools have their place, interpret the data they provide empathetically, tempered with input from your QA team's human analysis of individual customer contacts.

When you need to guide and coach your agents, outline what they're doing well, and frame any performance issues as opportunities for improvement. Provide them with clear steps and instructions on what they need to do to turn things around.



Recognise your agents as individuals

Are you demonstrating to your agents that you care about them on an individual level?

That you want to create a workplace where they can thrive?

Nobody likes feeling like their value as a person is somehow intrinsically tied to the effect they have on their team's monthly KPIs. That's why contact centres that recognise and encourage individuality create a culture of happiness and engagement.

Whilst this seems like a basic observation, it's overlooked by so many contact centres.

Does your contact centre have a huge divide between agents and team leaders, for example? If so, that can be a symptom of a workplace where frontline teams are valued far less than they should be.

See agents as more than just a resource

If you don't currently, make sure you train your team leaders in empathetic management skills from the get go. There might always be a power dynamic between team leaders and those they manage, but that doesn't mean they can't enjoy pleasant interpersonal relationships.

Make an effort to find out a bit more about agents in your team - ask them how they're doing or what they do with their spare time. Bonding over small talk and common interests establishes personal connections that make work more enjoyable for agents, and helps to increase agent engagement. In light of COVID 19, many contact centres have set up "chit-chat" and "pet-pics" channels within Microsoft Teams and Slack to drive forward this agenda.



Give agents a reason to go above and beyond

Agents who have insight into what the company's values, goals and vision are have more of an investment in its success. The mission of any business needs to be communicated effectively to those who turn up every day to work for it.

Because they're on the front line, however, agents are further away from strategic decision making and hence the overarching mission of your company. This means that it's more difficult for them to conceptualise their work as central to the success of the wider company.

If you communicate company values effectively and keep agents informed of key strategic initiatives, they will start to see themselves as part of a wider whole and take more pride in how their work contributes to that.

Start with the 'why?'

Make sure that every goal you set with agents specifically links directly to current objectives. Explain to your teams that the work they do everyday is directly linked to the success of the company, and they have an opportunity to make a real difference.

For example, you can show agents how important the work they do is in building a first-class CX. Given that CX is a major investment area for businesses right now, they're central to providing the competitive edge your company needs to thrive.



The golden rule: be the boss you needed as a junior member of staff

Whether you progressed up through the ranks of the contact centre or have a background elsewhere, this is the one, single, golden rule you must follow if any of the above advice is to succeed.

As a CX leader, you might work directly with agents everyday, or you might take less of a frontline role. Either way, your potential to make an impact here is huge. You're a senior figure within your organisation. People look to you for cues on management strategies, working relationships and appropriate workplace behaviour.

This means how you treat those you manage, how you approach feedback and how you recognise hard work has a significant impact across your contact centre.



Tacking employee disengagement? Equip yourself with the right tools

To optimise your employee engagement efforts, you'll need to regularly share feedback with agents and continually make investments in coaching.

The excuse of COVID 19 is no longer accepted by customers or your employees. To re-engage employees, you'll need to evaluate a greater volume of calls than ever before and provide in-depth, detailed and actionable feedback - all whilst dealing with workforces forced to go remote in the wake of the COVID pandemic. In a nutshell: you need to evaluate, coach and engage more, but don't have the luxury of having everyone in the same building to do so.

The problem is that traditional Quality Assurance and Performance Management workflows just aren't set up for this.

QA is broken, and has been for a long time. It often seems to be a choice between inefficient, manual QA processes rife with selection bias and a fully-automated 'computer says no' approach which agents find unfair.

However, It doesn't have to be like this.

What is Smart Quality?

Our 'Smart Quality' approach combines the speed and performance benefits of the latest automated technologies with an empathetic, human-led approach to feedback that agents respond well to.

It's how hundreds of Contact Centres across the globe are increasing their quality scores

It's how Atos ran over 10,000 coaching and feedback sessions in just six months.

It's how NS&I improved customer satisfaction 3% in just three months, with a 10% reduction in average call time.

With a complete all-in-one QA and Improvement platform and over 50 integrations available straight out of the box, Puzzel is your ticket to solving your service team disengagement issue, even with the challenges a post-COVID world brings.



About Puzzle

Puzzle is the leading European provider of cloud contact centre solutions. Every day, more than 1,100 organisations across 40 countries use our software to deliver smart customer experiences, blending the powers of people and technology to serve customers efficiently, effectively and with empathy. The Puzzle Platform enables organisations to create rich journeys for their customers, with a mix of live and self-service experiences that give people the freedom to choose when, where and how they get help. Artificial intelligence is harnessed at every touchpoint to automate tasks, provide insight, and personalise service and support. Puzzle also includes a suite productivity and planning tools to empower managers and agents to reach their goals and continuously improve performance. With 20+ years of experience in the industry, Puzzle is the CCaaS (Contact Centre as a Service) provider organisations trust when every moment matters.

For more information, please visit www.puzzle.com.

