



Human Resources Management in Indian Call Center

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ABSTRACT

The call center industry is one of the most dynamic industries and human resource management in a call center environment is a very challenging job. Most of the employees in call center being freshers and youngsters who are in early stage of their carrier, it becomes more difficult to manage the work force in call center. As no specific technical skill is required apart from good communication and other such aspects, finding the manpower to do the job is quite easier. But too much of work pressure, striving towards perfection in call transactions as required and monotony of job are a few aspects because of which employees tend to resign soon. This study aims at finding various methods like rewards and recognition including training used by HR department for increasing average tenure of employees with the organization and better retention.

Introduction:

Majority of call centers use various measures to check on attrition right from selection of right candidates for the job, providing them right training, giving them best possible atmosphere at work, engaging them in various fun activities and competitions, introducing performance linked incentives, rewards and recognitions, and so on to keep employees motivated and engaged with the company. Checking on attrition helps company to control costs of new employees hiring and related costs and expenses on training. Not all the call centers are able to achieve profitability. There are many call centers that are still unable to retain right amount of work force and hence fail to deliver the quality and productivity to the client and hence getting debited with penalties form accounts receivables and thus either run in loss or shut down the business. And then there are many big names who have mastered the business to quite some extent that they can deliver productivity and quality and are able to survive in a highly competitive environment.

Call Center as an Industry and atmosphere.

Call center industry becomes a part of BPO which is a kind of arrangement where in a company outsources a few of tasks to some other company with stipulated guidelines to run the process adhering to agreed quality and productivity parameters and the payments are based on amount of work and measurements of agreed payment parameters. On the other end there are some more call centers which are fully a part of the same company whose work is executed there, called In house call centers.

Considering the type of interaction with customers, call centers can be voice based / non-voice based. Voice based call center could be either outbound (where executives make calls, mostly to prospective customers, generally to generate a lead for sale) or inbound (where executives receive calls, mostly from existing customers of company, generally acting as a customer care agents). Further to here, there will be mentions, many of which are based on study of an inbound call center done for one of the leading telecom companies of Gujarat.

Let us discuss various aspects of Human Resources Management in a call center one by one.

Hiring right manpower:

Call center is a kind of job where a person has to deal with lot of stress as he has to answer at least around 200 calls per day as a target, leaving about an average of only 2 minutes per call and in the same call, he has to ensure that the entire information required by the customer is given to him, the same is well understood by him, additional information is given to customer for his further assistance so that he does not have to call back the call center, be very polite and courteous in his

dealing so that the customer feels like a king. This means the executive / agent has to ensure a long list of guidelines given to him is adhered to; else he will and hence the call center will lose on quality and productivity parameters. One of the ideal candidate would be one who has got excellent communication skills over multiple languages that a customer might speak, a quick learner who can grasp daily briefing consisting of additions and modifications in product like schemes and value added services, who is polite and courteous, has positive attitude, who is capable to keep his calm when the customer is angry/shouting/abusing, who can deal nicely with stress and who is willing to work in shifts.

Efficient Training:

The initial training provided to the agent plays a very vital role as the agent has to pass through certification process post training and he is allowed to be a part of productive team only once he has passed the certification tests. Generally the first day of training is orientation day where the agent is made to understand the basic philosophy of the company he is working for, the history and background of the company, company's goals, products, presence in nation/globe, values, mission, vision, etc. By the end of orientation, generally the agent feels a great joy and pride working for such a big group. This is followed by product training which is on an average 10 days long. The training consists of too much theory about understanding the product, a lot of mock calls and situations that generally are faced in specific process and lot of tests to ensure that the agents are grasping the product well and are getting ready to face real scenarios that are to come in the way on day to day basis during the job. A lot of agents quit job in the initial 3 days of training either because of finding again the class room situation which they never expected or because of not being able to grasp the product details as compared to their counterparts.

Those who hit the floor after passing the certification tests evolve as very confident people as compared to what they were before training as they have passed through various time bound product knowledge tests, have handled remarkable number of mock calls and have been through various tough situations which they anticipate would arise during live calls. It is noteworthy that this confidence does not guarantee that the agent would not feel nervous or fumble during the initial calls or would not go suddenly blank on product knowledge upon being asked a simple query by the customer on call or will not perspire in 22 degree air-conditioned atmosphere while handling live customers back to back. It's all a part and parcel of the game.

Initial 3-7 days:

Being nervous and unable to attend calls comfortably and confidently are very obvious signs seen in the first few days

of the agent. A lot of care is taken in these days by ensuring buddy trainer (co-worker) sitting next to agent, floor supervisors, team leaders, trainers roaming on floor and constantly looking if the new agent needs help just to make the new agent feel comfortable and confident as this is also a time when many of the agents are not able to face live calls and quit. So, during these days, the agent is treated virtually like a prince / princess.

Retention tools used during the course of employment at later stage:

Hiring the right candidate, providing right training and getting confidence level built up for an agent is half success and calm breather as this is considered to be sign that the agent would continue for a fairly long time with the job. But now it's a stage when he finds it to be a very competitive atmosphere where his each and every second is observed and recorded in various reports and he is given feedback on daily basis on his productivity, quality, break time, hold time, speed to respond to the call, schedule adherence, break management, knowledge enhancement, et al. Being so much under microscopic observation and competition with peers builds in lot of stress in the mind of a youngster which is very difficult for an individual to deal with. On the other hand, ignoring all these factors is also not at all possible for team leaders and higher management as all this directly impacts the profitability and image of the call center. The HR department, even if it wants to reduce this pressure on the agent is more or less helpless in this regard as all these are the factors which cannot be done away with. Knowing fully well that this all is increasing the chances of attrition which would again increase the requirement of ever hunted manpower, HR more or less plays a role of a mute spectator. Without interfering in this routine process of so called employee harassment, HR seeks support of team leaders and rest of higher management for various employee engagement programmes.

Fun Activities:

HR time to time in consultation with the management organizes various fun activities to re-energize and rejuvenate the employees and their morale. The activities include having indoor games competitions, poetry and essay competitions, display of creative writing, display of drawings, etc. And then there are various days celebrated like saree day, executive day, tie day, blue day, red day, chocolate day, rose day, thanks

giving day, mismatch day, friends day, etc. Apart from that various events are organized like talent hunt, sports, games, quizzes, etc. I personally believe, may be this is the reason why so many call center employees who work in call center for years and years remain always young at heart. There is always a brighter side of a dark affair. This helps employees always keep their morale high in spite of suffering from lot of stress and facing abusive customers on daily basis.

Rewards and Recognitions:

As each and every second of employee is monitored and captured in automated reports and each of their spoken words is recorded and is analyzed randomly on quality parameters and rated on numeric scale, a lot many kinds of reports are generated, compared and documented. I vouch for this that a good call center management does not miss even a single chance to recognize any outstanding achievement of an employee how much ever small it may be. Very few examples of these include highest calls answered, minimum hold time, minimum average transaction time, highest answered percentage, highest rank based on instant customer feedback, highest referred employees, lowest absenteeism, maximum schedule adherence, lowest leaves, maximum marks in product quiz, outstanding performance in terms of quality parameters like query acknowledgement, reassurance, complete information, additional information, call resolution, apology, etc. All such achievements are mostly acknowledged and appreciated publicly by means of display boards, briefing notes, desktop message scroll, and daily briefing meetings. Apart from that various certificates and mementos are bestowed generally in monthly and quarterly Rewards and Recognitions programmes. These include recognitions on individual level and team level as well.

Conclusion:

HR department plays a very vital role in employee retention in a call center by always trying to be innovative find and implement various tips and techniques. And to a very large extent, the efforts have been able to create an image of the best possible atmosphere in the minds of employees. But on the other end there are extreme pressures of targets which many are not able to survive with; and they cannot be done away with as, otherwise, it becomes a question of not only profitability but sustainability.