



INSIDE VIEW *PAGE 14*

- 10 RESEARCH**
THE RETURN TO VOICE
- 16 WRITING WELL**
WHEN GenAI SHOULD DO THE WRITING

- 20 AUTOMATION**
WHAT CONTACT CENTERS CAN LEARN FROM ATMs
- 23 METRICS**
YOUR METRICS ARE ACCURATE... AND MISLEADING

TAKING OFF WITH THE CONTACT CENTER

HOW ULTRA-LOW-COST CARRIER VOLARIS PROVIDES EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE.

BY BRENDAN READ CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE; Q&A WITH IKER URIONAGUENA, VOLARIS

PAGE 6



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE IMAGES

AGENT EXPERIENCE
BULLYING, BURNOUT, AND
INTERPERSONAL BREAKDOWNS
PAGE 26

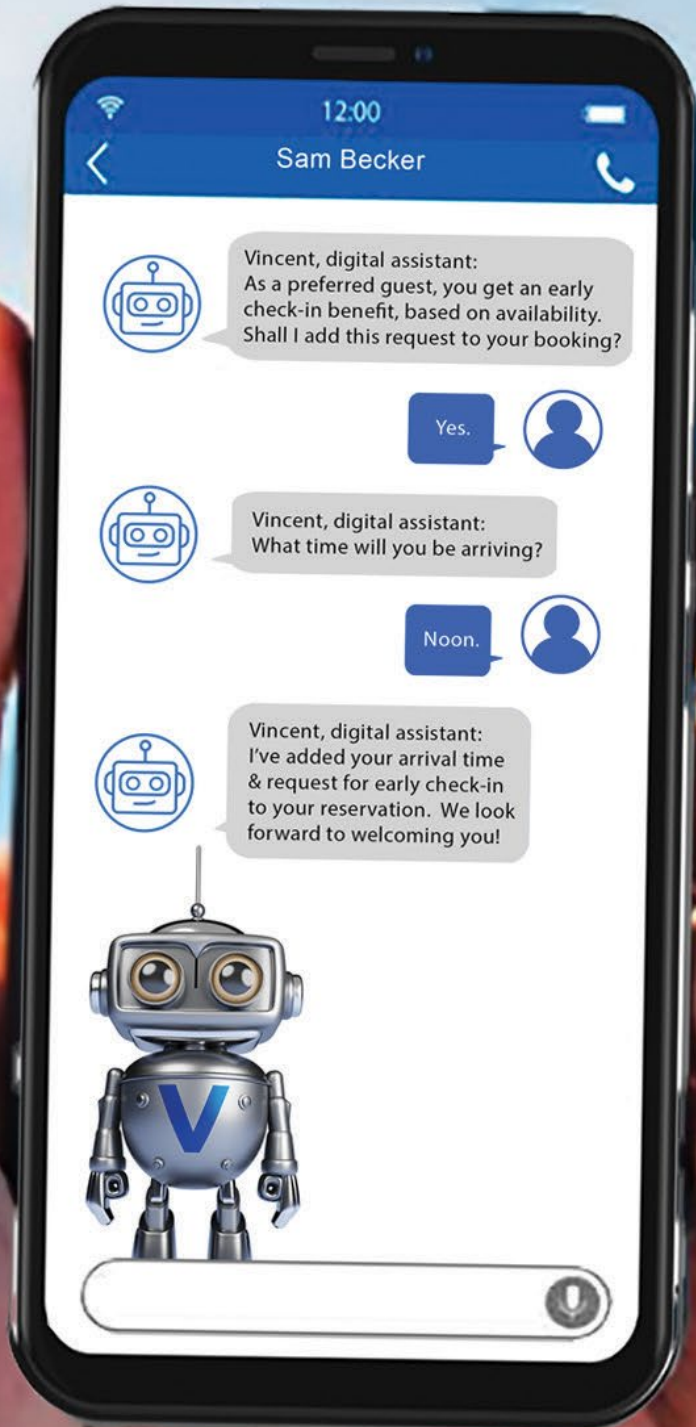
VOICE INTERACTIONS
ACCOMMODATING THE ACCENTS
PAGE 34

ACCESSIBILITY
THE HIDDEN ACCESSIBILITY CRISIS
PAGE 38

NEURODIVERSITY
THE NEURODIVERSITY DISCONNECT
PAGE 45

Artificial Intelligence. Real Results.

Verint® offers an open platform, best-of-breed automation and AI-powered bots to help you elevate the customer experience (CX) and reduce costs. From quick ROI to happier customers, our CX automation solutions can deliver **AI Business Outcomes, Now.™** Get started at www.verint.com.



THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW

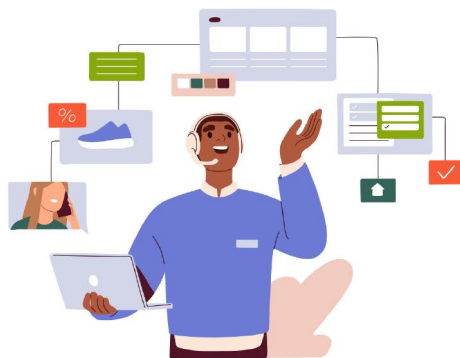
A MONTHLY DOSE OF FACTS & FIGURES FROM INSIDE THE ISSUE



47%

For high-complexity interactions requiring expert guidance, phone preference has surged dramatically from 28% in 2018 to a peak of 47% in 2024.

SOURCE
RESEARCH:
THE RETURN TO VOICE
By Steve Morrell
#RESEARCH



<50%

A 2025 survey found that less than half of mid-sized contact centers had fully functional TTY systems.

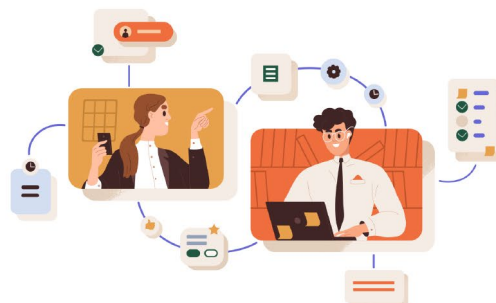
SOURCE
ACCESSIBILITY:
THE HIDDEN
ACCESSIBILITY CRISIS
By Matthew Elefant
#ACCESSIBILITY



67%

Survey found that 67% of agents feel undervalued when their accents are criticized.

SOURCE
COACH'S CORNER:
BEYOND THE ACCENT
By Mark Pereira
#COACHSCORNER



59%

52%

Up to 59% of contact center agents are at risk of burnout.

Research shows that approximately 52% of employees have experienced or witnessed workplace harassment.

SOURCE
AGENT EXPERIENCE:
BULLYING, BURNOUT,
AND INTERPERSONAL
BREAKDOWNS
By Joyce Odidison
#AGENTEXPERIENCE

FROM THE PIPELINE



LINDA HARDEN

PUBLISHER, CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE

I am proud of our March 2026 issue. I love seeing some of my "old favorite" topics, which I don't think we will ever stop writing about. Topics like metrics, writing, agent experiences, retention, and turnover. I also love seeing topics that foster inclusion, such as neurodiversity, language accents, and accessibility. We can't stop writing about technology as it continues to simplify daily tasks and improve productivity.

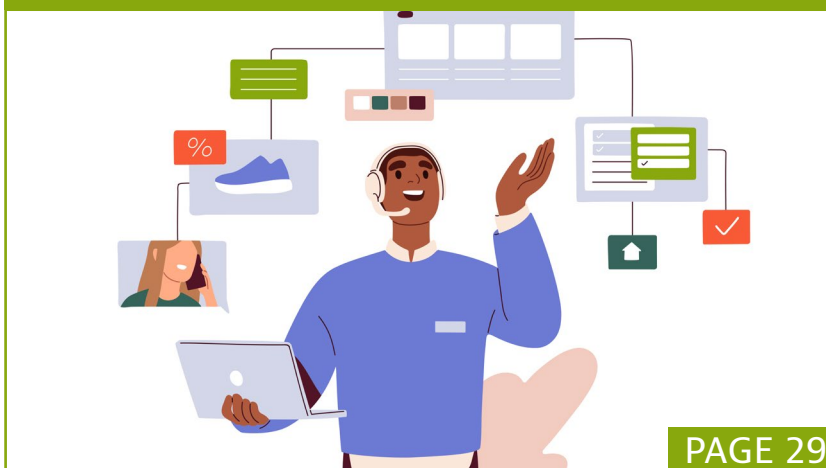
March 2026 marks issue No. 205 in our 17th year of publishing *Contact Center Pipeline*. We have covered a huge swath of topics over these years. It is interesting to see how some things continually challenge us, while others evolve.

Thanks for sticking with us through all these years. We appreciate your readership and your devotion to contact centers and customer experiences. We will continue to bring you exclusive articles featuring industry leaders offering their insider perspectives and executive interviews with from-the-trenches insights.

Linda Harden

Linda Harden
Publisher
Contact Center Pipeline

COACH'S CORNER



PAGE 29

BEYOND THE ACCENT

HOW TO BUILD INTERACTION CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE.

BY MARK PEREIRA

CONTACT CENTER INTEGRATION



PAGE 48

TURNING ACQUISITION CHAOS INTO CLARITY

HOW TO UNTANGLE MERGED CONTACT CENTER OPERATIONS.

BY MICHAEL BIDWELL

SUBSCRIBE TO PIPELINE



ONE GREAT MAGAZINE. THREE WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE.
PRINT | DIGITAL | ONLINE

Choose the right subscription for you.
SUBSCRIBE OR RENEW AT:

www.contactcenterpipeline.com/subscriptions

Corporate Subscriptions available, contact (443) 909-6951

FEATURE	6
TAKING OFF WITH THE CONTACT CENTER	
RESEARCH	10
THE RETURN TO VOICE	
INSIDE VIEW	14
AN INTERVIEW WITH JM&A GROUP	
WRITING WELL	16
WHEN GENAI SHOULD DO THE WRITING	
AUTOMATION	20
WHAT CONTACT CENTERS CAN LEARN FROM ATMS	
METRICS	23
YOUR METRICS ARE ACCURATE...AND MISLEADING	
AGENT EXPERIENCE	26
BULLYING, BURNOUT, AND INTERPERSONAL BREAKDOWNS	
COACH'S CORNER	29
BEYOND THE ACCENT	
VOICE INTERACTIONS	34
ACCOMMODATING THE ACCENTS	
ACCESSIBILITY	38
THE HIDDEN ACCESSIBILITY CRISIS	
AGENT TURNOVER	41
WHY TRADITIONAL SCREENING MISSES YOUR BIGGEST RETENTION RISK	
NEURODIVERSITY	45
THE NEURODIVERSITY DISCONNECT	
CONTACT CENTER INTEGRATION	48
TURNING ACQUISITION CHAOS INTO CLARITY	

PUBLISHER

LINDA HARDEN
linda@contactcenterpipeline.com

EDITOR

BRENDAN READ
brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com

ADVISORY BOARD

MIKE AOKI, Reflective Keynotes, Inc.
JON ARNOLD, J Arnold Associates
ELAINE AVERY, Atlantic Union Bank
DR. DEBRA BENTSON, NCCCA, Alvaria User Group
LORI BOCKLUND, Strategic Contact
TIFFANY LAREAU, Human Numbers
KATHLEEN M. PETERSON, PowerHouse Consulting, Inc.
MICHELE ROWAN, Customer Contact Strategies
LAURA SIKORSKI, Independent Consultant

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

MICHAEL BIDWELL	ROBERT BRADSHAW
MATTHEW ELEFANT	LINDA HARDEN
STEVE MORRELL	JENS NÄSSTRÖM
JOYCE ODIDISON	LESLIE O'FLAHAVAN
MARK PEREIRA	PIER RAGONE
BRENDAN READ	DINA VANCE

ADVERTISING SALES

advertise@contactcenterpipeline.com
443.909.6951

DIGITAL OPERATIONS

ANDREW MASLAR

CHIEF MARKETING TECHNOLOGIST

MARK KNIGHT

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

ERIC JACKSON

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

MARTHA SATTERFIELD

CLIENT SOLUTIONS MANAGER

BRANDI O'NEIL

CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, EMERITUS

STEVE HARDEN



CONTACT US

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

EMAIL info@contactcenterpipeline.com

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE. PRINTED IN USA USING PAPER FROM RESPONSIBLY MANAGED FORESTS & RECYCLED PLASTICS.

ADVERTISE WITH US TODAY @
linda@contactcenterpipeline.com



CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY PIPELINE PUBLISHING GROUP, INC. TO SUBSCRIBE OR FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE, CALL 443-909-6951 OR WRITE TO PIPELINE PUBLISHING GROUP, INC. AT 411 WALNUT STREET, #7566, GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FL 32043. PUBLISHER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EDITORIAL CONTENT OF CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE. VIEWS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS AND SPONSORS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE OPINION OF THE OWNERSHIP OR MANAGEMENT OF CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE, INC. OR PIPELINE PUBLISHING GROUP, INC. COPYRIGHT ©2026, PIPELINE PUBLISHING GROUP, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM THE PUBLISHER, PIPELINE PUBLISHING GROUP, INC. IS PROHIBITED.



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE IMAGES

TAKING OFF WITH THE CONTACT CENTER

HOW ULTRA-LOW-COST CARRIER VOLARIS PROVIDES EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Airlines are in the business of taking customer journeys. And they comprise two key steps that are taken together. There is the physical piece of carrying their customers safely, quickly, and making every effort to do so on time, and with a reasonable amount of comfort at market-tolerable fares.

Then there is the customer engagement piece from the first point of contact, like for information and booking, through any flight changes, delays and cancellations, and to post-flight issues like lost luggage.

Like most other transportation providers, airlines must ensure a single, up-to-date source of truth at all touchpoints: the contact center, both online and through the agents and the counter and gate staff. They also must enable swift, seamless interactions on all channels, both in-person and virtual.

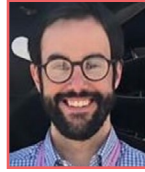
But providing quality customer service is not inexpensive. In a highly competitive environment, airlines must watch every cent. Especially the ultra-low-cost carriers that thrive on volume by carrying value-conscious-and-optimizing customers to popular destinations.

So how do the airlines enable a customer-attracting-and-retaining excellent customer experience (CX), knowing how conditions change? In particular, the ultra-low-cost carriers?



SUBSCRIPTIONS AVAILABLE @
[ContactCenterPipeline.com](https://www.ContactCenterPipeline.com)

IKER URIONAGUENA



THE VOLARIS EXPERIENCE

Volaris provides an excellent example. It is an ultra-low-cost airline that prides itself on offering customers high-quality service and a wide range of products.

Based in Mexico City, and founded in 2006, Volaris flies to 74 destinations in Mexico, the U.S., Central America, and South America on a fleet of 155 Airbus aircraft.

It is reportedly Mexico's largest air carrier; it carried over 28 million customers between January and November 2025 and over 281 million customers since its inception.

To learn more about how Volaris serves its customers, we had a virtual conversation with Iker Urionaguena, Senior Manager of Customer Care.

Q HOW DO YOU CONNECT WITH AND SERVE YOUR CUSTOMERS THROUGH THE CONTACT CENTER?

A: Our contact center addresses all information inquiries or service requests throughout the entire journey - from the moment the customer is considering purchasing a ticket - to any post-flight needs.

Our center is made up of multiskilled agents, divided into five mostly-digital channel-based teams designed to maximize productivity and reduce bottlenecks. There are teams for:

- Public social media.
- Private social media messages and WhatsApp.
- Ticket follow-ups.
- Cases from consumer protection institutions.
- Live customer voice calls from the IVR.

There is a robust ecosystem that enables real-time connection between all operational areas and the contact center, allowing everyone to stay informed about what's happening.

At the same time, the contact center serves as the company's eyes and ears, reporting in real time everything occurring on social media and in the media so that actions can be taken promptly.

"IN A TRADITIONAL CALL CENTER, AN AGENT HANDLES ONE CALL AT A TIME. BUT IN DIGITAL CHANNELS... A CHATBOT CAN HANDLE OVER 90% OF FREQUENT QUESTIONS..."

--IKER URIONAGUENA

Q IS YOUR CONTACT CENTER IN-HOUSE? OUTSOURCED? WHY THAT STRATEGY?

A: Our contact center is 100% outsourced with Concentrix. This allows us to be scalable when volume increases.

Q ARE YOUR (CONCENTRIX) AGENTS ON-PREMISE, WORK-FROM-HOME (WFH), OR HYBRID?

A: Our agents work on a hybrid plan in the contact center. Working remotely is a reward for excellent work done; those agents with room for improvement lose this benefit and go to the office.

Q YOU MENTIONED LIVE CUSTOMER VOICE CALLS. IS PHONE NOW THE EXCEPTION? HAVE YOU SHIFTED YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE TO PRIMARILY DIGITAL CHANNELS? IF SO, WHY DID YOU MAKE THAT MOVE?

A: We sell flights up to 18 months in advance. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, nearly every customer wanted to change their reservations at once. It was a crisis for airline call centers; no one could handle 18 months of customer volume in 48 hours.

At the time, we were piloting our digital service with a small bot in WhatsApp and handling some customer requests through social media.

That's when we decided to scale it to a more efficient model. So, we picked asynchronous channels - private social chat and public social chat apps and web chat - with greater market penetration that allow our agents to manage four to five conversations simultaneously instead of separate calls or emails.

In a traditional call center, an agent handles one call at a time. But in digital channels (social media, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger), a chatbot can handle over 90% of frequent questions or even check in passengers. For more complex cases, AI can help agents manage multiple conversations simultaneously.

Q WHAT WERE YOUR GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS TRANSFORMATION?

A: Our goals were scalability and speed combined with high customer satisfaction (CSAT).

Q WHAT SUPPLIER(S) DID YOU SELECT FOR IT AND WHY?

A: We first selected Emplify to answer questions on public social media. We chose it because it is also the platform that our marketing team uses to upload campaigns.

We then chose Verint for WhatsApp, private social media, and web chat. We selected the company because their solutions allowed us to achieve our goals and outcomes.

Q OUTLINE THE IMPLEMENTATION. WHAT STEPS DID YOU TAKE?

A: The first step was to integrate all our customer service cells into a single area with unified KPIs and training. This allowed us to build one multiskilled team that could scale.

From there, we moved into digital channels, including an AI bot that could contain a percentage of conversations. When the bot was unable to resolve issues, we used selected channels that enabled us to respond more efficiently, handling multiple conversations simultaneously 24/7.

These features and methods improved the CX by being faster and eliminating the need to repeat the conversations as in traditional email and voice channels.

Finally, we implemented a push-notification strategy so customers could proactively self-manage instead of reacting after the fact.

Q HOW DID YOU INTEGRATE THE DIGITAL CHANNELS WITH THE VOICE CHANNEL?

A: We reserved the voice channel for sales calls and gradually migrated all service calls to digital channels. In the IVR, we added deflection options so customers could manage their own requests or be assisted through digital channels.

Q HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO CUSTOMERS' INQUIRIES WITH THE AI TOOLS?

A: On the Live Agents platform, we use an AI-managed assistant that provides accurate, on-the-spot answers based on our policies and the customers' language (English or Spanish).

Q ARE YOUR IN-PERSON COUNTER AND GATE CUSTOMER SERVICE STAFF CONNECTED TO THE PLATFORM AND TOOLS? DID THIS CHANGE WITH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND IF SO, HOW?

A: Yes. They are connected to the platform and tools to ensure they have all the information to solve customer requests. When we made the digital transformation the airports' staff engaged with more prepared customers, so, as a result, the time they spend at the counters and gates is less.

"LIKE ANY DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, OURS REQUIRED A MINDSET SHIFT. THE AGENTS' RESISTANCE HAS FADED AS WE HAVE INVOLVED THEM IN THE SOLUTION: AND THEY HAVE SEEN THAT THEIR WORK HAS BECOME EASIER."

Q WHAT, IF ANY ISSUES, DID YOU ENCOUNTER AND HOW WERE THEY RESOLVED?

A: Like any digital transformation, ours required a mindset shift. The agents' resistance has faded as we have involved them in the solution: and they have seen that their work has become easier.

We created an AI filter for agents:

- Incoming messages are summarized by AI.
- AI consults internal policy databases to ensure up-to-date responses.
- It suggests a reply.
- It translates if needed.
- The agent simply reviews and sends.

What used to take 10 minutes - reading, translating, checking policies, drafting a reply - now takes seconds.

Q WHAT HAVE BEEN THE RESULTS?

A: The "Triple Crown" of CX. Consistent digital conversation's growth, improved CSAT, and reduced costs. We've also seen a decrease in voice volume as our customers switched to digital.

Q WHAT ARE YOUR NEXT STEPS FOR YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE?

A: The next steps are to continue implementing AI use cases that allow customers to self-manage without having to wait in line, provide an experience as if they were interacting with a real person, and to better understand our customers to provide personalized service.

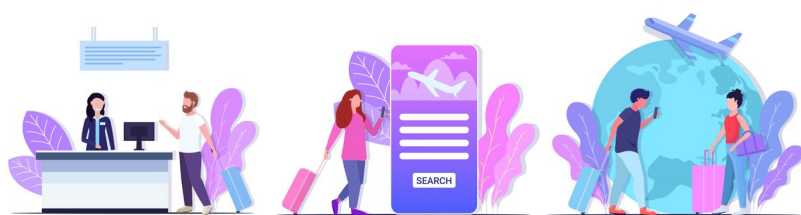
Q WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER CONTACT CENTERS THAT ARE LOOKING TO MAKE A SIMILAR TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY?

A: I recommend starting step by step: identify the repetitive processes customers request most and work on making them more efficient. Little by little - and without stopping - you will see results quickly.

AT A GLANCE

1 Number of agents

--342



2 On-premise and remote (percentage)

--65% on-premise

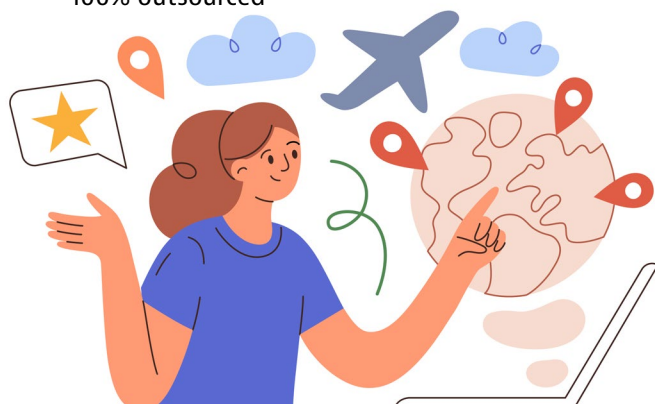
--35% remote

3 Location of on-premise agent contact centers

--Two locations in Mexico

4 In-house or outsourced (percentage)

--100% outsourced

**5 Split between inbound and outbound? (percentage)**

--100% inbound

6 Split between different inbound channels e.g., voice, digital (percentage)

--80% through digital channels and 20% voice. 2024 was 74% through digital channels and 26% voice

7 Key contact center technologies used

--Salesforce and Zendesk for email services

--Verint for WhatsApp, private social, web chat

--Emplifi for social media

--Avaya for inbound services



Brendan Read is Editor of Contact Center Pipeline. He has been covering and working in customer service and sales and for contact center companies for most of his career. Brendan has edited and written for leading industry publications and has been an industry analyst. He also has authored and co-authored books on contact center design, customer support, and working from home. Brendan can be reached at brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com.

Do your workforce management practices meet the needs of your contact center?

Find out by letting the subject matter experts at Human Numbers run a WFM Health Check on your staff group. Our review includes deep analysis of your data at the interval level and screens the key components for successful planning. Our test results will show you how well you've set up your forecasts and schedules and point out any deficiencies you may need to fix.

For more information visit www.HumanNumbers.com/HealthCheck

\$995 WFM Health Check

Human
Numbers

Re-humanize your workforce



770.609.6565 • info@humannumbers.com • www.HumanNumbers.com



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

THE RETURN TO VOICE

WHY CUSTOMERS PREFER HUMAN CONNECTION FOR COMPLEX INTERACTIONS.

In an era where businesses invest billions in digital self-service platforms, a surprising trend has emerged: customers are increasingly turning to voice channels when their needs go beyond simple queries.

Recent survey data from ContactBabel's "US Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide" reveals a fundamental shift in consumer behavior that challenges the conventional wisdom (and investment strategy) of digital transformation.

A comprehensive study of 1,000 U.S. consumers examined channel preferences across three distinct interaction types: high-emotion situations (such as receiving an incorrect order), high-urgency scenarios (like checking flight arrival times), and high-complexity tasks (such as mortgage application guidance).

The findings paint a clear picture of when and why customers prefer to call a business – regardless of the knowl-

edge that they will almost certainly face a wait – rather than choose a theoretically simpler and less effortful channel (see **FIGURE 1**).

THE VOICE PREFERENCE ACROSS ALL SCENARIOS

Telephony emerged as the dominant choice across all three interaction types, with particularly striking numbers in complex scenarios.



SUBSCRIPTIONS AVAILABLE @
ContactCenterPipeline.com

CUSTOMERS ARE SEEKING SOMETHING MORE FUNDAMENTAL: CONFIDENCE AND REASSURANCE.

For high-complexity interactions requiring expert guidance, phone preference has surged dramatically from 28% in 2018 to a peak of 47% in 2024. Even as this figure has moderated slightly, voice remains the clear frontrunner, outpacing all digital alternatives.

The pattern holds remarkably consistent across high-emotion interactions as well, where 42% of respondents chose phone as their preferred method for notifying a company about an incorrect delivery. This preference for voice persists despite years of corporate investment in email, web chat, and self-service portals designed to deflect these exact types of contacts.

Perhaps most telling is the shift in urgent interactions. Pre-pandemic research had positioned web self-service as the clear winner for time-sensitive queries. Today, telephony has reclaimed this territory, suggesting that speed alone is no longer the primary consideration.

Customers are seeking something more fundamental: confidence and reassurance. It should, however, be noted that web self-service enjoyed something of a resurgence in 2025, although it still trails live voice.

UNDERSTANDING THE PANDEMIC EFFECT

The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have created a lasting transformation in customer behavior.

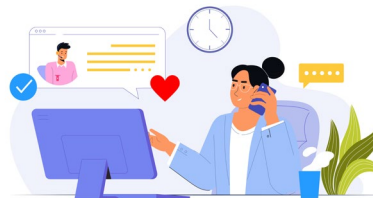
Survey data collected annually since 2018 shows a pronounced jump in voice preference beginning in late 2020 and continuing through subsequent years. This shift coincides with widespread reports of deteriorating customer service quality as companies struggled with remote work transitions and staffing challenges.

The research suggests customers may have experienced frustration with digital channels during this period and reverted to the channel they associate with reliability and resolution.

Even as service levels have recovered to some extent, the preference for voice communication has largely persisted, indicating that customer trust, once lost, is difficult to regain.

Interestingly, the data shows that face-to-face interactions have also rebounded somewhat for complex and emotional issues, though not to pre-pandemic levels.

This suggests that what customers truly value is not necessarily the phone itself, but rather human interaction and real-time guidance from an actual person who can understand nuance and adapt to their specific situation.



THE QUESTION FOR BUSINESSES IS NOT WHETHER TO MAINTAIN VOICE CHANNELS, BUT HOW TO OPTIMIZE THEM FOR THE TYPES OF INTERACTIONS WHERE THEY REMAIN IRREPLACEABLE.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE BY DEMOGRAPHICS

Age plays a significant role in channel preference, with older demographics showing the strongest preference for telephony across all scenarios.

However, the trend is not exclusively generational. Even younger cohorts, who might be expected to gravitate toward digital channels, show substantial phone preference for complex interactions.

Income levels show less variation in channel preference, with telephony ranking as the top choice across all household income brackets for complex queries. This universality suggests that the desire for human connection during challenging interactions transcends socioeconomic boundaries.

THE BUSINESS DISCONNECT

Organizations – despite spending over 50% more on CX investment into digital channels than the voice channel – seem to agree with customers (see **FIGURE 2**).

When organizations were asked which channels they thought would be best for customers across the three scenarios, telephony dominated their responses even more than it did for customers.

Yet many of these same businesses continue to invest heavily in deflection strategies aimed at reducing call volumes.

This paradox highlights a fundamental misalignment: businesses recognize that voice is what customers need, yet operational metrics often penalize the very channel that delivers the best customer experience for non-basic interactions.

CUSTOMER PREFERENCE FOR LIVE VOICE CHANNEL, 2018-2025

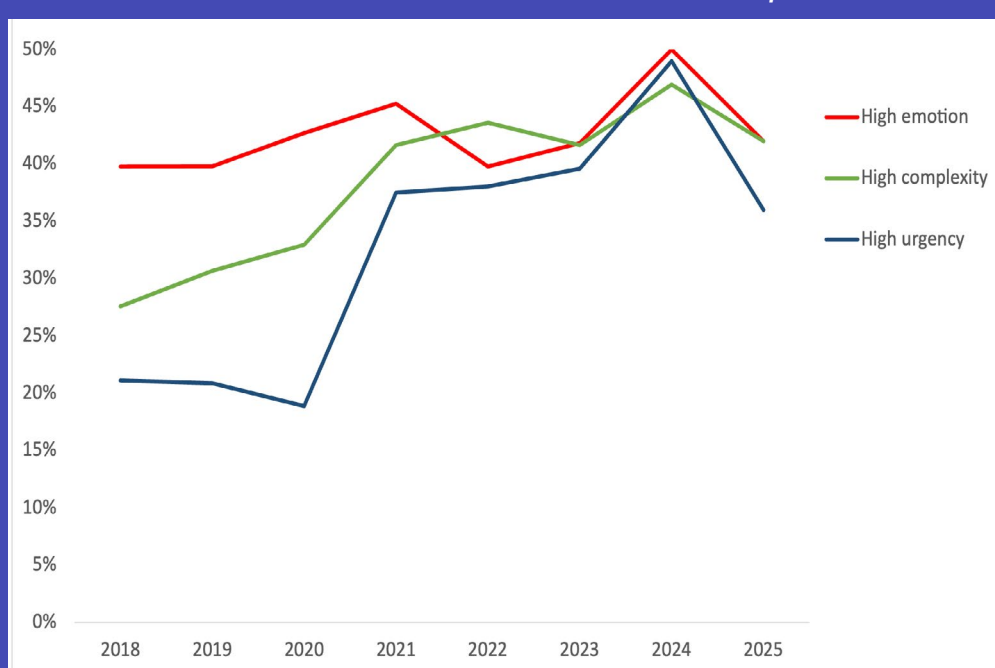


FIGURE 1

ORGANIZATIONS' VIEWS ON BEST CHANNELS FOR CUSTOMERS TO USE

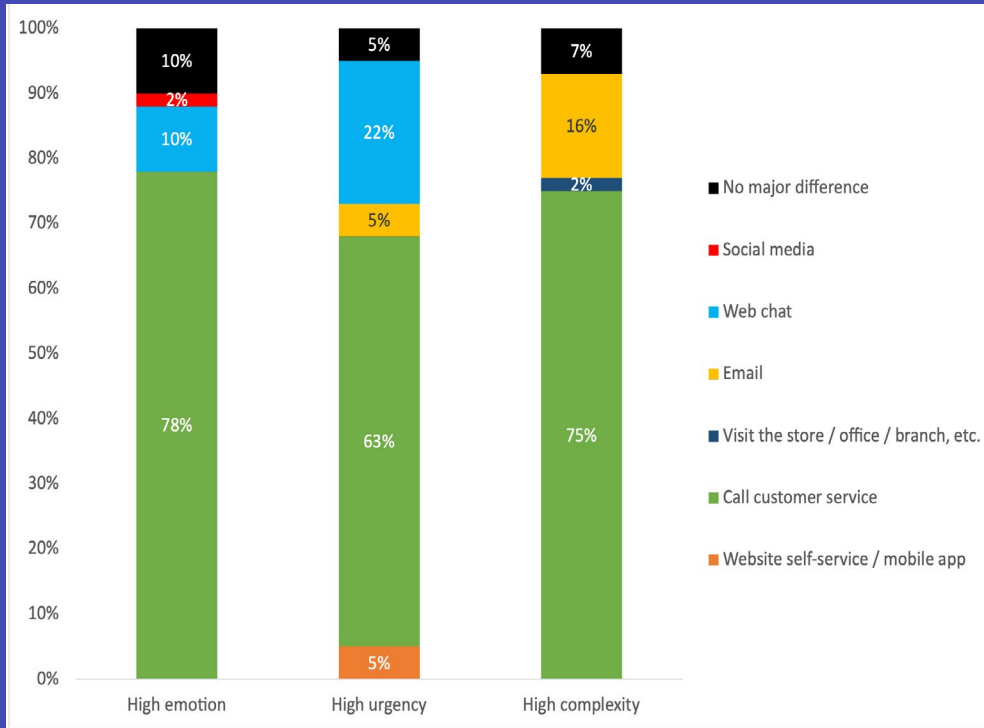


FIGURE 2

As businesses plan their customer experience strategies, this data presents a clear message.

While digital channels excel for simple, straightforward tasks, complex, emotional, or urgent interactions require the flexibility, empathy, and real-time problem-solving that only human conversation can currently provide.

The question for businesses is not whether to maintain voice channels, but how to optimize them for the types of interactions where they remain irreplaceable.

The 2026 US Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide is based on research with 1,000 U.S. customers and around 200 U.S. organizations. It is available for download from <https://www.contactbabel.com/the-us-customer-experience-decision-makers-guide/>



Steve Morrell is the Managing Director of *ContactBabel*, which was founded in 2001 to provide high-quality research and analysis to the US and UK contact center industries.

Invite Your Colleagues to sign-up for our weekly *eNewsletter!*

- Featuring insight from the top subject-matter experts, on the most pressing, ever-changing contact center management topics.
- Share our expertise with your management teams and colleagues with in-depth articles, first-party research, and forward-thinking perspectives *that you won't find anywhere else.*

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER BY VISITING OUR WEBSITE:

[CLICK HERE!](#)

Contact Center pipeline

THE TOP 5 BLOG POSTS ON BLOG.CONTACTCENTERPIPELINE.COM

EXCLUSIVE CONTENT FROM OUR TEAM OF CALL CENTER EXPERTS
NEW POSTS EVERY WEEK (TUESDAY - THURSDAY)

The New Value of Unstructured Data

BY CHRIS MARRON

<https://bit.ly/46SL0Ba>



Avaya at a Crossroads

BY TOM HANSON

<https://bit.ly/4c7yln7>



CCP BLOG'S
TOP 5
MOST POPULAR
POSTS FROM
FEBRUARY



Why Become AI-, Data-, and Cloud-Centric

BY JON ARNOLD

<https://bit.ly/4uc3lcn>



Managing The Data Fuel

BY BRENDAN READ

<https://bit.ly/473cMGb>



FOLLOW US
ON X
@ccpipeline

The Other Reason to Outsource

BY PIER RAGONE

Yes, there are plenty of practical reasons to outsource your contact center. Cost, coverage, scalability, language support, and speed all make sense on paper.

But there's a deeper, more strategic reason companies should consider. And that is whether they want to have a productive relationship with their contact center.

<https://bit.ly/4s9nt2e>



SMART INSIGHTS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR THE CONTACT CENTER

blog.contactcenterpipeline.com



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE IMAGES



AN INTERVIEW WITH JM&A GROUP

HOW AUTOMATION AND AI ARE ADDING VALUE.

In our September 2025 issue, we featured an article, “The Road Ahead for Auto Finance CX,” which examined automotive finance lending and included an interview with Tod Chisholm, President of Integrated Financial Technologies (IFT).

Following on that story, we wanted to share what happens once the deal is made to purchase the vehicle. We found just such an organization, JM&A Group, to share how they support the unique complexity of serving both consumers and dealers with the same customer service team, and how automation and AI are adding value by enabling greater efficiency and smoother customer experiences.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Justin Pecaut. He is the Vice President of Customer Services at JM&A Group, a subsidiary of JM Family Enterprises. Over the past 18 years, Justin has worked in various roles within JM Family, including Total

JUSTIN PECAUT



Rewards, Human Resources, Sales, and Operations. Outside of his professional life, he loves spending time outdoors and embarking on adventures with his five children.

Q JUSTIN, YOU HAVE AN AMAZING STORY TO SHARE ABOUT THE JM&A ORGANIZATION AND ITS FOUNDER, JIM MORAN. PLEASE INTRODUCE US TO YOU, YOUR ORGANIZATION, AND WHAT YOU DO.

A. I have had the privilege of working with JM Family for 18 years. My current role is leading our Claims and Customer Services team. The organization and culture are very unique - we truly live up to the "Family" in our name, and the company invests time and resources into our associates' success at home and at work.

The company was founded by Mr. Moran, a fantastic businessman and an even better human. His leadership and intention in creating our company are why our culture and our ability to invest in our clients, consumers, and associates are top tier. The way we treat our associates is undoubtedly why we have a company where our teams feel connected and our customers are well taken care of.

Q PLEASE SHARE WITH US ANY "STATS" ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION. WE WOULD LOVE TO KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT THAT. WHAT DOES YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM LOOK LIKE? HOW ARE YOU STRUCTURED? HOW MANY AGENTS? HOURS OF OPERATION? TYPES OF COMMUNICATIONS AND HOW MANY HANDLED?

A. JM&A Group's primary service is centered on products that protect vehicles, and we have more than 14 million contracts in force across all 50 states and Puerto Rico. To support our dealer customers and contract-holders, we have a Customer Services team of more than 400 people. We have around 280 associates who process claims on vehicle mechanical failures, GAP, and Road Hazard Tire.

Alongside the claims processing teams, we have Customer Experience and Dealer Assistance teams. Their role is to support consumers in navigating the use of their contracts and dealers with technology and administrative questions around our product. This team consists of about 60 associates.

The remaining teams are Quality Assurance, Operational Analytics, Recruiting & Training, as well as a Field Claims Team, which are associates across the country supporting unique escalations and helping our dealers improve processes, and finally a project team focused on scaling new and innovative processes across the contact centers.

Q I WOULD EXPECT THAT YOU SERVE TWO AUDIENCES IN YOUR CLAIMS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER. FIRST, YOUR DEALERS AND SECOND, YOUR CUSTOMERS. THEY COULD SEEM A BIT AT ODDS WITH EACH OTHER. HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO FOSTER LOYALTY AND TRUST FOR BOTH AUDIENCES WHILE CREATING MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS? DO YOU HAVE SEPARATE GROUPS TO HANDLE DEALERS AND CUSTOMERS, OR ARE THEY SHARED AMONG AGENTS?

WE HAVE FOUND THAT MANY PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO TALK TO A HUMAN FOR SIMPLE TASKS UNTIL SOMETHING ISN'T GOING RIGHT, AND THEN THEY EXPECT SOMEONE TO HELP RIGHT AWAY.

A. As you noted, our two main audiences are dealers and consumers, and while you may think their interests are at odds, we believe that what's right for the customer is ultimately right for the dealer and is simply good business. Our dealer body wants to keep a customer for life, so we have a lot of discussions on customer retention, ways to increase the consumer experience and ultimately expand our ability to serve the customer through our dealers. It's through that lens that our company has operated for nearly 60 years and maintained our reputation and high integrity. To drive loyalty and trust, we ensure our teams understand what customers and dealers value and work to preserve and advance that in every interaction.

We are structured to support both dealers and customers together, not separately, because of how connected the relationship is. The dealer sells our contract to the customer, and the customer comes back to the dealer to have their vehicle repaired and maintained, which are critical retention points for the customer-dealer relationship.

Therefore, supporting both audiences enables greater efficiency and a smoother customer experience. We are designed to be able to solve inquiries in as few contact points as possible, which is a benefit to everyone. The trade-off we make is that it takes more time for an associate to gain full proficiency in their role because they need to understand both the dealer and customer needs.

We offset this with very low turnover for a contact center. We have about 5% of people exit the organization and another 5% of people who move to other parts of the organization each year. Across our contact centers, the average tenure is 10 years, which is a testament to the way our associates support each other and the culture within our organization.

We also leverage technology to handle contacts more seamlessly, including dealer and consumer portals built on the same database and CRM. This allows us to leverage the same processes and streamline interactions by having a single source of truth. If we didn't design our processes like this, we estimate we would need 25-33% more associates.

Q YOU ARE INTEGRATING AI INTO YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER. SINCE SO MUCH OF YOUR BUSINESS IS MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DEALERS AND CONSUMERS, ARE THERE ANY CHALLENGES TO KEEPING YOUR "HUMAN TOUCH" EXPERIENCE PART OF YOUR INTERACTIONS? IF SO, HOW ARE YOU INCORPORATING THAT? IF NOT, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MINIMIZE THAT?

A. We believe strongly as an organization in the intersection of technology and human touchpoints. While we leverage both traditional (rules-based) intelligence and generative AI, we are a people-first company so the majority of our processes have people in the loop. The complexity of claims decisions - no two are alike - maintains the need for our teams to play a vital role in our service delivery.

CONTINUED ON PAGE PAGE 18



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

WHEN GenAI SHOULD DO THE WRITING

IT CAN HELP THE AGENTS AND THE CUSTOMERS.

The poets, newspaper journalists, and novelists may be weeping into their embroidered hankies about generative AI (GenAI) being the death of original writing.

But contact center agents - whose performance is measured in the number of emails or tickets they reply to - are, no doubt, celebrating all the ways GenAI can make their jobs easier and their responses to customers better.

Of course, writing with AI comes with risks: the tool can give incorrect answers; overuse AI-typical words like "leverage;" and use a blandly positive tone that's out of synch with the topic or simply grating.

For contact center agents, using GenAI is worth the risks. Answering customers' emails all day can be like working on a factory assembly line; it just makes sense to use a tool that automates some of the challenging tasks of writing well.

Here are five ways to use (and benefit from) GenAI in writing.

1 PROOFREADING

A GenAI tool is better at proofreading than the tools many agents use now: Microsoft Editor or the spellcheck built into their CRM software. Editor is a cursed tool that frequently gives incorrect advice. (Editor told me I'd spelled "novelists" incorrectly when I spellchecked this article.)

The CRM's built-in spellcheck will need customizing or it will flag product names and other brand wording as spelling errors. AI just makes proofreading easier.

Agents can prompt an AI tool to "List and fix the spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes in this draft email..." and the AI will provide a corrected version and a list of the changes it made.

MS Editor makes the writer figure out how to correct many of the errors it finds; AI tools just fix the errors. For contact center agents who must churn out email responses, AI is a better option.



2 CUSTOMIZING RESPONSES BASED ON EMAIL TEMPLATES

To maintain efficiency and consistency, contact center agents use templates or macros to respond to customers. These prewritten “form letters” can be helpful aids, but agents must customize the templates to create worthwhile responses, ones that customers can trust.

Some templates include prompts for customizing, such as:

- *“We’re sorry to learn you’re disappointed with the [insert product name] that you purchased on [date]...”*
- *“Thanks for contacting us. [Insert empathy statement.]”*

But customizing something that’s already written can be a lot harder than it looks. While it’s relatively easy for agents to drop in a purchase date or a product name, weaving an expression of authentic empathy into a template or adding a correction of a customer’s misunderstanding requires substantial editing.

Agents must then be willing and able to add freetexted sentences into an already-written template. It’s hard work that has to be done quickly and separately.

GenAI can make it easier to prepare a customized response based on an email template. The agent would include the customer’s incoming email and the email template in the prompt. Yes, the prompt would be quite long, but most of the content would be copy-and-pasted.

Here’s how to prompt the AI:

“Using this email template [insert the email template here], write a response to this customer’s email [insert the customer’s email here].

Customize the email template by using details the customer has shared in their incoming email. Base your response on the email template, but do not use the template as-is.

Delete any information from the template that’s not relevant to the customer’s question and add customized information to make the response particular to the customer.

Use the customer’s details about what they purchased, what they want from our company, how they’re feeling, the questions or complaints about their purchase, or the type of help they’re looking for.”

3 CHECKING OR CHANGING THE TONES OF RESPONSES

AI tools can help agents improve more than *what* they’re writing to customers; the tools can help agents adjust *how* they’re writing.

Shaping the tone of an email response can be a fiddly, time-consuming task, but GenAI can help with prompts like these:

“Revise this email response to give it a friendlier, more personal tone.

“Check the tone of this email response to ensure it is understanding without being conciliatory because we cannot agree to the customer’s request for a refund.

“Check the tone of this email to ensure it complies with our company’s Brand Voice and Tone Guidelines [link to Guidelines document] and edit the tone if it does not comply. List the changes you’ve made to the email.”

4 AS A READING TOOL

Reading hundreds of incoming emails is difficult. Because customers are often asking the same questions or making the same complaints, their emails blend together.

The more emotional the customer, the more they write. Upset customers write long emails; figuring out what they’re asking for can be like trying to find the proverbial needle in the haystack.

AI tools can digest detailed information quickly and prepare the agent to respond accurately and with less effort. Here’s how:

- **Summarize a long email from a customer by listing the customer’s questions.** Some customers write 10 paragraphs when one would be enough.

Before replying to one of those 500-word email treatises, an agent could prompt GenAI to list the customer’s questions, both stated and implied.

UPSET CUSTOMERS WRITE LONG EMAILS; FIGURING OUT WHAT THEY’RE ASKING FOR CAN BE LIKE TRYING TO FIND THE PROVERBIAL NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK.

- **Summarize an emotional email from a customer by stripping out the feelings and creating a neutral version.**

An airline I worked with a few years ago received a 969-word email from a customer. He was heartbroken and furious because problems with his visa and other travel documents meant his international travel was disrupted, and he was temporarily detained at the airport mid-itinerary.

He used emotional phrases like these:

- I am extremely disappointed.*
- I have suffered your abuse of power.*
- I cannot express how frustrated I was.*
- I beg you for moral compensation for all the distress your staff created.*
- You have permanently broken my trust.*

The heightened emotion in the customer’s email made it harder for agents to understand what happened and what the airline could do to make things better.

If GenAI had been available, the agent could have told the AI tool to create a summary of the customer’s email that focused on the facts of the complaint and stripped out the feelings.

Using the GenAI-created summary, the agent could have drafted a response that addressed the problems the airline traveler experienced. Specifically, the problems the airline could solve or compensate for.

Then, the agent could have added expressions of empathy and sympathy that acknowledged the customer's feelings.

5 FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Contact centers are the rare workplace where a person can start in an entry-level job (phone agent, paid hourly) and rise through the ranks to manager or director.

A star customer service agent becomes a QA specialist, then Team Lead, Training Manager, Workforce Manager, even Director. The contact center is a great place to grow!

GenAI CAN HELP, LITERALLY...BUT EVERY PERSON WHO USES GenAI IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRODUCT IT CREATES.

However, many talented customer service agents have rough-around-the-edges writing skills. They usually begin their careers by talking to customers on the phone, so their speaking and listening skills are more important and noticeable than their writing skills.

Some agents have more product knowledge, emotional intelligence, and hustle than formal higher education. Their promotion to email, chat, or social media channels can expose weak or unpolished writing skills. This deficit can cause some agents' career growth to stall.

Every career advancement in a contact center demands new and more sophisticated writing skills. When smart agents who want to climb the career ladder lack writing skills, they may never realize their ambitions.

GenAI can help, literally. When used as a proofreading tool, it can prevent the embarrassment that surface errors (like "alot") cause.

When a former customer service agent-now-newly-promoted-Training Manager has to write an onboarding curriculum for the first time, GenAI can help.

When a new Workforce Manager has to create a budget proposal, GenAI can edit the draft to make it more convincing.



It's not "cheating" to use GenAI to write or even to fill in gaps in your writing skills, but every person who uses GenAI is responsible for the product it creates.

Whether the AI tool checked your writing for errors, drafted the entire document for you, or made it more interesting by shaping your tone, you - the writer - are responsible for ensuring the product meets the readers' needs. When GenAI tools help smart people advance in the contact center, everyone wins. 



E-WRITE's Leslie O'Flahavan helps people write well to customers. She delivers customized training for frontline agents, social media managers, and contact center leaders. She is a problem-solver for all written channels: email, chat, text and social. Leslie is a [LinkedIn Learning](#) author of five customer service writing courses. Connect with Leslie on [LinkedIn](#) or follow her on [Twitter](#).



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

I'll give you a quick example: When a consumer calls us to file a GAP claim, they have just experienced a total loss of their vehicle, likely from theft or accident. Our associates are phenomenal at supporting the emotions of the customer and helping them navigate the local and state laws to get their claim paid. We cannot replicate that people-first experience with technology, but we can augment what our agents can do to provide a faster and more convenient experience.

In the cases where a process is fully self-service, we are careful to make sure these are transactional in nature. We only deploy those processes where the customer or dealer wants the convenience of self-service.

On top of that, if something in our self-service processes doesn't go as planned, we have an associate support that transaction immediately. We have found that many people don't want to talk to a human for simple tasks until something isn't going right, and then they expect someone to help right away. We want to deliver that level of service for those who want it, "meeting our customers where they are."

WE BELIEVE STRONGLY AS AN ORGANIZATION IN THE INTERSECTION OF TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN TOUCHPOINTS.

• INSIDE VIEW

Q IS AI SERVING YOUR CLAIMS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY? IF SO, HOW?

A. Yes, to both. One example of efficiency is our internal AI agent. We sell products on thousands of different forms, which can be governed by different processes or policies. Additionally, each form has to comply with 50 distinct sets of state laws. This agent acts similarly to how we all use ChatGPT, it takes key information of the transaction and provides a response on how to move forward with a link to the document for reference. Without AI, we couldn't accomplish this. It saves us time on every call and provides extra bandwidth by providing accurate information and limiting questions.

Thank you, Justin. We appreciate you sharing your insights about your contact center experiences. Find out more details about the [JM Family organization](#). 



Linda Harden is President and Founder of Pipeline Publishing Group and Contact Center Pipeline magazine.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO CONTACT CENTER CONSULTING

The outcome you can expect?
High value results driven by your business needs!



Experienced consultants
averaging 25+ years
in the industry



**Practical knowledge of
technology and operations**
including challenges
and keys to success



Proven project frameworks
tailored to each client's needs
and objectives



Keen strategic insights
to drive business, operations,
and technology plans

BRIDGING STRATEGY, TECHNOLOGY AND OPERATIONS SINCE 2004

Our fresh approach to contact center consulting



DEFINE

Strategy and Vision
Assessment
Recommendations
Roadmap



PLAN

Requirements
Sourcing Options
Vendor Evaluation
Business Case



IMPLEMENT

Project Plan
Design/Development
Testing
Pilot and Rollout



OPTIMIZE

Operations
Technology
Support Models
Monitoring & Management

**WHETHER YOU NEED TO PLAN FOR, DEFINE, ASSESS,
EVALUATE OR IMPLEMENT CHANGE, WE CAN HELP.**



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

WHAT CONTACT CENTERS CAN LEARN FROM ATMs

WHY ATMs SHOULD MAKE AGENTS FEEL BETTER ABOUT THEIR JOBS.

When automated teller machines (ATMs) first showed up in the late 1970s, many predicted a steady decline in bank tellers.

I can remember working at a small community bank in 1988 and having our first ATM installed. It created a lot of discussion at my level - I was a teller at the time - about potential job replacement.

After all, ATMs could do the core transactional work like dispense cash, accept deposits, and report balances.

But that didn't happen, for reasons I will explore in this article. Tellers are still here but in a more professional role. And coming full circle, my son just graduated college and started his first professional role as a universal banker.



**...THE [ATMs] TOOK OVER
PREDICTABLE, REPEATABLE
TASKS, WHILE HUMANS
MOVED UP THE VALUE CHAIN.**

This parable matters for call centers today as AI and chatbots will change how customer service is delivered, but they will not make human agents obsolete. Instead, they'll shift the job toward real-time judgment, empathy, and complex decision-making where machines still fall short.

A CAUTION AGAINST LINEAR THINKING

Economists who studied the rise of ATMs found there were two distinct outcomes.

First, automation replaced routine aspects of the teller job and reduced the number of tellers required per branch.

But second, ATMs lowered operating costs per branch and made it economical for banks to open many more branches.

The result was total teller employment did not collapse. Instead, and surprisingly, it grew for a time as the role shifted toward sales, problem-solving, and higher-touch customer service (source: Bessen, James E. "Toil and Technology". *Finance & Development*, International Monetary Fund).

In other words, the machines took over predictable, repeatable tasks, while humans moved up the value chain.

Back in the day, these changes were hard to digest for the actual bank employees (me). As ATM networks expanded, less tellers per branch were required. New branches weren't built immediately, and teller job growth plateaued for a while before it started to grow again.

Once it did start to grow, often those teller jobs morphed into personal banking - or operations roles like call centers - which took more training.

CALL CENTER VS. BANK TELLER WORK

That pattern of automation substituting for repetitive tasks, while expanding or reshaping complementary job skills, is an applicable model for contact centers. It shows how organizations and markets reconfigure themselves around new capabilities.

Both bank tellers and call center agents perform a blend of routine and non-routine tasks, with automation excelling at the predictable functions such as balance inquiries, password resets, and billing questions.

In addition, both roles involve direct customer interaction, requiring employees to humanize the experience.

In my work conducting observations in contact centers, I consistently see how much on-the-spot judgment agents must use.

These employees are often making decisions with incomplete information, weighing short-term fixes against long-term customer value, and applying discretionary empathy, whether that means choosing to escalate a case or to offer a goodwill credit.

I watch agents navigate rapid task switching and highly nuanced interactions, as callers frequently present multiple issues at once or bring strong emotions into the conversation.

These situations require agents to read tone, history, and subtle behavioral cues that technology simply can't interpret or reason through the way a human can.

Customers choose to call precisely because they want a genuine human interaction with those who can understand, adapt, and reassure in ways automated systems are still far from replicating.

McKinsey's recent analysis of contact centers underscores this hybrid future. Generative AI (GenAI) and automation are taking over heavy volumes of routine interactions, while organizations redesign the human role around customer advocacy.

The firm highlights case studies where human-AI combinations produce better outcomes than AI alone. And we've seen this in our experience.

One of our clients, a leading energy company, successfully reduced its billing call volume by around 20% and shaved up to 60 seconds off customer authentication by integrating an AI voice assistant into its back-end call workflow. The company is now planning to scale this use case across the organization.

Other customer care leaders are naturally eager to invest in this technology, too, given the promised benefits of greater efficiency and productivity in an environment that generally struggles with high agent churn and the associated costs of recruitment and training.

The upside of the technology also extends to customer and employee experience. GenAI can handle simple queries and make interactions more efficient

while reducing wait times and enhancing customer satisfaction.

Agents themselves are seeing the positive effects of GenAI in their day-to-day duties, especially from reduced after-call work (ACW). AI tools can summarize issues and proposed interventions, increase agent productivity, and reduce their call times.

**ULTIMATELY,
THE CONTACT
CENTER AGENT
ROLE IS IN FOR
A MAKEOVER AS
AI WILL REQUIRE
THE HUMAN TO
ELEVATE.**

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR WORKFORCE STRATEGY

If the ATM evolution taught us anything, it's that companies shouldn't view AI as a simple way to cut headcount.

Instead, AI works best when it reshapes the work itself. It should automate the predictable tasks, so humans don't get bogged down in routine work. In the contact center space, AI will augment agents by giving them real-time prompts along with instant access to the right information.

Ultimately, the contact center agent role is in for a makeover as AI will require the human to elevate. The key to their future success will be their ability to learn how to use good judgment and problem solve the most challenging scenarios.

Organizations will need to invest in training and skilling their agents to handle this higher-order work. The shift from agents performing primarily transactional tasks to acting as problem solvers who apply judgment and emotional nuance will require a far more advanced workforce strategy.

Organizations will also need to rethink the entire talent lifecycle, beginning with the screening process for this new, elevated candidate who can have higher degrees of emotional intelligence: something AI *cannot* do for their customers.

CASE STUDY: JPMORGAN CHASE INVESTS IN BRANCHES AND AI

Even as JPMorgan pours billions into AI infrastructure, the bank is simultaneously expanding its physical footprint. Since 2018, JPMorgan Chase has opened more than 1,000 new branches (**CNBC**).

Many of these branches are not “old-fashioned teller counters,” but modern “advice centers,” focused on developing relationships and creating long-term clients.

These moves underline a lesson along the same lines to the ATM story; automation rarely eliminates the need for human presence as customers may seek human interactions for confirmation, but it will reshape it.

While self-service technologies and AI can handle speed, scale, and routine execution, customers will seek human interaction for reassurance, like in moments of uncertainty where there is complexity or emotional weight. Human agents provide confirmation that the system has understood their intent.

Rather than replacing people, automation elevates the importance of human roles as validators through relationship building, which reinforces the idea that technology works best not as a substitute for human interaction, but as a complement that amplifies it.

Most tellingly, Jamie Dimon himself has publicly explained his strategy to leverage technology while focusing on the people.

During a 2024 interview (NBCUniversal News Group+1) he said, “Every day, 900,000 people go to our branches. They are much more advice centers than processing, operational centers.”

He acknowledged that while digital banking will continue to grow, many customers “want to have the backup for the branch. Customers like to visit their money.”

Dimon’s point is very straightforward, reinforcing the point that customers value human interactions with real people for complex issues.

In the end, the lesson of the ATM is not that machines replace people, but that they redefine where human value lies.

As automation reshapes contact centers, the organizations that succeed will be those that use technology to elevate human judgment because when it matters most, customers still want a human to say, “Yes, this is understood, and I’ve got you.”

Training will need to move beyond transactional to emphasize advanced communication supported by continuous upskilling as tools and expectations evolve.

Supervisors will also need to be retrained to coach agents on these skills to build reasoning skills, driving customer outcomes instead of narrowly defined productivity metrics.

Together, these changes point to a broader operating model shift in which agent roles are treated as skilled knowledge work, with corresponding implications for performance management, career paths, and long-term retention.

The future of the contact center isn’t just smarter technology; it’s a more capable human workforce that knows how to interpret and action AI-generated insights.

Consider the use of AI with speech analytics in the contact center. This technology can surface the patterns, the risks, and the opportunities, but only a well-trained human can turn that information into empathy, decisions, and outcomes that build real customer value.



CLOSING THOUGHT

Machines change jobs, humans change roles

As I reflect on the ATM story from my younger self, I’m reminded that it isn’t a blanket defense of every job. Automation will absolutely streamline some roles: and in certain areas it will reduce headcount.

But time and again - from bank tellers to factory teams - we’ve seen that technology tends to reshape work more than it eliminates it. I see the same future for call centers.

AI will take on repeatable, rules-based tasks, but the heart of the work will still rest with people. Only humans can rely upon good judgment to determine when to make the exception or show empathy to create better customer experiences at each point of contact.

Of course, transformation demands change, and most of us aren’t naturally comfortable with that. Leaders must guide teams through shifting responsibilities: and agents need to stay open to stepping into more human-centered roles.

But here’s the part I find reassuring: the tasks that matter most, like listening, understanding, decision-making, and building trust, remain deeply human. When we frame AI as a partner rather than a threat, agents can feel more secure, more valued, and genuinely excited about where their work is heading. 🗨️



Dina is responsible for the operations of Ulysses Learning and serves as the chief client executive, working with Fortune 100 clients and other progressive organizations to redefine the way customers are cared for. Before joining Ulysses Dina was responsible for starting up two contact centers and later was a call center consultant.

**THE FUTURE OF THE CONTACT CENTER...
IT’S A MORE CAPABLE HUMAN WORK-
FORCE THAT KNOWS HOW TO INTERPRET
AND ACTION AI-GENERATED INSIGHTS.**

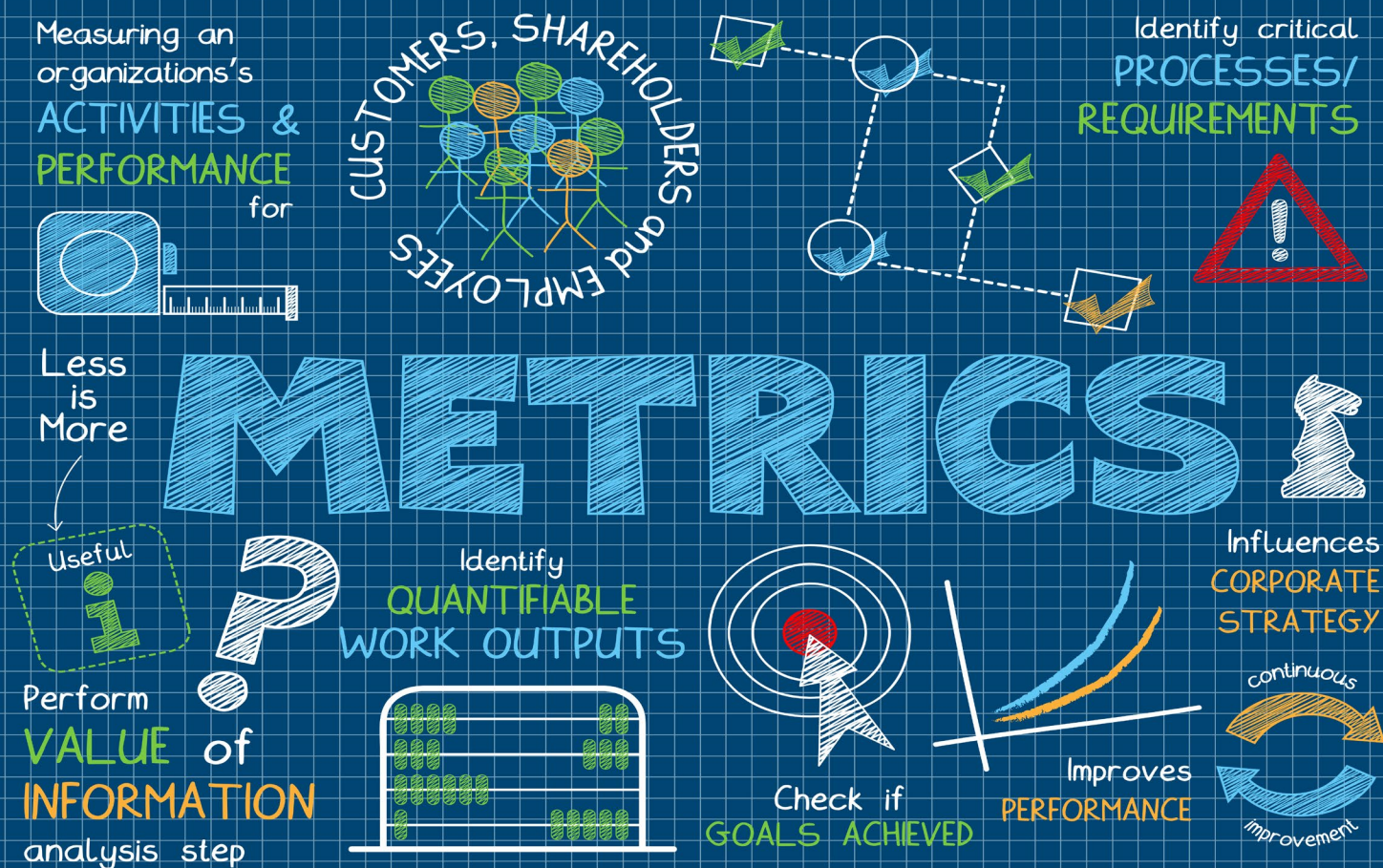


ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

YOUR METRICS ARE ACCURATE...AND MISLEADING AND HERE'S HOW TO FIX THEM.

For decades, contact centers have been managed by the same familiar scorecard.

- Average handle time (AHT)
- Service levels
- CSAT
- Cost per contact
- NPS

There's a reason 85% of contact centers are leveraging these legacy metrics. They are tidy. They benchmark well.

They fit neatly into dashboards.

They also leave most executives with the same lingering question once the meeting ends: "So what did this actually do for the business?"

That gap used to be survivable. It no longer is.

Margins are thinner. Scrutiny is higher. And AI has moved from experiment to expectation. Leaders are being asked to invest real money in automation, analytics, and self-service without a clear way to explain what success looks like in financial terms.

The problem is not a lack of data. The problem is that the data speaks a language few outside the contact center understand.

METRICS EXPLAIN ACTIVITY, NOT BUSINESS IMPACT

Operational metrics describe what happened. They do not explain why it mattered. For example...

- **AHT** tells you how long an agent stayed on the line. But it does not tell you whether that call prevented a cancellation, saved a renewal, or avoided a repeat contact tomorrow.



- **CSAT** captures how a customer felt in the moment. But it does not tell you whether that feeling changed their behavior next month.
- **NPS** suggests advocacy. But it rarely shows up cleanly in a revenue forecast.

These metrics are accurate. They're also incomplete.

Ask a CFO what they need from the contact center, and the vocabulary changes immediately.

Cost. Margin. Retention. Payback period. When customer experience (CX) performance is framed in averages and sentiment scores, leaders outside the function are left to infer business impact.

That is why contact center leaders often describe ROI as "directionally correct." They sense the value. But they can't defend it with the financial rigor of other business units, such as sales or product development.

That's also why your contact center operations are often viewed as a cost center. In practical terms, this is why your contact center will too often fail to get the resources you need and the respect you deserve from the rest of the organization. You get a pat on the head rather than a firm handshake.

AVERAGES ARE FLATTENING ECONOMIC REALITY

Today's economy is moving to a K-shape. Customers are now split between a vast majority with limited incomes and a small elite that have the most buying power.

As a result, most organizations now serve two very different customer realities at the same time.

- **Group One** is highly price sensitive, loyal through inertia, and willing to tolerate friction if switching feels harder than staying. Airlines, utilities, broadband providers, and enterprise software contracts primarily live here.
- **Group Two** is smaller, more demanding, and far more valuable per interaction. These customers (like high-spend customers with contractual SLAs) expect fast resolution, context, and minimal effort. They expect it every time.

But traditional averages collapse both groups into a single number. For example, a five-minute AHT hides 10-minute interactions that protect meaningful revenue and one-minute interactions that barely matter. Treating them as equivalent *feels* efficient. But it quietly misallocates effort and cost.

This flattening effect makes it difficult to design service strategies that align with real business priorities. High-impact interactions get optimized for speed when they require care. Low-impact interactions absorb time and cost because they look identical on a dashboard.

AI EXPOSED MEASUREMENT PROBLEMS

AI was supposed to simplify the equation. Think: Fewer calls, shorter interactions, and lower costs. Instead, it revealed how little organizations know about the financial impact of service decisions.

Consider a chatbot that deflects thousands of contacts. On paper, the savings look obvious. In practice, savings are rarely recouped. Some customers circle back through another channel. Others escalate more frustrated than before. A few quietly churn weeks later.

If success is measured by deflection alone, the initiative looks like a win. If success is measured by avoided cost, the story likely changes. This gap explains why so many AI pilots feel successful and still underdeliver.

(Don't just take my word for it. No-table industry reports have shared the same takeaway.)

Measured activity goes down. Dashboards improve. Confidence rises. But financial results remain stubbornly unclear (at best).

The issue is not the technology itself. It is the absence of metrics that connect AI performance to outcomes leaders actually care about. This leads me to my next point.

WHY FINANCIAL PRECISION BREAKS DOWN...

There is a structural reason ROI — measurable ROI, that is — remains elusive in contact centers. Operational metrics like AHT are built from the ground up. Every interaction has an owner. Every minute has a source. Leaders can trace performance down to a queue, a team, or an individual agent.

Financial metrics move in the opposite direction and are built from the top down. Total cost is allocated across contacts, minutes, or customers. The result is a clean average that assumes every interaction contributed equally.

That assumption is convenient. It is also incorrect.

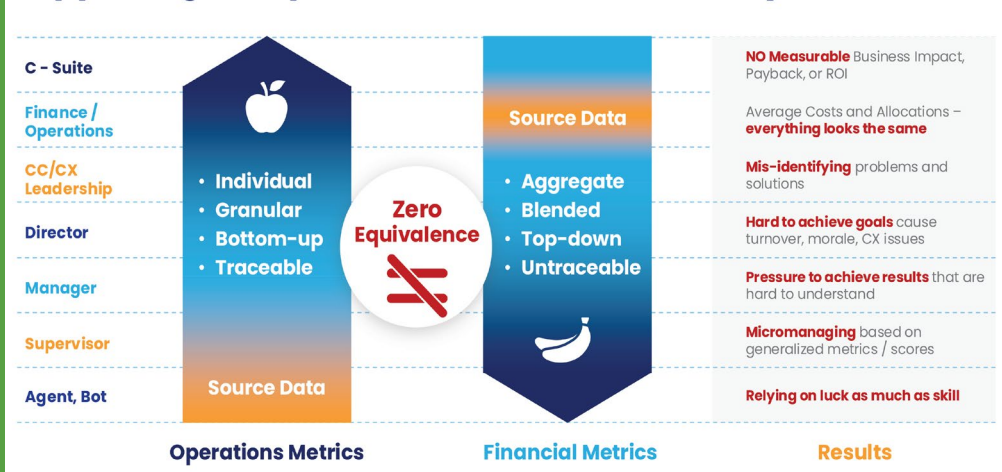
There's a structural mismatch between operational data and financial reality (see **FIGURE 1**).

Some contacts cost far more than average. Others cost almost nothing. When everything is spread evenly, leaders lose visibility into where money is actually being spent and where it is quietly wasted.

And when 45% of contact center leaders want their CX operation to do more with less, that monetary invisibility is a liability. This is also why organizations can debate cost per contact endlessly and still hesitate to invest or cut. The number looks credible. The story behind it is missing.

FIGURE 1

Opposing Perspectives = Distorted Reality



The competing priorities between a top-down and bottom-up approach (source: WiserOwl)

...AND HOW TO FIX IT

The shift required to fix this is conceptually simple and operationally demanding.

Operational and financial performance must be measured from the same starting point (see **FIGURE 2**). That means calculating the actual cost of interactions at the level where work happens. Agent time. Channel usage. Technology consumption. Overhead tied to real activity for each customer interaction.

Once that foundation exists, the fog lifts.

Payback periods stop being theoretical. The cost of supporting a product line becomes visible. Marketing campaigns can be evaluated based on the customer service demand they create. AI investments can be judged on outcomes finance teams recognize.

GIVE METRICS FINANCIAL WEIGHT

A bottom-up approach produces a different class of metrics, ones that stop describing motion and start explaining consequences.

What's more, we're seeing boards and CFOs increasingly demanding an alignment between contact center performance and enterprise financial priorities.

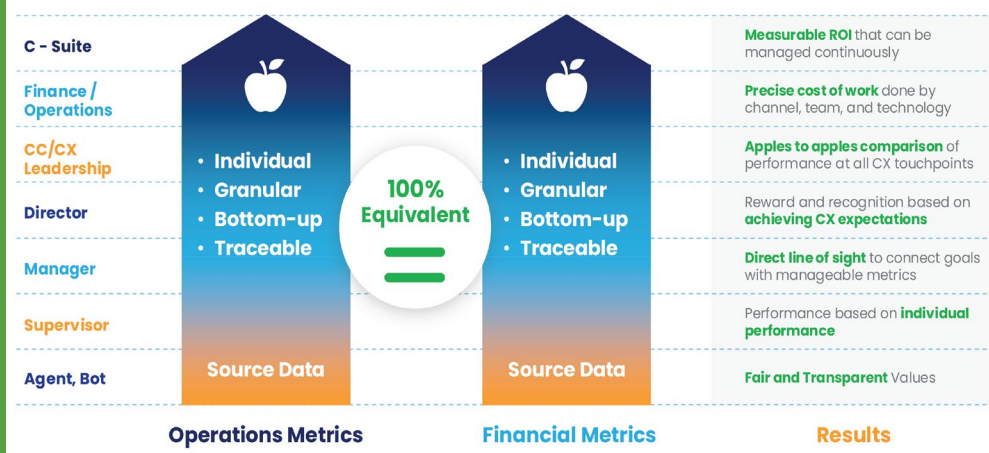
This way of measuring costs will reflect what actually happens across channels and roles rather than smoothing everything into a comfortable average. ROI is tracked continuously, so small inefficiencies show up early, before they quietly erode margin.

Familiar KPIs like AHT and CSAT are translated into financial terms, allowing leaders to see, in plain dollars, what a single minute of extra effort *really* costs.

THE FUTURE OF CONTACT CENTER MEASUREMENT IS NOT ABOUT CLEANER DASHBOARDS. IT IS ABOUT TELLING THE TRUTH CLEARLY.

FIGURE 2

Aligned Perspectives = Unified Decision Making



The competing priorities between a top-down and bottom-up approach (source: WiserOwl)

Process inefficiencies become visible as daily drains on time, money, and capacity. AI performance is judged by whether issues are resolved, customers are retained, and expense is genuinely avoided.

BUSINESS METRICS CHANGE CONTACT CENTER ROLES

One-time snapshots invite debate. Continuous measurement invites action.

When costs rise unexpectedly, leaders can see whether overtime, channel mix, or underused automation is responsible.

When AI performance degrades, the financial impact appears before customers start complaining. (That is, if they complain at all instead of fleeing to your competitor: which 72% of customers would do.)

Over time, this discipline reshapes conversations with finance, IT, and product leaders. Requests stop sounding reactionary. Instead, they start sounding like proactive business cases.

Metrics now begin to make sense to the broader enterprise. Product leaders understand how service affects renewals. Finance trusts that savings are real. Boards see whether AI protects margin or merely shifts work around.

As contact center metrics become a feature of enterprise conversations, the role the contact center plays also changes. It stops being an operational silo and becomes a strategic arm that product and service leaders can reason about, invest in, and optimize with confidence.

The future of contact center measurement is not about cleaner dashboards. It is about telling the truth clearly.



So, this time, when executives ask, "What did this actually do for the business?" they have clear answers.

- Which interactions cost the most?
- Which ones protect the most value?
- Which technologies earn their keep?
- Which investments quietly miss the mark?

AI has raised the stakes. Economic pressure has narrowed tolerance for guesswork.

The organizations that adapt will **stop measuring activity and start measuring impact**. The rest will continue to feel directionally right while wondering why the numbers never quite add up. 📊



Robert Bradshaw is the founder and president of WiserOwl, a CX decision intelligence firm that helps contact center and customer experience leaders connect operations to financial outcomes. He has more than 30 years of consultative problem-solving experience across startups and Fortune 100 firms.



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

BULLYING, BURNOUT, AND INTERPERSONAL BREAKDOWNS

WHY AND HOW THEY NEED TO BE ADDRESSED.

Contact centers are uniquely vulnerable to bullying and harassment, a critical set of issues which this article will explore.

The consequences are clearly seen in the rates of contact agent burnout and turnover, which increase recruitment and training costs.

- Up to 59% of contact center agents are at risk of burnout, driven by sustained workload, emotional demands, and minimal recovery time, according to Convoso's 2023 industry analysis, sourcing work by Jeff Toister.

- Industry research from Insignia Resource indicates that contact centers consistently report some of the highest turnover rates of any industry, ranging between 30%–45%.

Unchecked bullying and harassment drive other predictable organizational expenses. These include:

- Rising absenteeism, sick leave, and disability claims.
- Increasing mental health accommodations and workers' compensation claims.

- Declining customer experience (CX)-related scores and brand reputation damage.

- Legal liability and settlement costs.

Employees rarely leave because the work is hard. They leave because the environment feels unsafe.

This article will then look at ways to reduce or eliminate agent bullying, burnout, and interpersonal breakdowns.

BURNOUT, HARASSMENT BY DESIGN

Burnout isn't accidental; it's the predictable outcome of work design. Contact center roles are typically characterized by:

- High emotional demands and regular exposure to customer aggression.
- Continuous surveillance through call monitoring, script adherence tracking, and metric dashboards.
- Minimal autonomy over pace, workload, or task variation.
- No recovery buffer between emotionally charged interactions.
- Cascading pressure from leadership targets.

Research, such as by Michael D. Galanakis and Elli Tsitouri and published in *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2022 and reviewing the job demands-resources model, states that jobs combining high demands with low employee control are among the strongest predictors of chronic stress and psychological harm.

This isn't just uncomfortable work. It's work that systematically depletes the psychological resources people need to regulate their behavior.

BURNOUT ALTERS BEHAVIOR AND CREATES HARM

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. This clinical framing matters because burnout is not neutral; it fundamentally changes how people interact.

When employees are burned out, empathy narrows, patience drops, self-regulation weakens, and interpersonal reactivity spikes.

In contact centers, this manifests as:

- Supervisors using intimidation, public criticism, or sarcasm to enforce metrics.
- Peers snapping at each other during peak volumes.

- Normalization of dismissive or de-meaning language.
- Reduced tolerance for mistakes, questions, or learning curves.

Burnout erodes self-control, empathy, and emotional regulation, making people more reactive, impatient, and defensive. In that depleted state, everyday stress is more likely to come out as sarcasm, intimidation, or blame, so bullying often becomes a *byproduct of exhaustion*, not just bad character.

BULLYING IS WIDESPREAD AND OFTEN INVISIBLE

Bullying behaviors often emerge not from malice, but from depletion. This is why individual discipline rarely solves the problem; the conditions that created the behavior remain intact.

BURNOUT ERODES SELF-CONTROL, EMPATHY, AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION, MAKING PEOPLE MORE REACTIVE, IMPATIENT, AND DEFENSIVE.

Research from HR Acuity's 2023 workplace harassment study shows that approximately 52% of employees have experienced or witnessed workplace harassment, with nearly half reporting exposure to bullying behaviors. In contact centers, *these numbers likely under-represent reality*.

Harmful behavior goes unreported because:

- Targets fear retaliation or being labeled "too sensitive."
- High performers and supervisors are informally protected.
- Complaints are reframed as interpersonal conflicts rather than system failures.

- Leaders are rewarded for output, not relational health.

As a result, bullying typically surfaces indirectly through accelerating turnover, rising absenteeism, disengagement, declining customer satisfaction scores, and increasing mental health claims. By the time it reaches Human Resources, the damage is often extensive.

Bullying in contact centers is *not* a personality problem. It is also a predictable outcome of system design, one that is under strain.

WHY POLICIES ALONE CANNOT PREVENT HARASSMENT

Many organizations implement zero-tolerance policies and assume the problem is solved. Policies are necessary infrastructure, but they are insufficient when work design continues to systematically overload employees. And here's why:

- Leaders model aggressive, dismissive, or reactive behavior.
- Performance pressure consistently outweighs relational accountability.
- Psychological safety is absent from daily operations.

Employees experience culture through daily interactions, *not* policy documents. When stated values conflict with lived reality, people believe what they experience.

WHAT ACTUALLY REDUCES BULLYING, BURNOUT

Effective prevention requires system-level intervention, not just individual discipline. Organizations that successfully reduce harassment focus on five areas:

- 1 Psychological safety as infrastructure.** Teams need credible mechanisms to raise concerns without fear of retaliation.

Psychological safety isn't a feeling; it's behavioral evidence that truth-telling is rewarded, not punished. When issues surface early, they can be addressed before harm escalates and becomes entrenched.

CYBERBULLYING IN REMOTE CONTACT CENTERS

Remote and hybrid contact centers haven't eliminated bullying; they've transformed how it operates.

In virtual environments, harassment appears as:

- Dismissive or hostile messages in team chats.
- Public call-outs during video meetings.
- Excessive monitoring or micromanagement through digital surveillance.
- Strategic exclusion from key conversations or information loops.
- Weaponized silence, delayed responses, or selective visibility.

Research published in *Canadian HR Reporter* indicates that nearly 40% of workers report experiencing toxic or hostile communication in virtual settings; and 54% have encountered it.

Without physical cues, tone and intent are easily misinterpreted and harmful behavior can be dismissed as "just text" or misunderstanding.

Digital platforms also create partial visibility into workloads and performance, fueling assumptions and resentment when context is missing.

The key risk: technology moves faster than team norms. Without explicit agreements about digital conduct, escalation protocols, and respectful communication, harm becomes easier to commit and harder to resolve.

But when leaders measure relational impact as carefully as they measure output, organizations become safer and more resilient.



2 Leader accountability for relational impact. Supervisors must be evaluated not only on metrics, but on how their teams experience working with them.

Research on abusive supervision directly links this leadership style to turnover, disengagement, and reduced psychological wellbeing. Leaders who create fear-based environments must face consequences, regardless of their output numbers.

3 Explicit digital communication norms. Employees, particularly those working remotely (also see **BOX**) need clear expectations around appropriate tone in written communication, response time expectations, and boundaries.

Employees also need escalation protocols for conflict. And when conversations should move from chat to live discussion. Assumptions about digital etiquette create gaps where harm thrives.

4 Workload transparency with context. Visibility without explanation breeds mistrust. When performance dashboards show productivity disparities without context, employees fill gaps with assumptions.

In response, leaders must contextualize decisions, workload distribution, and performance expectations so clarity replaces speculation.

5 Early stress detection systems. Burnout doesn't appear overnight; it builds through repeated exposure to unmanaged demands.

Organizations need diagnostic systems that monitor strain and capacity, not just output. Early intervention prevents the behavioral deterioration that leads to conflict and harassment.

Psychological safety is not a "nice to have." It is an operational risk that must be monitored and managed.

A LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

Bullying in contact centers is rarely about individual malice. It is the predictable outcome of sustained pressure, insufficient recovery, and systems that reward performance without relational accountability.

Leaders who want to reduce harassment must ask different questions:

- Where are we generating unnecessary strain?
- What behaviors are we implicitly rewarding through promotions, bonuses, and praise?
- How safe is it for people to tell the truth here? What do we measure besides output?

EARLY INTERVENTION PREVENTS THE BEHAVIORAL DETERIORATION THAT LEADS TO CONFLICT AND HARASSMENT.

When organizations redesign work systems to support resilience, provide diagnostic insight into team capacity, and build psychological safety as infrastructure, bullying doesn't need to be managed after the fact. It becomes far less likely to occur.

Unchecked conflict and harassment erode culture, performance, and retention more than any single metric ever will.

The choice isn't between productivity and safety. It's between reactive crisis management and proactive system design. 



Joyce Odison is a Conflict Analyst, Master Certified Coach, and the founder and president of *Interpersonal Wellness Services Inc.*, where she leads a team dedicated to helping leaders spot the hidden stressors that drain team capacity before burnout, conflict drag, psychological safety breakdowns, and missed goals become costly realities.

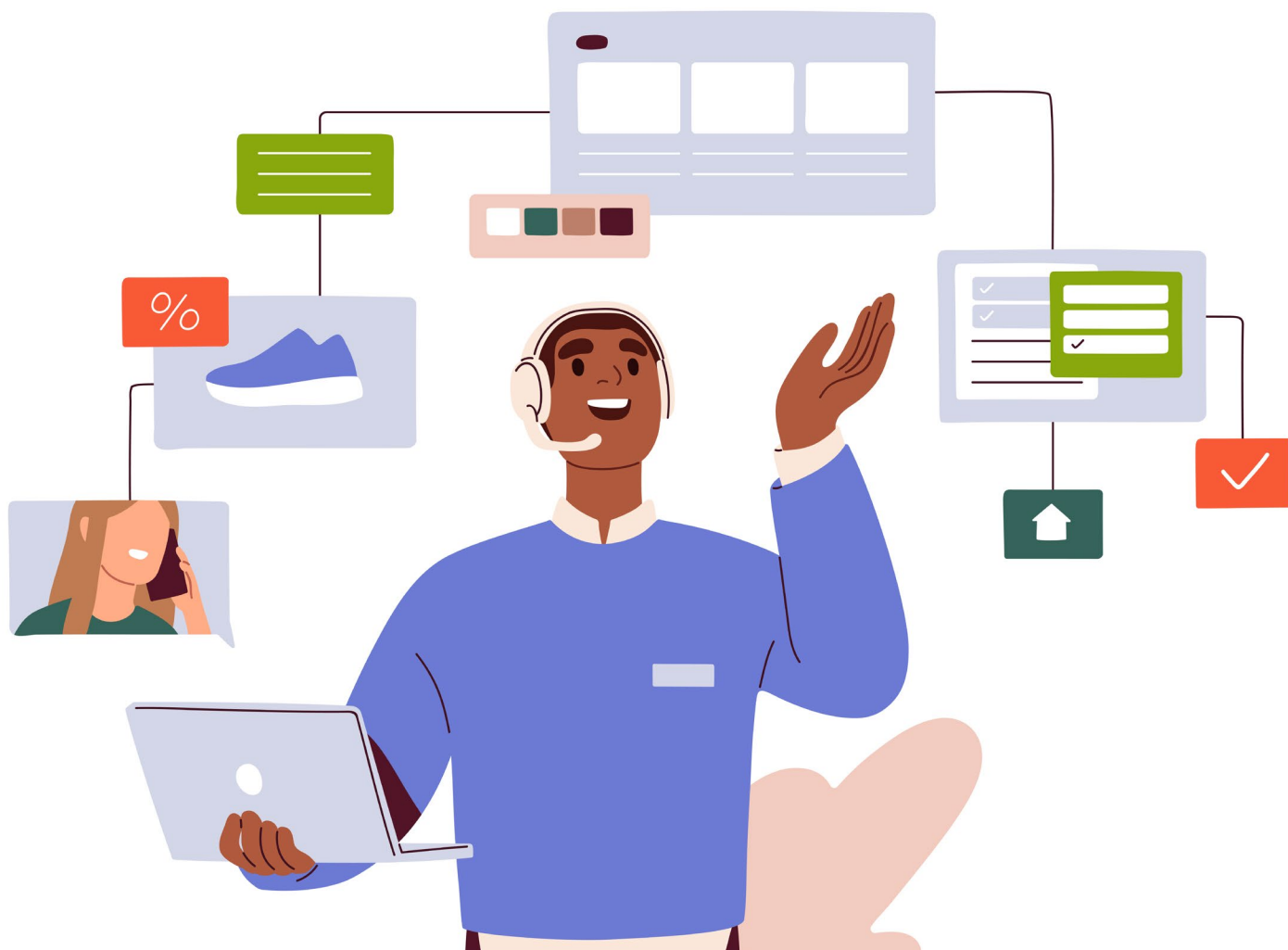


ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

BEYOND THE ACCENT

HOW TO BUILD INTERACTION CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE.

In today's global economy, call and contact centers handle inquiries from a diverse range of customers. This diversity reflects the richness of a global workforce, but it can also create challenges when clarity gets lost in translation.

Accent training is an important way to enable clear communication between agents and customers. But it is often misunderstood as "erasing" someone's accent. In reality, it's about building confidence, choosing the right words, and ensuring that both agents and customers feel heard and understood.

HANDLING MY ACCENT

I remember my first full-time job in the U.S. working in a call center. At first, it was intimidating: a new country, a new job, and an unfamiliar environment.

Still, I was determined to make it work because I knew every call mattered. I was helping people with their health insurance needs, which gave me a sense of purpose.

But one thing stood out right away: my accent. Having lived in both Bahrain and India, many influences shaped my accent, and it quickly became clear that it affected how callers understood me.

As a result, I often had to repeat myself. While I didn't mind repeating — I wanted to help — it started to affect my average handle time (AHT). My reports showed I wasn't meeting goals.

In an effort to compensate, I began speaking faster. That only made things worse. Speaking quickly and trailing off at the end of sentences — combined with my accent — made it even harder for callers to follow me.



The turning point came when I listened to a recording of one of my own calls. That was when I realized I needed to make a conscious effort to improve my speaking skills, so that my message would come across more clearly and efficiently.

I didn't eliminate my accent — and I don't believe that it should be the goal — but I did take steps to strengthen my communication. These are some of the techniques I used: which may help you or someone on your team. In the next section, I'll share a few of those practical steps.

ACCENT TRAINING: A SKILL, NOT A FLAW

Over time, I experimented with different techniques and built a personal toolkit. Many of these approaches are common in formal accent training and can be easily adapted by call and contact center agents.

1 WARM UP THE MOUTH AND MUSCLES

Clear speech starts with control of the mouth, lips, and tongue. Just as athletes stretch before a game, agents can benefit from quick vocal exercises.

- Mouth exercises: Exaggerate the opening of vowels ("ahhh," "eee," "oooh") to loosen the jaw.
- Tongue twisters: Practice sentences like "She sells seashells by the seashore" or "Rubber baby buggy bumpers." These train agility and pronunciation clarity.

Tip: Before a shift, spend a few minutes practicing vowel stretches and tongue twisters.

2 MASTER COMMON VOWEL SOUNDS

Vowels often cause misunderstandings because they vary across languages. For example, the short /I/ (ship) and long /i:/ (sheep) can sound alike in some accents. On a call, "The ship will leave at 6" might be heard as "The sheep will leave at 6."

Training both your ear and your mouth helps prevent these mix-ups (see **TABLE 1**).

Diphthongs are like gliding sounds; they begin with one vowel and slide into another, as in phone line or oil change.

Tip: Record yourself saying "I'll call you tomorrow;" check if "call" and "tomorrow" sound like distinct words or blur together.

3 TRAIN YOUR EAR THROUGH IMMERSION

In language, it's not just about speaking; it's about listening.

- **Watch English-language TV with subtitles.** Start in your language and then switch to English.
- **Read children's books in English.** They have simple words, strong repetition, and clear structures.
- **Shadowing.** Listen to a native speaker (podcast, training clip, or even a colleague), repeat immediately after them, and record your response.

For example, watch a two-minute news clip, record yourself shadowing the anchor, and then play back your recording to compare pacing, stress, and clarity.

Tip: When watching TV or shadowing native speakers, focus on voices from your target country: for example, U.S. shows if most of your callers are American.

...RACING THROUGH WORDS OFTEN MAKES CALLS LONGER, AS CUSTOMERS NEED REPETITION, CLARIFICATION, OR MAY EVEN CALL BACK...

4 PAY ATTENTION TO RHYTHM, STRESS, AND INTONATION

English is a "stress-timed" language; certain syllables carry more weight. **Getting this wrong can change the meaning.**

- "I didn't say she stole the money." → Emphasize a different word each time and the meaning changes.
- Practice rising intonation for questions ("How are you?") and falling intonation for statements ("I'm fine, thank you").

Tip: Misplaced stress can confuse customers, e.g., saying inSURance instead of INSurance.

5 USE PAUSES AND PACING WISELY

Speaking too quickly is common, especially when agents feel nervous or worried about their handle time. Ironically, racing through words often makes calls longer, as customers need repetition, clarification, or may even call back if they couldn't understand the agent the first time.

COMMON SOUNDS AND PRONUNCIATION TIPS

TABLE 1

Sound	Example Words	Tips
"Err"	bird, work, learn	Relax your tongue in the middle of your mouth; don't roll the "r."
"Ou"	food, move, you	Lips should form a small circle; stretch it slightly for clarity.
"Aww"	call, thought, law	Open the mouth wider; avoid flattening it into "ah."

Research in communication training consistently shows that well-timed pauses improve comprehension and reduce the need for repeat explanations.

- Pause briefly at natural breaks.
- Avoid "trailing off" at the end of sentences.
- Imagine you're "placing words on a shelf;" each one should land cleanly.

Tip: Call center trainers often coach agents to aim for a pace of around 140–160 words per minute: fast enough to keep energy, but slow enough for customers to process.

6 EXPAND VOCABULARY AND WORD CHOICE

Clarity isn't just about sounds; it's also about the words you choose.

- Learn one new word a day and visualize it to solidify it in your memory.
- Replace region-specific phrases with globally understood terms.
- "Kindly revert" → "Please reply."
- "Do the needful" → "Please take care of this."

- Learn idioms and slang that are common in your target region.
- Example: "Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed" = enthusiastic and alert.

EVEN NATIVE SPEAKERS SOUND DIFFERENT DEPENDING ON THEIR REGION OR COUNTRY.

7 SPELL IT OUT WITH PHONETICS

Sometimes, even when you speak slowly and clearly, certain letters and numbers still get confused: especially over the phone. Using a phonetic alphabet is a simple way to eliminate errors.

Example: Instead of saying "My name is Mia," a caller could hear it as "Nia" or "Leah." You'd say: "M as in Mary, I as in India, A as in Apple."

Here's a sample phonetic guide agents (TABLE 2) can keep handy:

Tip: If a customer or agent struggles with the "official" NATO phonetic words, substitute simple everyday ones (e.g., C for "cat," D for "dog," S for "Sam"). The key is clarity, not sticking rigidly to the military version.

8 NUMBERS AND DATES: SAY THEM TWICE, SAY THEM SMART

- Break long numbers into chunks: "Your claim number is 483 – 725 – 19. That's four eight three, seven two five, one nine."
- For dates, use full words to avoid confusion: "December 5th, 2025" instead of "12/05/2025."

9 WATCH OUT FOR "SOUND-ALIKE" WORDS

English is full of words that look or sound alike but which carry different meanings. These are called homonyms (same sound/spelling, different meaning) or homographs (same spelling, different stress, or pronunciation).

Misplacing stress **can completely change the meaning of your conversation with the caller**. For example: PROduce (noun: fruits and vegetables) vs. proDUCE (verb: to create).

PHONETIC GUIDE

TABLE 2

Letter	Example Word	Letter	Example Word
A	Alpha (or Apple)	N	November
B	Bravo (or Boy)	O	Oscar
C	Charlie	P	Papa
D	Delta	Q	Quebec
E	Echo	R	Romeo
F	Foxtrot	S	Sierra
G	Golf	T	Tango
H	Hotel	U	Uniform
I	India	V	Victor
J	Juliet	W	Whiskey (or Window, in customer-friendly contexts)
K	Kilo	X	X-ray
L	Lima	Y	Yankee
M	Mike	Z	Zulu

Tip: Highlight stress and, when needed, clarify for numbers, e.g., "That's FIF-teen, one-five" (not fifty).

10 USE EMPATHY PHRASES WHEN MISUNDERSTANDING HAPPENS

Even with the best preparation, miscommunication can still occur. What matters is how you handle it:

- Instead of saying: "I don't understand."
- Try: "I want to make sure I get this right. Could you please repeat that for me?"

These small shifts help maintain a positive and respectful interaction, especially when both the agent and the customer have accents.

11 BUILD A PERSONAL CLARITY TOOLKIT

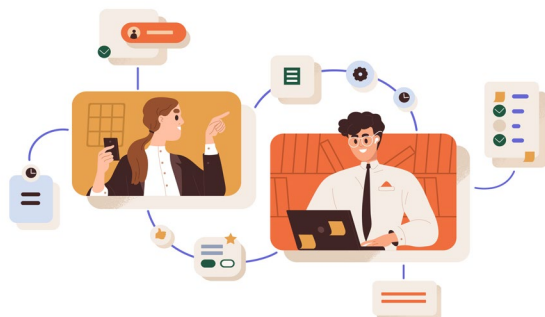
Every agent should develop a personal toolkit of techniques that work for them, which may include:

- A phonetic alphabet card taped near the monitor.
- A list of "word swaps" (formal → plain English).
- Reminders to slow down when nervous.
- Practicing two new idioms or slang phrases each week from the target customer region.

12 BUILD CONFIDENCE THROUGH PRACTICE

At the end of the day, confidence carries through the voice.

- Practice in front of a mirror to monitor mouth movement.



- Record short voice notes daily: even reading a news article aloud helps.
- Sing along to songs, repeat riddles, or play word games: they all strengthen rhythm and fluency.

Remember: The goal isn't to sound "perfect." It's to be understood.

HOW TO TUNE YOUR EAR TO ACCENTS

Since I've both taken calls and coached agents, I know how challenging it can feel when you're trying to understand someone with a different accent.

And to be clear, "different accent" doesn't always mean English is their second language. Even native speakers sound different depending on their region or country. Think about the contrast between customers from Texas, New York, or London (England or Ontario, Canada).

The first step is self-awareness. Ask yourself: How do I feel when I don't immediately understand someone? If it makes you frustrated or even angry, that could be bias creeping in: and *not* the caller's fault.

Recognizing that bias is the first step toward overcoming it. (I wrote more about this in "Unlock the Power of Inclusion and Equity"; you can read it [here](#)).

If the feeling is stress rather than anger — perhaps you're worried about AHT or that your break is approaching — that's natural too.

In those cases, take a slow breath, reset, and give the caller your full attention. Divided focus only makes accents harder to understand.

Here are a few practical techniques you can use in the moment:

- **Ask clarifying questions.** Example: "Just to be clear, you'd like names of pediatricians in ZIP code 46201, correct?"
- **Paraphrase for confirmation.** "If I understand correctly, you need the phone number for XYZ Insurance?"
- **Request an example.** Sometimes a single concrete detail clears up the confusion.

- **Blame the line, not the person.** If you need the caller to repeat themselves, say: "The connection isn't clear. Could you repeat that slowly?" Doing this avoids making them feel at fault.

- **Ask for spelling.** Use phonetics when necessary: "Can you spell your first name? M as in Mike, A as in Alpha..."

- **Practice active listening.** Tune out distractions, take notes, and give your ears and brain a second to process what you're hearing.

The more you use these strategies, the more natural they become — and the easier it is to handle calls with confidence - no matter what accent you hear on the other end.

WHEN CALLERS STRUGGLE WITH YOUR ACCENT...

Earlier, I mentioned how callers may get frustrated if an agent struggles to understand them: especially if the agent blames it on the caller's language. But the reverse is also true: sometimes callers struggle to understand the agent's accent (also see **BOX**).

In these moments, it's natural for agents to feel embarrassed or even defensive. A 2022 Gallup survey via [Hecctor AI](#) found that 67% of agents feel undervalued when their accents are criticized.

When I coach, I ask agents to reflect: "Have you ever spoken to someone you couldn't understand? How did it feel when the roles were reversed?" This question usually prompts them to pause and realize that communication challenges affect both parties.

The key is not to take it personally. Not everyone will understand you immediately, and that's okay. What matters is how you respond. Go back to the basics of excellent customer service:

- **Slow down** and pace your speech.
- **Stay calm** and maintain a friendly tone.
- **Use your clarity toolkit.** Pause, spell words out, or paraphrase.
- **Focus on the customer's needs**, not your own discomfort.

ACCENT MASKING TOOLS: HELPFUL OR HARMFUL?

Accent masking tools can be helpful, especially when agents have strong accents and serve customers across multiple countries or regions. They can smooth out speech and make conversations easier to follow.

But these tools also have limitations. They can misinterpret words due to the pronunciation. When that happens, the voice output can sound unnatural: almost like the customer is talking to an automated system instead of a real person. And it isn't a fix for bad choice of words or grammar.

When the tool repeatedly misidentifies words or poor word choice is used, it can confuse the listeners and actually prolong the calls. In some cases, this can backfire, causing customers to disconnect or to lose trust in the interactions.

While reviewing calls for quality assurance (QA), I came across two unusual but eye-opening examples. In both cases, the calls began with a normal human voice, but within less than a minute, the voice suddenly shifted to something robotic.

I recognized what was happening. The callers were likely calling from another call center and had switched on an accent masking tool. But the agents didn't realize this; they thought they were speaking to AI voice bots and in both cases, they hung up.

Here's what happened:

- **Call 1:** The agent explained that a claim was denied because the provider's office missed the timely filing deadline.

After that, the caller's voice became robotic, repeating the same question: "Why claim deny?" By the third repetition, the agent assumed it was an AI bot stuck in a loop and ended the call.

- **Call 2:** The caller wanted the status of a provider enrollment application. After completing authentication, the caller switched on the accent masking software and began repeating two phrases: "Give me application status" and "I want application expedited."

After hearing the exact phrases three times, the agent believed it wasn't a real person and disconnected the call.

Both agents made the same judgment: the robotic tone, combined with the unnatural word choice, convinced them that the caller was a bot.

For the preceding reasons, accent masking tools should never be seen as a complete solution. They work best in conjunction with accent training: the techniques I shared in the main body of the article.

Technology can support clarity. But it can't replace the confidence and adaptability that come from skill-building.

Equally important is rigorous product and service training, so agents not only speak clearly but also provide accurate answers.

Pair accent support with solid product knowledge and strong resources, and agents will be equipped to deliver both clarity and accuracy on every call. This helps your agents build confidence on the phones.

Accent training isn't something that happens overnight. It takes patience, practice, and consistency: but even dedicating just 30 minutes a day to exercises, audiobooks, or movies can make a difference.

Over time, you'll notice improvements not only in word choice and clarity but also in how confidently you connect with your callers.

Accent masking tools are becoming more advanced and can reduce bias against certain accents. But no tool can replace the effort you put into developing your own clarity, building product knowledge, and learning to understand your caller.

Remember: technology can support you, but it cannot do the work for you.

COACH'S CORNER

IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATION

I recognize the concern some people have about "losing" part of their identity by sounding more American or British.

I agree; your accent is part of who you are. Yet, in practice, many professionals learn to adjust depending on context.

For example, friends who work at international banks in India often switch into a neutral accent when speaking to customers, then return to their natural speech with colleagues.

**ADAPTING YOUR
SPEECH TO BE
CLEAR...[IS] EN-
SURING THAT
YOU AND YOUR
CALLERS MEET
ON COMMON
GROUND.**

And sometimes when you talk to a customer who is from the same country or region you may even, without thinking, revert to your natural accent.

Which is OK as it improves communication and builds a connection with them. Accents convey important cultural cues that amongst those with the same or similar ones enable a strong understanding without spelling it all out.

So, it's not about erasing identity; it's about being understood.

Think of it this way: if you move to the U.S. or Canada, insisting on driving on the left side of the road because "that's how it's done at home" wouldn't work.

Communication follows a similar principle. Adapting your speech to be clear and easy to understand isn't giving something up; it's ensuring that you and your callers meet on common ground.

At the end of the day, the goal isn't perfection. It's a connection. 📍



Mark Pereira is a certified Trainer and experienced On-Site Supervisor specializing in boosting retention and productivity through proven teaching methods. With an academic background in Business and Innovative Education, he provides coaching to agents with empathy and skill. He stays up-to-date with industry developments from his base in Indianapolis, Indiana.



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE IMAGES

ACCOMMODATING THE ACCENTS

HOW NEW AI-POWERED TOOLS CAN IMPROVE CX.

Accents are deeply personal, shaped by geography, language, socioeconomic class, gender, and by one's own identity. Just as voice prints can identify individuals, accents reveal where they are from: in ways that can impact how they're heard, perceived, and reacted to and engaged with by others.

Class and accents are central to the plot of the film *My Fair Lady*, based on George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, in which, to win a bet, Dr. Henry Higgins tries to turn London Cockney flower-seller Eliza Doolittle into an upper-class "lady."

My family loved the film and had the soundtrack's LP. For good reason. We're from northern England, which is noted for a distinct accent (and its class variations), that one can hear on many movies and shows, notably *Coronation Street*, which is reportedly the world's longest-running TV soap opera.

SHARATH KESHAVA NARAYANA



Not surprisingly, accents can impede customer experience (CX) in the contact center, causing what can be termed as "accent friction" and leading to misunderstandings and frustration on both sides of conversations.

Contact centers have long sought to address this issue through accent training. Now there are also automated AI-based tools that can help people understand each other across accents.

However, these methods and tools have their own challenges and controversies, like the risk of reinforcing customer biases against agents who speak “differently.” AI applications also hold the potential to fail, creating friction points of their own.

Sanas, a speech AI company, has developed “Real-Time Accent Translation” technology. To learn more about accent issues, and the benefits and challenges of accent translation, we had a virtual conversation with company CEO and co-founder, Sharath Keshava Narayana.

Q LET’S SET THE BASELINE. WHAT KINDS OF UNDERSTANDABILITY CHALLENGES DO BOTH CUSTOMERS AND AGENTS FACE DURING VOICE INTERACTIONS? HOW DO THESE ISSUES AFFECT CX AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY?

A: Customers and agents struggle with more than just accents. Noise, call quality, fatigue, and speaking pace all influence how clearly we understand one another.

When people can’t hear, or be heard, they repeat themselves, interactions take longer, and frustration rises on both sides. Over time, these moments affect trust and reduce customer satisfaction and loyalty. Clear communication isn’t just a nice-to-have; it’s foundational to a positive CX.

Q IN TERMS OF SCALE AND IMPACT ON CX, HOW DO AGENT AND CUSTOMER ACCENTS COMPARE WITH OTHER CHALLENGES, LIKE AUDIO QUALITY?

A: Technical issues like jitter or low bandwidth can distort a sentence, but accent-related misunderstandings can distort the entire relationship.

Infrastructure fixes can resolve audio quality issues. Accent friction is different; it’s a human barrier that persists even when every technical variable is perfect. It often shows up in subtle ways, like hesitation or misinterpretation.

Q IT HAS BEEN POINTED OUT THAT GEOGRAPHICAL/REGIONAL ACCENTS ESPECIALLY, HAVE BEEN FADING AWAY THANKS TO MASS MEDIA AND MIGRATION. SO, IN THE FACE OF THIS, IS THE ACCENT ISSUE THROUGH THE CONTACT CENTER STILL STRONG AND RELEVANT AND IF SO, WHY?

A: You’re right about global media and mobility flattening regional accents in many social and professional contexts, but contact centers operate under very different conditions.

These are short, high-stress, audio-only transactional interactions, often between people from very different cultural backgrounds. In those environments, subtle phonetic differences can increase cognitive load and create real friction.

Customers aren’t reacting to accents themselves so much as the effort required to understand and be understood. That added effort compounds quickly, increasing frustration, slowing resolution, and lowering overall satisfaction.

As global CX has scaled, the volume of cross-accent interactions has grown faster than accents have converged. In practice, accent-related friction hasn’t faded; it’s become more concentrated in the moments that define CX.

ACCENT TRANSLATION, ACCENT MODIFICATION

Q DESCRIBE ACCENT TRANSLATION. WHAT IS IT AND WHAT IS ITS OBJECTIVE?

A: Accent translation enhances clarity by analyzing the sound waves in incoming speech and adjusting them, so listeners hear a clearer, more familiar pronunciation along with the original tone and intonation.

When it comes down to it, accents are simply tiny variations in sound waves. This technology helps eliminate noise, reverb, and echo in real time to ensure the most human, authentic experience possible on both ends of the call.

Q IS ACCENT TRANSLATION DIFFERENT FROM ACCENT MODIFICATION AND IF SO, HOW?

A: In my view, “accent modification” and Sanas’ term “accent translation” can be used to describe the same basic idea: adjusting speech so it’s easier for listeners to understand across accents.

The difference is mainly historical and contextual. Accent modification is an older phrase rooted in human coaching and may imply permanently changing the way someone speaks through training.

We coined the term accent translation to describe technology that transforms the acoustic patterns of speech while enabling the speaker to talk naturally and preserving meaning, intent, and voice identity.

In practice, both terms can describe the same outcome, but we prefer accent translation to make it clearer that the change happens with technology, not in the person.

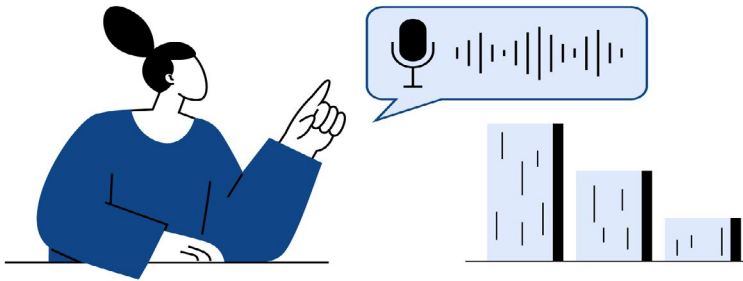
Q HASN’T ACCENT TRANSLATION BEEN AROUND FOR SOME TIME, SUCH AS THROUGH AGENT TRAINING?

A: Traditional accent training can take months and often pressures people to change how they naturally speak. Accent translation technology enables clarity instantly and consistently while also preserving the speaker’s unique voice characteristics like pitch, cadence, and emotion.

“CLEAR COMMUNICATION ISN’T JUST A NICE-TO-HAVE; IT’S FOUNDATIONAL TO A POSITIVE CX.”

-- SHARATH KESHAVA NARAYANA





AI APPLICATION

Q WE UNDERSTAND THAT YOU USE AI IN YOUR SOLUTION. WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS AND DESCRIBE HOW IT ACHIEVES THEM? HOW IS AI TECHNOLOGY DEPLOYED AND HOW ARE AGENTS TRAINED TO USE IT?

A: The biggest benefit is that AI improves clarity instantly, with no special training, months of coaching, or pressure to change how someone speaks.

With this technology, agents can speak naturally while the system improves clarity in the background, so they can focus on the customers, not their accents, thereby shortening handle times and reducing escalations.

Unlike traditional accent training, AI adapts in real time to each customer, accent, and environment. This leads to faster resolution. With a single click, AI-enabled accent translation runs on the agent's existing device, with low latency and no complex setup.

Q WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES OF AI-DRIVEN ACCENT TRANSLATION? ISN'T AI PRONE TO ERRORS, LIKE THROUGH HALLUCINATIONS?

A: All AI needs is thoughtful design, and accent translation is no exception. It must be engineered carefully to avoid sounding artificial or overcorrected.

Unlike generative AI, accent translation isn't creating new words or meanings. Rather, it enhances the natural speech that's already there. And because it's speech-to-speech rather than speech-to-text or text-to-speech, there's no intermediate transcription step where meaning can get lost or distorted.

The real challenges are ensuring consistency across diverse accents and noisy environments, which is why real-world evaluation and continuous performance monitoring matter so much.

CUSTOMER ACCENT ISSUES

Q YOU'VE DISCUSSED ACCENT TRANSLATION FROM THE AGENT END. BUT WHAT ABOUT FROM THE CUSTOMERS' END? CAN IT BE USED THERE SO THAT AGENTS CAN UNDERSTAND THEM BETTER?

A: The technology could theoretically work in both directions: helping agents understand customers as well as the reverse. Sanas already offers omnidirectional noise cancelation, which removes background noise on both sides of the call.

Our goal is always to remove communication barriers to promote understanding, and any future application would need strong ethical guardrails to ensure the purpose remains grounded in clarity, inclusion, and understanding.

Q TO WHAT EXTENT DOES ACCENT MODIFICATION OR TRANSLATION, REGARDLESS OF THE TECHNOLOGY USED, RISK CONCEALING CUSTOMER BIAS INSTEAD OF CONFRONTING IT?

COULD THIS METHOD ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THE BROADER FORMS OF IDENTITY NEUTRALIZATION, INCLUDING GENDER OR REGIONAL OR NATIONAL DIFFERENCES?

A: It's important to acknowledge that accent translation isn't a cure for bias. The goal is to break down communication barriers without asking agents to speak in a way that doesn't feel authentic.

We designed this technology to enhance clarity, not erase identity. Our vision has always been to enable agents to speak comfortably in their natural voice while the technology simply adjusts the acoustic patterns that can create friction. It's about being understood, not being someone else.

"THE GOAL IS TO BREAK DOWN COMMUNICATION BARRIERS WITHOUT ASKING AGENTS TO SPEAK IN A WAY THAT DOESN'T FEEL AUTHENTIC."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Q WHAT STEPS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT CONTACT CENTERS TAKE TO IMPROVE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN AGENTS AND CUSTOMERS? WHICH ACTIONS SHOULD THEY PRIORITIZE AND HOW CAN AI-DRIVEN ACCENT SOLUTIONS BEST SUPPORT THOSE EFFORTS?

A: I always advise to start with the basics: clean audio, reliable equipment, and agent coaching on pacing and empathy. Then add technology that reduces friction, such as real-time accent translation, for clearer speech.

We've found the technology works best when it complements strong fundamentals, turning good conversations into effortless ones that help both agents and customers alike feel understood.🗣️



Brendan Read is Editor of Contact Center Pipeline. He has been covering and working in customer service and sales and for contact center companies for most of his career. Brendan has edited and written for leading industry publications and has been an industry analyst. He also has authored and co-authored books on contact center design, customer support, and working from home. Brendan can be reached at brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com.

Find almost anything

Real Answers for Real CX Questions

Operations
Strategy

► All Access
People
Technology



blog.contactcenterpipeline.com



●● GET THE ANSWERS YOU CAN TRUST

THESE DAYS IT'S HARD TO TELL whether the CX advice you're reading is expert insight, a sales pitch, or written by an algorithm at 2 a.m. Like all of our content, *the Contact Center Pipeline blog is written by real people*: experienced contact center and customer service professionals who've been in the trenches and share practical guidance for real-world challenges. There's value in partner perspectives too—but we're always transparent and clearly label where our content comes from, giving you the full picture so you can decide for yourself – blog.contactcenterpipeline.com

Contact Center
pipeline



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

THE HIDDEN ACCESSIBILITY CRISIS

WHY BOTH CUSTOMERS AND AGENTS WITH DISABILITIES MATTER NOW.

Digital accessibility is no longer a “nice-to-have.” It’s a business-critical issue that impacts customer experience (CX), operational efficiency, and brand trust.

Yet many contact centers remain unprepared to serve customers with disabilities, creating frustration for users, unnecessary escalations to live agents, and real legal risks.

Modern contact centers lean heavily on digital channels—web chat, email, and self-service portals—but accessibility gaps remain widespread:

- Screen readers often fail to navigate chat interfaces.
- TTY systems are underused or poorly maintained.
- And agents frequently lack training to support customers with disabilities.

These shortcomings don’t just frustrate customers. They increase workload, slow response times, and expose organizations to regulatory scrutiny.



MODERN CONTACT CENTERS LEAN HEAVILY ON DIGITAL CHANNELS...BUT ACCESSIBILITY GAPS REMAIN WIDESPREAD:...

ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES IN CONTACT CENTERS

Web chat: Many modern contact centers rely on web chat to provide instant support. Yet the reality for users with disabilities is often frustrating. Buttons and forms may be unlabeled for screen readers, keyboard navigation may break, and chat transcripts may be unreadable by assistive technology.

For example, a customer who is visually impaired may be unable to use online chat or a chat app to buy a product or service, or to obtain information and assistance. The result? An escalated call to a live agent, longer handle time, and a frustrated customer.

TTY systems: Text telephone (TTY) systems were designed to give hearing-impaired users access to phone-based support. But in many contact centers, these systems are neglected or missing altogether.

A 2025 survey by Nagish found that less than half of mid-sized contact centers had fully functional TTY systems, leaving hearing-impaired customers without proper access. Some users report waiting days for responses, which can escalate urgent issues unnecessarily to live agents or management.

Self-service portals: Automated portals often fail accessibility checks. Form errors, missing labels, and navigation barriers create roadblocks that prevent customers from resolving issues independently.

Every failure in the self-service channel translates to more live agent escalations, longer call times, and higher operational costs. And yes, frustrated, annoyed customers.

THE HUMAN IMPACT OF POOR ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility issues affect not only customers but also the employees who handle escalations. Every failed interaction creates friction that agents must resolve.

Training gaps: Many contact centers fail to provide scenario-based training or accessibility guidelines. Agents are rarely tested on handling customers with disabilities.

Without proper training, agents may be unsure how to assist customers with visual, auditory, or cognitive disabilities. The results? Longer calls, more errors, frustrated and dissatisfied customers, and stressed employees.

Escalation patterns: When digital channels fail, issues escalate to live agents. For example, accessibility-related glitches in something as simple as an online password reset often force customers into long call queues just to have the agents walk them through a process that should have been fully self-service.

But with proper digital accessibility, such escalations could have been avoided entirely.

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES AFFECT NOT ONLY CUSTOMERS BUT ALSO THE EMPLOYEES... EVERY FAILED INTERACTION CREATES FRICTION THAT AGENTS MUST RESOLVE.

REGULATORY, POLICY PRESSURES

Accessibility isn't just a best practice. In most instances it's legally required, even as some political actors express skepticism or pushback.

For example, recent commentary and policy discussions reported in outlets like *The Guardian* highlight instances of federal and state resistance to expanded accessibility mandates. Also, some federal initiatives promoting disability inclusion have faced political hurdles.

Nevertheless, companies cannot ignore compliance. Failing to provide accessible digital presences exposes brands to lawsuits, fines, and reputational damage.

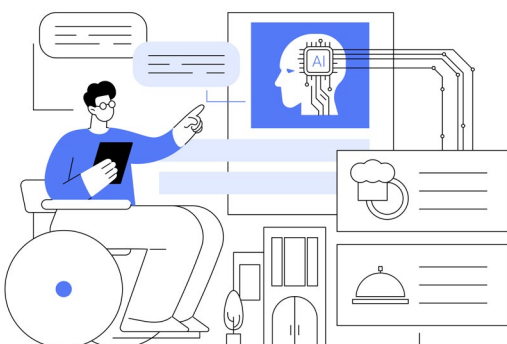


- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is still the law:** Enforcement of existing ADA regulations continues. Companies must stay proactive to avoid being investigated and if warranted, penalized.
- **State-level requirements:** States like California and New York are actively enforcing digital accessibility regulations, and non-compliance can result in costly legal action.
- **Business risk:** Beyond legal liability, inaccessible experiences alienate customers, reduce loyalty, and create operational inefficiencies.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR CONTACT CENTERS

Contact center leaders can take concrete steps to improve accessibility and reduce both legal risk and operational friction.

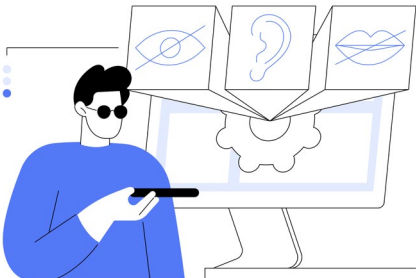
- 1 **Audit all digital channels:** Evaluate web chat, IVR, self-service portals, and apps for accessibility. Include real users with disabilities in testing to validate findings.
- 2 **Integrate accessibility training:** Provide agents with scenario-based training, accessibility checklists, and regular refreshers. Include guidance on TTY and other assistive technologies.
- 3 **Hire inclusively:** Recruit agents with disabilities to bring firsthand expertise into your team (also see **BOX**). Leverage their insights to shape workflows and training programs.



TEAM SUBSCRIPTIONS AVAILABLE @
ContactCenterPipeline.com

4 Leverage expert tools responsibly: Use technology to support human-led accessibility work. Avoid overreliance on overlays, AI fixes, or automated “compliance” tools without testing.

5 Monitor escalations: Track how accessibility gaps affect live-agent volume and satisfaction. Use this data to prioritize improvements.



WHY HIRE AGENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

Incorporating agents with disabilities into contact center teams can dramatically improve service. Contact centers that do so are also reaching out to an untapped pool of quality, loyal workers.

These employees provide firsthand insight into accessibility challenges, helping design better workflows and improve agent training. Prioritizing inclusivity can result in faster resolution times and higher employee engagement.

To support these agents effectively, organizations should enable accommodating work arrangements. These include fitting remote staff with accessible tooling and ensuring on-premise spaces meet ergonomic and assistive tech needs.

Most importantly, agents with disabilities should be fully integrated into team processes, coaching sessions, and feedback loops so their perspectives help shape continuous improvement.

BOX

BY EMBEDDING ACCESSIBILITY...CONTACT CENTERS CAN TURN COMPLIANCE INTO A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE...

6 Policy awareness: Stay current on federal and state ADA regulations, even amid political pushback, and also regulations in other countries where you have customers and operations. Proactively implementing best practices reduces risk and positions your company as an industry leader.

7 Develop customer feedback loops: Create channels for feedback from customers with disabilities. Their insights provide actionable data and help preempt future accessibility issues.

CASE SCENARIOS HIGHLIGHTING IMPACT

The following are composite scenarios based on recurring patterns observed across accessibility, CX, and contact center environments.

Scenario 1: Restaurant Chain Ordering

A visually impaired customer attempts to place an online order using a chat interface with missing screen-reader labels.

Unable to navigate the system, they call the contact center, increasing agent workload and lowering first call resolution (FCR). But with proper accessibility implementation, the customer could have completed the order independently, preserving self-service efficiency.

Scenario 2: Financial Services Portal

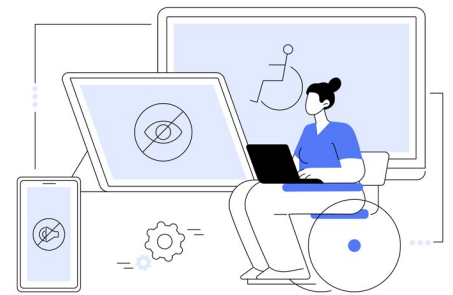
A hearing-impaired customer tries to submit a support request via TTY, but the outdated system repeatedly drops the connection.

This leads to multiple escalations, delayed resolution, and rising customer frustration. Routine TTY maintenance and targeted agent training would have prevented the failure.

Scenario 3: Escalation Metrics

A mid-sized contact center analyzing interaction trends over three months found that roughly a quarter of live agent calls originated from inaccessible digital experiences.

After addressing the underlying accessibility gaps and providing staff training, escalations dropped by 40%, improving both operational efficiency and customer satisfaction.



CONCLUSION

Accessibility isn't a checkbox. It's a strategic imperative. Contact centers that embrace inclusive digital experiences:

- Reduce operational friction,
- Improve employee engagement,
- Protect brand reputation, and
- Minimize legal risk.

By embedding accessibility into digital channels, training, hiring, and feedback loops, contact centers can turn compliance into a competitive advantage, enhancing the experience for *all* customers. 🗣️



Matthew Elephant is CEO of Inclusive Web, helping enterprise brands make digital experiences fully accessible through human-led remediation and testing by real disabled users. He previously built and sold multiple SaaS companies, bringing deep expertise in scaling complex digital solutions.



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE IMAGES

WHY TRADITIONAL SCREENING MISSES YOUR BIGGEST RETENTION RISK

THE OVERLOOKED FACTOR THAT PREDICTS TURNOVER AND SICK LEAVE.

The profit engine of any successful call center rests on two cornerstones: retaining skilled agents and minimizing sick leave. These aren't peripheral metrics; they drive revenue and operational costs directly.

But the ground beneath that foundation is shifting. As AI transforms customer service delivery, talent management strategies must evolve just as rapidly.

We're entering a phase where profit margins for low-complexity tasks will steadily shrink until they disappear altogether. The foundational pyramid of the contact center is inverting, eliminating a large portion of entry-level roles.

Agents will no longer be script readers. They'll handle escalation calls, solve non-standard problems, navigate emotionally charged situations, and integrate with AI systems.

While AI takes over routine tasks, remaining roles become more complex, emotionally taxing, and cognitively demanding. That makes retention even more critical: and sick leave more costly.



Without a shift in how call centers recruit, train, and support their people, organizations risk increased turnover costs, reduced productivity, and a direct hit to profitability.

THE EMOTIONAL LABOR CHALLENGE

Call center jobs are what psychologist Christina Maslach calls "contact work": roles requiring constant emotional labor. Agents must remain composed, empathetic, and effective while interacting with frustrated or confused customers.

Even before AI, these roles had some of the highest turnover rates across industries. This raises a strategic question for call center leaders: how do we identify people who can handle the pressures of this work? (See **BOX** on leadership implications.)

BEYOND NEUROTICISM: A BETTER PREDICTOR

Traditional recruitment models have relied mainly on the Big Five trait "neuroticism" to estimate stress sensitivity (see **BOX** on Big Five traits). But emerging research suggests this isn't the best predictor at all.

A significantly more accurate predictor of burnout, especially in high-pressure environments like call centers, is the combination of two traits:

- **Performance-based self-esteem** ("I am only worthy if I succeed").
- **High ambition** ("I must always perform at my best").

This blend creates the *insecure overachiever*. These individuals often look ideal on paper: high grades, strong drive, impressive performance. But they're also much more prone to burnout, have difficulty accepting feedback, and incur stress-related leave.

This vulnerability stems from a psychological mechanism; when self-esteem is tied to performance, feedback isn't just feedback, it's personal. If a customer or supervisor is unhappy, it feels like a rejection of one's worth.

People with this profile also tend to take disproportionate responsibility for others' satisfaction, making them especially sensitive in emotionally charged conversations. In the fast-paced world of contact work, where complaints and dissatisfaction are part of the job, this sensitivity becomes a very real risk factor.

Ambitious and driven, these individuals set high standards for themselves. So, when customers express frustration or dissatisfaction — as they inevitably do — these agents experience sharp disappointment and internalize the negativity more deeply.

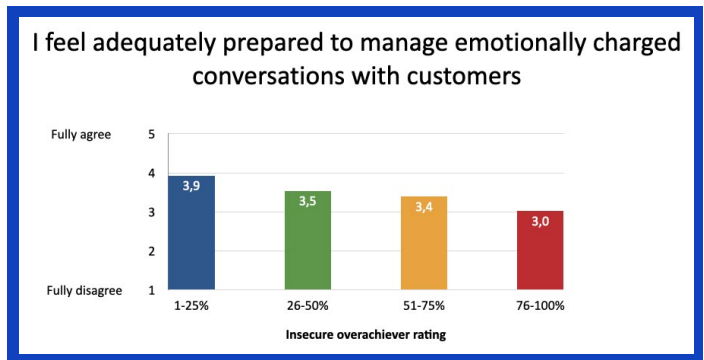
In outbound call settings, this same combination can reduce assertiveness. The desire to be liked may override the drive to convert or close, making them less pushy or competitive than the role requires.

THE DATA: SIX CRITICAL PATTERNS

I've conducted several studies in call centers in both the U.S. and the Nordic countries. In one U.S.-based study involving 289 call center agents, I observed clear patterns linking psychological traits to real-world outcomes.

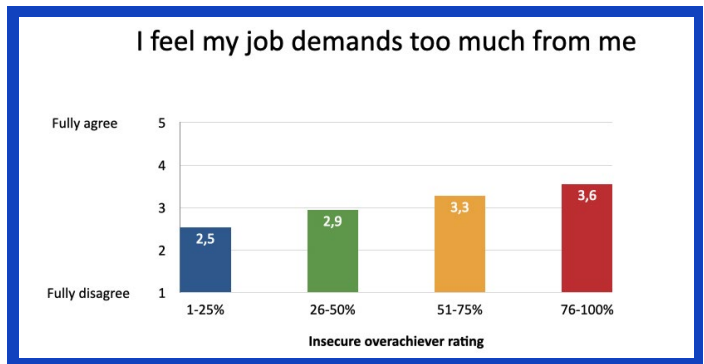
Pattern 1: Lower Preparedness for Emotional Demands

Insecure overachievers report feeling less prepared to manage emotionally charged conversations with customers. Those with performance-based self-esteem and high ambition tend to feel less equipped to handle the emotional strain, even when they have the same training as their peers.

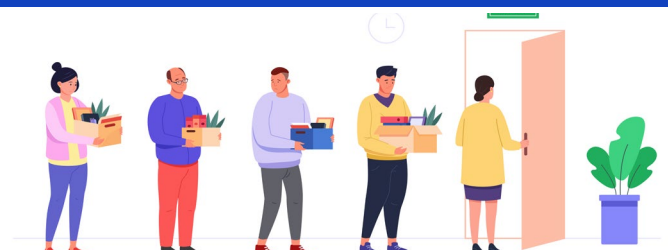


Pattern 2: Perceived Workload Amplification

When employees don't feel adequately prepared to handle difficult conversations, they begin to perceive their work as more demanding than others do, even though they have the same workloads. Lack of preparedness correlates with these perceptions, regardless of actual task volume.

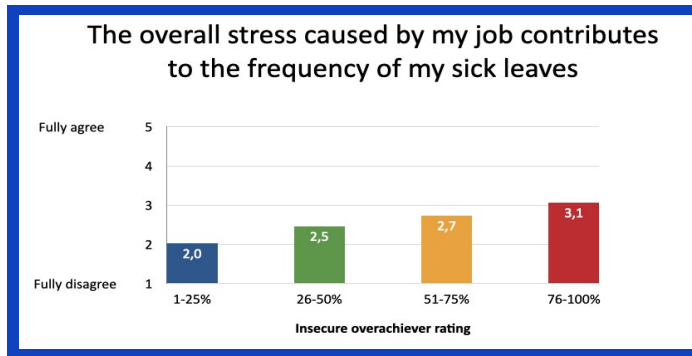


WHEN EMPLOYEES DON'T FEEL ADEQUATELY PREPARED TO HANDLE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS, THEY BEGIN TO PERCEIVE THEIR WORK AS MORE DEMANDING...



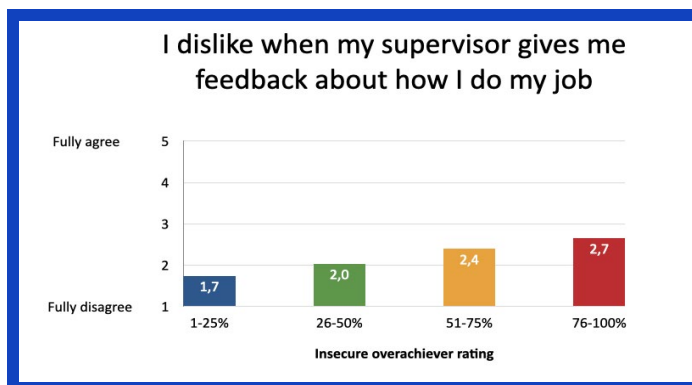
Pattern 3: Sick Leave Intention

This elevated perception of job demands translates into higher levels of experienced stress. And that stress correlates strongly with increased intention to take sick leave. Higher stress levels predict greater likelihood of absence: a strong early warning signal for turnover.



Pattern 4: Feedback Sensitivity

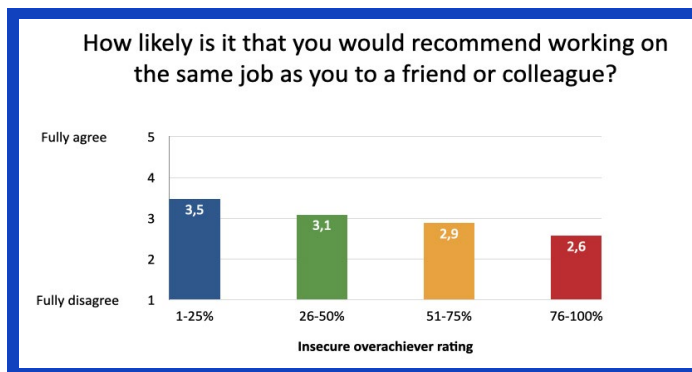
Performance-based self-esteem affects how employees receive feedback. Individuals with this trait report a stronger negative emotional reaction to being evaluated and tend to give their leaders lower ratings.



Pattern 5: Job Satisfaction Decline

Patterns 1-4 compound over time, thereby eroding the agent's connection to their work. Overall job satisfaction drops significantly for profiles with high ambition and fragile self-worth.

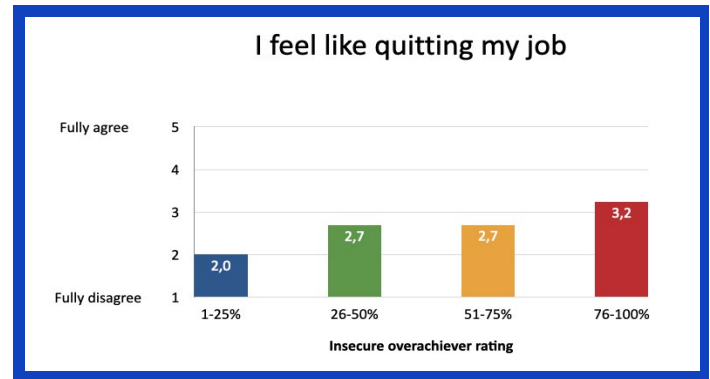
These agents become less engaged with their role and less likely to recommend their workplace to others. What started as enthusiasm and drive gradually transforms into disillusionment and detachment.



Pattern 6: Increased Turnover Intent

This culminates in a higher intention to quit, which is the strongest predictor of actual turnover. Agents who link their self-esteem to performance outcomes are significantly more likely to consider leaving their positions.

By the time an agent expresses intention to quit, the organization has often already lost the battle for retention. The cost isn't just in replacement and training; it's in the months of diminished performance leading up to their departure.



Together, these findings reveal that this psychological profile isn't a niche HR insight: it's a fundamental business variable. It predicts who will stay, who will thrive, and who will burn out.

CONTINUED ON PAGE PAGE 47



LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS

The emotional labor issue goes beyond stress, tenure, and sick leave. Employees with the insecure overachiever profile are less comfortable with evaluation and more likely to interpret feedback as personal criticism. That's why leaders get lower ratings from individuals with this profile.

Understanding this difference, between how individuals respond to feedback, opens a powerful opportunity for call center managers. Leaders can be trained to adapt their coaching style based on whether an employee has the insecure overachiever profile or not.

This tailored approach can drastically improve leadership efficacy across the center. When employees improve self-leadership around their psychological drivers and managers adjust their leadership accordingly, both parties meet halfway.

The result is the creation of a true co-leadership dynamic. One that transforms feedback from a source of stress into a catalyst for growth.

We can conclude with confidence that this factor correlates strongly with:

- Tenure length
- Job satisfaction
- Burnout risk
- Leadership ratings
- Feedback tolerance

These findings align with a growing body of peer-reviewed research on the insecure overachiever profile and workplace outcomes.

What I'm observing in call centers mirrors patterns documented across high-pressure, customer-facing industries: confirming that this isn't just correlation, but a robust and replicable phenomenon.

...THE HUMANS WHO WILL THRIVE IN THIS NEW ENVIRONMENT WILL NEED MORE THAN EMPATHY OR QUICK THINKING. THEY'LL NEED MENTAL RESILIENCE, EMOTIONAL ENDURANCE, AND THE RIGHT SUPPORT SYSTEMS.

RECRUITMENT IMPACTS

Here's where the insecure overachiever trait is becoming critical. It is sharply on the rise, particularly among younger generations.

Large-scale studies, such as this one published in *Psychological Bulletin* that examined generational differences show that Gen Z, especially young women with strong academic records, are increasingly tying their self-worth to external success.

Since this wasn't a common factor until recently, it's been missed in traditional recruitment models. This creates a paradox for recruiters: the very traits that make someone look hireable — being ambitious and taking personal responsibility — can also signal vulnerability.

If unchecked, this feeds the cycle of churn and stress-related absenteeism.

A PROGRESSIVE SOLUTION

So how are HR leaders to resolve this paradox?

One option is to identify and filter out insecure overachievers during recruitment. This is certainly the simplest and most cost-effective approach in the short term.

But there's a more progressive — and sustainable — approach: equip them to thrive. The psychological tendencies that underlie insecure overachievement are not hardwired; they are malleable. If they weren't, they wouldn't have increased so sharply in response to social and digital environments.

THE BIG FIVE TRAITS IN CONTACT CENTERS

The Big Five — also called the Five-Factor Model — is arguably the most commonly-used personality framework in recruitment. It groups traits into five broad dimensions:

1. Openness (curiosity, creativity)
2. Conscientiousness (organization, reliability)
3. Extraversion (sociability, assertiveness)
4. Agreeableness (empathy, cooperation)
5. Neuroticism (emotional reactivity, stress sensitivity)

These traits reliably predict job performance, stress, and more.

That's why the Big Five underpins many widely used recruitment tools: including Hogan HPI, SHL OPQ32, Criteria's EPP/CPI, PMaps' BPO screener, PI Behavioral Assessment, Traitify - and various tests from vendors like TestGorilla, TestGroup, and HiPeople.

But there's a limitation: Big Five traits are stable and hard to change, making them less useful for training. In contrast, models focused on malleable traits — like perfectionism and performance-based self-esteem — offer sharper insights and clearer paths for development.

Furthermore, emerging research suggests that the insecure overachiever profile may outperform the Big Five in predicting stress, burnout, and early turnover risk.

The truth is that these psychological patterns have been addressed in cognitive behavioral therapy for decades.

Building on this knowledge, I developed a brief psychometric assessment that accurately identifies insecure overachievers. It equips them with tools to manage their inner drivers more constructively, reducing stress and increasing staying power.

These are bright, hardworking, and driven individuals. With the right support, they don't just survive in call centers: they can thrive.

THE PATH FORWARD

The rise of AI doesn't eliminate the need for humans in call centers: it elevates it. But the humans who will thrive in this new environment will need more than empathy or quick thinking. They'll need mental resilience, emotional endurance, and the right support systems.





ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

THE NEURODIVERSITY DISCONNECT

HOW TO RECONNECT WITH EXCELLENT NEURODIVERGENT AGENTS.

I'm starting from a few assumptions. That diversity and inclusion matter. That neurodiversity is real. And that listening is one of the most important skills a leader can develop.

If we agree on those foundations, then it's worth exploring what leaders can actually do to better support agents in a contact center.

Contact centers demand constant communication, emotional regulation, and the ability to make sense of other people's confusion in real time.

For neurodivergent individuals, that can be exhausting. But it can also be exactly where their strengths shine.

Whether a contact center becomes a place of burnout or belonging has less to do with the individual - like for a neurodivergent agent - and far more to do with how willing leaders are to truly understand how different minds work.

THE AGENT'S JOB: AND NEURODIVERSITY

A contact center agent's job is, at its core, to make people feel heard and understood. All day long. Repeatedly. And often when those people are frustrated, anxious, confused, or already at the end of their patience.

YOU RARELY KNOW WHO IS NEURODIVERGENT, AND YOU DON'T NEED TO. WHAT BECOMES VISIBLE INSTEAD IS HOW DIFFERENTLY PEOPLE ENGAGE WITH THE WORK.



Agents absorb emotion, translate it, regulate their own reactions, and respond with curiosity, clarity, and care, interaction after interaction.

In my experience, those strengths don't show up neatly by role or title. You rarely know who is neurodivergent, *and you don't need to.*

What becomes visible instead is how differently people engage with the work. Some thrive when expectations are clear and decisions are well defined. Others bring strong intuition and empathy when nuance matters.

These strengths emerge not because someone fits a category, but because leaders are paying attention to how people actually work: and are willing to adjust the environments to meet them where they are, whenever possible.

What is striking, though, is how rarely organizations are paying attention, are willing to make those adjustments, and are offering that same level of listening in return.

We ask agents to slow customers down, de-escalate emotion, and seek understanding before solving the problem. Yet internally, we often rush past their experience in the name of policy, efficiency, or risk management.

The gap, the disconnect, is hard to ignore. Emotional intelligence is treated as a job requirement but not always as a leadership or organizational practice.

In neurodiversity, the desire to feel heard and understood is not a preference. Instead, it is a fundamental human need, often intensified by a lifetime of communication barriers and social exclusion.

In many cases, this desire is paired by organizations with being asked to adapt without ever being asked what support would help. Communication gaps happen constantly, but they are rarely one-sided.

Being truly understood is a rare experience, and when it happens, it can be unexpectedly powerful. It creates safety. It reduces the need to mask. It allows people to stop performing: *and start participating as themselves.*

WHERE PEOPLE PRACTICES FAIL TO CONNECT

However, this is where many well-intentioned people practices fall short, failing to connect with neurodivergent employees: like contact center agents.

Most rules, guidelines, and policies are designed for sameness. They prioritize structure, consistency, and risk reduction.

On paper, that looks fair. But in practice, it often assumes everyone thinks, communicates, and regulates emotion in the same way.

When inclusion is treated as something added on rather than something embedded into how decisions are made, the system quietly defaults back to what feels safest and most familiar.

In my experience, bolt-on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives rarely change lived experience. When inclusion sits outside core operations, it is easy to deprioritize when things get busy or uncomfortable.

Representation improves, but processes remain unchanged. People are asked to adapt, mask, or work around systems that were never designed with them in mind.

Real inclusion only shows up when organizations are willing to question whether their definition of fairness is actually producing understanding, safety, and belonging.

A piece on neurodiversity in contact centers, "Championing Neurodiversity in the Contact Centre," written by Julie Mordue and published in *Call Centre Helper* pointed to small but meaningful adjustments in hiring and onboarding for these agents. These included:

- Clearer job descriptions that distinguish essential skills from nice-to-haves.
- More flexible interview formats that reduce unnecessary pressure.
- Onboarding approaches that allow people to learn and demonstrate competence in different ways.



These are useful insights, especially for leaders just starting this journey. But they are *not sufficient* on their own.

ADDRESSING THE DAILY EXPERIENCE

What those conversations often stop short of addressing is the daily experience after someone is hired. The experience of being listened to. Of being supported in an environment that still prioritizes metrics, efficiency, and consistency over human nuance.

That is where leadership shows up: or it doesn't.

At the center of meaningful inclusion is what I think of as listen-first leadership. This is leadership that does not assume it already knows the answer. Instead, it asks questions like, "Help me understand what gets in your way," or "What would make it easier for you to do your best work?"

Listening first means slowing down long enough to hear how someone actually experiences the work, the pace, the structure, and the expectations. It replaces assumptions with curiosity and rigid rules with thoughtful questions.

When leaders practice this consistently, the contact center stops being a place people endure and becomes a place where people can contribute fully.

For neurodivergent agents especially, the stakes are higher.

When your role already requires heightened self-regulation and constant interpretation of others' needs, being unheard internally does more than frustrate. It erodes trust. Over time, it turns what could be a place of belonging into a quiet source of burnout.

And yet, this is exactly why contact centers can be powerful environments for neurodivergent talent when they are led well.

The role values skills that are often under-recognized elsewhere. Deep listening. Pattern recognition. Curiosity. Emotional attunement. Comfort with ambiguity. The ability to make sense of complexity in real time.

These are ***not*** fringe capabilities. They are ***central*** to great service. When leaders understand this, the contact center shifts from a place people have to survive to one where they can genuinely thrive.

MAKING CONNECTING COMMITMENTS

If you are leading a contact center today, this work comes down to making three commitments to connect it to your employees. Like your neurodivergent agents.

First, make self-care a priority in a high-stress environment. Contact centers carry a unique emotional load. Expectations are high. Pressure is constant.

The best centers acknowledge this reality and build forgiveness into their culture. They assume good intent. They look for patterns rather than isolated moments. They allow people to recover from difficult days instead of treating every dip as a failure.

This is **not** about lowering standards. It is **about** creating conditions where people can meet them.

Second, lead by listening first. Listening is not a soft skill or a courtesy. It is a leadership discipline. It is how you earn the right to be heard.

Seeking to understand before responding creates trust, strengthens relationships, and leads to better decisions. In environments built on speed and volume, slowing down to listen may feel counterintuitive. But it is often the most effective move you can make.

Third, stay teachable. Neurodiversity is not always easy to understand, especially when it challenges your own way of thinking or communicating. Expecting everyone to operate like you do is not fairness. It's convenience.

Being a senior leader does not mean you have finished learning. It means you have a responsibility to remain curious, open, and willing to adjust when the system is not working for everyone.

Contact centers already teach people how to listen, regulate emotion, and seek understanding under pressure.

WORKING WITH NEURODIVERSITY DOES NOT REQUIRE PERFECTION. IT REQUIRES INTENTION.

They do it externally, every single day. The real test of inclusion is whether leaders are willing to apply those same skills internally.

Working with neurodiversity does not require perfection. It requires intention. Leaders make choices every day about what they prioritize, measure, and what they make space for. Inclusion lives in those choices, whether we name it or not. ¹⁰



Pier Ragone is a customer experience and contact center leader with over 25 years of impact in both in-house and outsourced environments. He has scaled teams, led transformation in complex service operations, and played key leadership roles in several high-profile Canadian startups. You can reach him at ragonepier@gmail.com.



AGENT TURNOVER

Addressing the insecure overachiever challenge can take different forms depending on organizational maturity and resources.

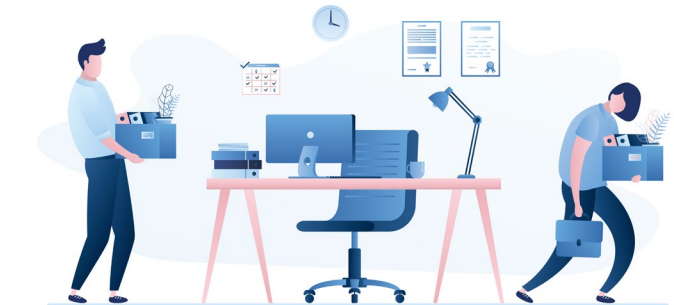
At minimum, psychometric screening during recruitment can help identify high-risk profiles and inform hiring decisions. But the gold-standard approach is three-dimensional.

First, use assessment data not just to select, but to prepare, identifying candidates who may need additional support and planning for their success from day one.

Second, implement targeted development programs that help agents build psychological skills to manage their inner drivers more constructively.

Third, equip managers with training to adapt their coaching and feedback styles to different psychological profiles, creating more effective relationships across the team.

Organizations that integrate these elements into their talent strategy will be better positioned to:



- Reduce churn and turnover costs.
- Increase job satisfaction and engagement.
- Deliver outstanding customer experiences.
- Build resilient, high-performing teams.

In a world where machines can talk, human connection and resilience become premium assets. The question isn't whether to assess employees and prospective hires for psychological fit: it's whether you can afford **not** to. ¹¹



Jens Näsström is a Swedish occupational psychologist and independent researcher, specializing in next-gen psychometrics. He is the Founder and Head of Science at *Ambitionprofile*. His research and development focuses on overlooked psychological factors, such as "anxious overachievers," that drive stress, sick leave, and turnover in call centers.

IN A WORLD WHERE MACHINES CAN TALK, HUMAN CONNECTION AND RESILIENCE BECOME PREMIUM ASSETS. THE QUESTION ISN'T WHETHER TO ASSESS EMPLOYEES AND PROSPECTIVE HIRES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL FIT: IT'S WHETHER YOU CAN AFFORD NOT TO.



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

TURNING ACQUISITION CHAOS INTO CLARITY HOW TO UNTANGLE MERGED CONTACT CENTER OPERATIONS.

If you have ever lived through a merger or acquisition (M&A), you know the feeling. Systems do not talk, processes overlap, and everyone insists their way is the right way.

In my career leading customer service and contact center operations through multiple integrations, I have learned that an acquisition does not just change logos or leadership; it rewires the DNA of how people serve customers.

In this article, I am going to outline the experience of one such M&A that I was involved with to illustrate the key challenges and how they were resolved, step by step, that could give you guidance

should your contact center be facing similar integration with other centers.

WHEN M&A CAME KNOCKING

In this example, a retailer, each acquired business brought its own ecosystem with unique order-to-cash models, pricing logic, escalation paths, and definitions of what “urgent” even meant.

One team used Outlook for tracking orders, another used spreadsheets, and a third used a legacy CRM last updated during the Obama Administration.

Suddenly, the contact center was not just a support function. It was the intersection of competing worlds. We were not tasked with merging systems but with building a new, shared experience.

...AN ACQUISITION DOES NOT JUST CHANGE LOGOS OR LEADERSHIP; IT REWIRES THE DNA OF HOW PEOPLE SERVE CUSTOMERS.

Our mission was to transform these parts into a single, customer-ready operation that employees could navigate confidently and customers could trust completely.

STEP ONE: ADMIT THE MESS

Post-acquisition integration is not a 90-day sprint; it is controlled chaos that demands honesty first. We started by mapping what was really happening inside the contact center, not what was written in PowerPoint decks.

What we found was painfully human.

- Three separate order entry methods, two of them manual and one semi-automated.
- Different return merchandise processes depending on who picked up the call.
- Conflicting pricing and quoting policies for nearly identical products.
- Customer emails routed to multiple, unmonitored inboxes with no ownership model.

These were not signs of failure. They were the result of independence. Each team had built workarounds that made sense in their old world, but those differences were now slowing down the new one.

Before we could simplify, we had to see the whole picture. So, we did something contact centers rarely do: we stopped, listened, and documented the chaos.

We interviewed agents. We sat in on calls. We looked at what customers were actually saying in their emails.

What emerged was a mosaic of effort, made up of dedicated people doing their best with the tools they had but who were unable to see beyond their own lanes. That acknowledgment, that this was not broken but incomplete, became our turning point.



STEP TWO: UNIFY THE TRUTH, DATA BEFORE PROCESS

Every company says it wants one version of the truth. After an acquisition, you quickly learn there are at least four. Before processes can align, data must align.

Our Customer Service teams were operating on different systems with mismatched customer hierarchies. Sales territories overlapped. Tax, ship-to, and pricing data were inconsistent. Agents spent as much time verifying data as they did helping customers.

HERE IS A TRAP MANY POST-ACQUISITION COMPANIES FALL INTO: THEY RUSH TO STANDARDIZE PROCESSES BUT FORGET TO STANDARDIZE THE EXPERIENCE.

We launched a "Customer Master Data" initiative to cleanse, validate, and standardize customer records. It became the foundation for:

- Consistent financial governance and credit limits across regions.
- Accurate data mapping to route customers to the right partner instantly.
- Reliable reporting that finally connected order volume, fulfillment speed, and customer sentiment.

Once the data aligned, the fog lifted. Agents no longer had to guess. Dashboards began telling one coherent story. When people have access to the same truth, they can finally make the same decisions.

STEP THREE: STANDARDIZE THE EXPERIENCE, NOT THE LOGO

Here is a trap many post-acquisition companies fall into: they rush to standardize processes but forget to standardize the experience.



Customers do not care which division they are talking to. They care that someone owns their issue and resolves it quickly.

We built a framework that unified the experience layer first.

- A "Customer Experience Council" that brought Sales, Supply Chain, and Customer Service together every month to review real customer pain points and decide how to fix them.
- A universal escalation tracker that replaced ad hoc email threads with visible ownership, timestamps, and trend analysis.
- A training re-launch that focused on judgment and empathy, not memorization.

We standardized our frontline messaging. Previously, agents across divisions used different phrasing when communicating delays or product constraints. Now, every message follows a shared communication framework that blends accuracy, empathy, and clear next steps.

The result was consistency across channels and divisions, giving customers one experience and reinforcing internal alignment among contact center teams.

STEP FOUR: EMPOWER WITH TECHNOLOGY, NOT TOOLS

Acquisitions love new technology. Every integration meeting seems to end with, "We should get a tool for that."

The problem is that tools without governance multiply chaos. We took a different approach. Technology had to earn its place by simplifying agent work or improving customer experience (CX). We started by mapping every repetitive, error-prone step in the customer journey.

Then we automated with purpose.

- Document-capture automation for order intake, which reduced touches by 60%.



- Contact analytics through our omnichannel platform to measure call, email, and chat trends in one place.
- Powerful business intelligence (BI) dashboards that pulled data from multiple systems, giving leadership a single lens into service levels, escalation volume, and urgent-order metrics.
- A customer self-service portal for invoices, order tracking, and representative lookups, reducing inbound volume and empowering customers to get answers faster.

Our rule was simple: if a tool did not reduce effort for customers and agents, it did not make the cut.

The result was what I call "productive silence": fewer status-check emails, follow-ups, and agents bouncing between screens to answer a single question. Technology did not replace our people; it removed the noise so they could focus on the moments that matter.

STEP FIVE: CONTACT CENTER PLATFORM INTEGRATION

Behind every seamless experience is an invisible spine of contact center infrastructure. Routing, dialing, call recording, and workforce management (WFM) are not glamorous topics, but they determine whether an integration actually works day to day.

In our case, each acquired business arrived with its own telephony stack. Some were on legacy on-prem systems, others used partial cloud solutions, and none were configured the same way.

A full rip-and-replace on Day One would have created unnecessary disruption, so we took a phased approach.

We first standardized call routing logic and queue design, ensuring customers were routed based on intent and urgency rather than legacy product lines. This allowed us to unify the CX even before the technology was fully consolidated.

Dialing plans and call recording policies followed, with compliance and quality requirements harmonized across all teams.

Yes, ultimately the acquired teams were re-equipped onto a single, cloud-based omnichannel platform.

Moving to the cloud gave us scalability, remote work flexibility, and centralized analytics that were impossible in a fragmented environment. The transition was staged, not abrupt, with parallel run periods and fallback paths to protect service levels.

Training was role-based and practical.

- Instead of generic system overviews, agents were trained on what changed in their daily workflow: how calls would route differently, where recordings lived, and how schedules were managed.
- Supervisors received deeper training on WFM tools and real-time monitoring so they could coach effectively during the transition.

The lesson was simple: technology integration must follow operational readiness. When routing logic, governance, and training are aligned, the platform becomes an enabler rather than a disruption.

STEP SIX: CULTURE IS THE FINAL INTEGRATION

The hardest part of any integration is not the system migration. It is human migration. Each legacy team carried pride in its history. Some feared losing their identity,

and others feared being absorbed into something faceless. Culture work had to move as fast as process work.

We treated culture as an operational dependency.

- Recognized legacy strengths before standardizing and built from what worked.
- Included agents from every business in standard operating procedures (SOP) workshops so they felt ownership.
- Celebrated wins publicly with dashboards, quick-win boards, and internal recognition.

We also rewired internal communication. Instead of top-down memos, we started sharing stories about how collaboration prevented errors, how an agent caught an issue early, or how teamwork saved time and frustration.

When people see their fingerprints on the process, they stop resisting it. That is when the integration becomes more than structural; it becomes emotional.

STEP SEVEN: INTEGRATING PEOPLE, NOT JUST TEAMS

Organizational integration cannot succeed if people feel like passengers in the process. From the beginning, we were intentional about avoiding the classic "A Team versus B Team" dynamic that often follows acquisitions.

We started by clearly defining roles, career paths, and progression frameworks across the combined organization.

- Legacy titles were mapped into a single structure so employees could see where they stood and where they could go.
- Promotions and development opportunities were tied to skills and performance, not legacy affiliation.

Scheduling and workforce planning were centralized to ensure fairness and consistency. This removed perceptions that one team received preferred shifts or lighter workloads, which can quietly undermine morale. Transparent scheduling rules created trust quickly.

THE HARDEST PART OF ANY INTEGRATION IS NOT THE SYSTEM MIGRATION. IT IS HUMAN MIGRATION.

When workforce reductions were unavoidable, decisions were made based on future-state needs, not historical ownership. We communicated early, clearly, and respectfully.

Leaders were visible, questions were answered directly, and affected employees were treated with dignity and support. That transparency mattered just as much to those who stayed as to those who left.

To reinforce unity, we mixed teams intentionally. SOP workshops, pilot programs, and improvement initiatives always included representatives from each legacy organization. People were not asked to abandon their identity; they were asked to contribute it.

When individuals see a future for themselves and fairness in how decisions are made, competition fades. Collaboration takes its place.

STEP EIGHT: THE CUSTOMER LENS

Throughout this transformation, one principle anchored every decision: if a change does not make life easier for customers or agents, it is probably not worth doing.

We reframed our metrics from internal to external:

- From average handle time (AHT) to customer effort score.
- From ticket closure to first contact resolution (FCR).
- From volume managed to issues prevented.

We began using text analytics on emails to measure sentiment trends and track how tone improved as processes stabilized. We no longer measured just speed, but trust.



TRUE INTEGRATION IS NOT ABOUT MERGING SYSTEMS; IT IS ABOUT SYNCHRONIZING PEOPLE, DATA, AND INTENT INTO ONE VOICE CUSTOMERS CAN TRUST.

That shift reshaped how our contact center leaders talked about success. Meetings no longer started with "How many calls did we take?" but with "How many customers did not have to call?"

That is when we knew we were transforming from a cost center into a *confidence center*.

STEP NINE: PARTNERING WITH THE BUSINESS

Unifying a post-acquisition contact center means re-establishing relationships inside the organization as much as outside it.

- Sales needed transparency.
- Supply Chain needed predictability.
- Finance needed governance.

Everyone needed confidence that customer service was not just reacting but enabling.

We embedded customer service leaders into cross-functional meetings and made service data visible in executive dashboards.

Once leadership saw the numbers, response times, sentiment trends, and backlog velocity, the conversation shifted. Customer Service went from anecdote to analytics.

That visibility changed perception. Instead of being seen as a call center, we became viewed as a "customer command center." Aligned data changed not only our processes, but our influence.

FROM CHAOS TO CLARITY

Within two years, measurable improvements were visible across every area of the contact center.

- Response times improved significantly.
- Service recovery became faster and more predictable.

- Employee engagement climbed.
- Self-service adoption reduced manual workload across teams.

The collective impact was unmistakable. Customers experienced faster answers, fewer handoffs, and more cohesive service journeys.

The most telling sign was not in the metrics, but in the conversations.

Customers stopped asking, "Which division are you?"

They simply said, "Thanks, you made it easy."

Agents stopped saying, "That is not my product line."

They started saying, "Let me take care of that for you."

That is not automation. That is alignment.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Acquisitions create noise. Leadership creates harmony. True integration is not about merging systems; it is about synchronizing people, data, and intent into one voice customers can trust.

The great untangling never happens overnight. It happens every day, one clarified process, one empowered agent, and one consistent CX at a time.

That is the real work of post-acquisition clarity. 🗣️



Michael Bidwell is a senior customer experience and contact center leader with more than two decades of experience transforming complex, multi-system operations into scalable, customer-ready organizations. Mike focuses on simplifying work for agents while improving trust and outcomes for customers. You can connect with him on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/bidwell76](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bidwell76).

• PRINT + DIGITAL •



THE STORY DOESN'T END HERE

Stay ahead of the trends transforming the contact center and customer service industry with a digital or print subscription.



CONTACTCENTERPIPELINE.COM