DECREASE ATTRITION THROUGH TRAINING DONE RIGHT

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Contact Center
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A planned, balanced training approach leads to more consistent service delivery and higher job satisfaction.

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While training is a top 2016 priority for contact center managers, a recent study finds that the type and frequency of training that most contact centers are planning will not adequately address the top call center challenge—staff attrition. Regular, planned training that balances process and behavioral skills, reinforced by a certification program, will not only have a greater impact on the customer experience; it will positively impact staff attrition.

An report recently published in *Pipeline*, "Contact Center Challenges and Priorities," January 2016 (bit.ly/1Q0Oz1n), outlined results from a survey conducted in late 2015, which focused on participants' current contact center challenges and the priorities they set in place for 2016. The No. 1 challenge (24% of respondents) was attrition, while one of the top priorities for 2016 was to improve training (29%). This would seem to imply that contact center managers are planning to use training as one of the tools to impact attrition (top challenge). While the CX Solutions team has seen that the right training can certainly impact not only the customer experience but also attrition, we wanted to look deeper into the type and frequency of training planned.

To answer this question, we conducted a short survey with *Contact Center Pipeline* readers about the topics covered in training and the frequency of training for both new-hires and existing employees. Our goal was t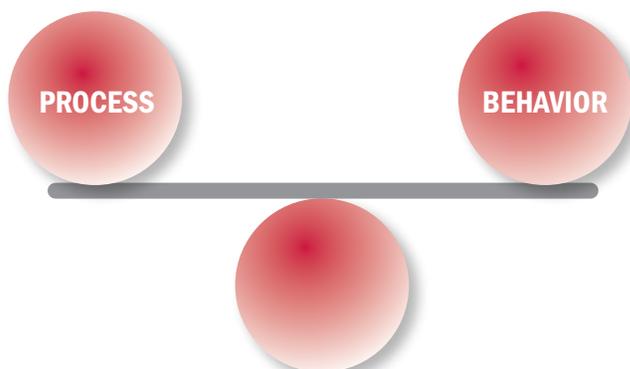o uncover how contact center managers are using their training resources and see how it could align with the No. 1 challenge identified in the initial survey—attrition.
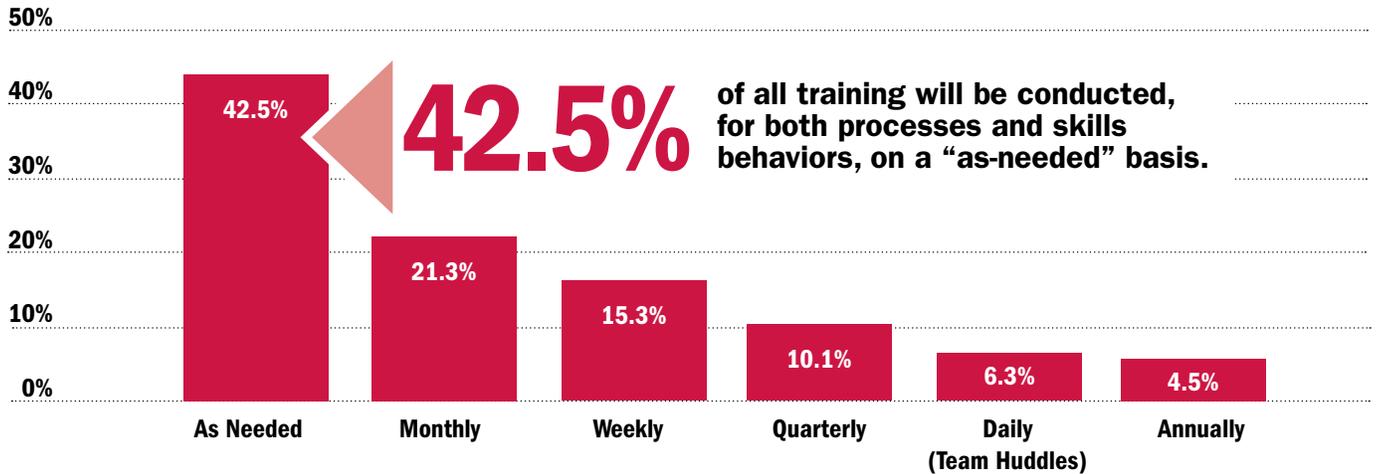
Process Vs. Behavior Training

While training was a top priority identified by participants in the "Contact Center Challenges and Priorities" research, in our follow-up survey, nearly all contact centers (95%) said that they will focus the majority of their training in 2016 on processes—that is training focused on products and technology. Only about one-third of contact center managers said they plan to focus training on customer service skills and employee behaviors, with 35% planning training on enhancing emotional connections and 32% training on frustration-reduction skills.

Obviously product and technology are necessary topics for training—you can't support the customer without a full background on the product or service offering, as well as the ability to navigate through the necessary technology to address the customer's needs and/or concerns. However, after an agent conquers these basics, the way to drive customer engagement to the next level is through enhanced emotional connection skills and the ability to deal with frustrated customers.

These behavioral skills are vitally important for turning a transaction into an interaction that leads to repeat business, returning customers and positive word of mouth. These skills also play a large role in mentally equipping frontline agents to deal with a variety of customers and situations, which, in turn, increases job satisfaction and employee retention. Training resources need to be allocated at both the process level and the customer interaction level to create a more balanced, able and satisfied agent.

PROCESS

BEHAVIOR

Bar chart data:

- As Needed: 42.5%
- Monthly: 21.3%
- Weekly: 15.3%
- Quarterly: 10.1%
- Daily (Team Huddles): 6.3%
- Annually: 4.5%

42.5% of all training will be conducted, for both processes and skills behaviors, on a "as-needed" basis.

Frequency of Training: Planned Vs. Ad-hoc

Our survey found that roughly 42% of all training—for both processes and skills behaviors—will be conducted on an "as-needed" basis. The next closest frequency was monthly, which was reported by 22% of participants, and 15% said they plan on conducting training on a weekly basis. This leads us to believe that the majority of training in 2016 will be more reactionary rather than proactive or planned. Granted, there will be many times over the course of a year when new products are launched, service offerings are changed, etc., but to keep training as a top priority, resource allocation and training development needs to be more strategic and planned to gain lasting change and address the challenges identified.

Our experience has shown that great customer experiences and employee satisfaction is driven by training and coaching that is planned as part of an overall operations strategic plan. Training "as needed" is often delivered reactively and to smaller employee audiences or individuals. This type of training delivery can come across as more of a corrective action rather than skills development.

Reactive "as-needed" training is often viewed as a fire-drill approach and lacks the long-term learning element. The employee often views this as a negative approach, which leads to job dissatisfaction and, at times, increased attrition. With a planned training approach, there is a more consistent understanding of the content, which also leads to a more consistent delivery.

Taking It to the Next Level: Certification

When training is implemented on a planned, scheduled and strategic basis, an important element to gain a full return on the training investment and ensure sustained results is to incorporate a certification program. By implementing ongoing certification programs as a follow-up to training, participants can keep key learnings and messages top of mind. And with ongoing measures to track understanding and demonstration of the content, regardless of process or behaviors, those key learnings, over time, become part of an employee's DNA.

When a certification program is in full swing, companies are better able to identify employee knowledge trends and skills demonstration. Moving the training approach from ad hoc, or "as needed," to a more planned and strategic approach allows companies to put valuable metrics in place to measure the impact of training. Actionable information also can be captured to assist in improving processes and balancing efficiency and effectiveness. When implemented correctly, and with regular tracking, a certification program provides numerous benefits for the company, the employee and the customer.

With training identified as a top priority for 2016, there can be alignment with the No. 1 challenge—attrition. Training must be included as part of the overall strategic plan, outlining resources needed, topics to be covered and frequency of training. The strategic plan should also include a balanced approach including both process and behavioral skills development to ensure the greatest return on your training investment.

It goes without saying that the world of contact centers is a fast-moving and ever-changing environment with training needs occurring on a regular basis. The resources placed toward this initiative should ensure that there is a positive return on investment. Companies that place a greater emphasis on integrating training needs into the overall strategic plan and measuring the success through a certification program will find higher levels of skills understanding and demonstration leading to greater employee satisfaction and attrition reduction. ⌾

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Contact Center Pipeline is a monthly instructional journal focused on driving business success through effective contact center direction and decisions. Each issue contains informative articles, case studies, best practices, research and coverage of trends that impact the customer experience. Our writers and contributors are well-known industry experts with a unique understanding of how to optimize resources and maximize the value the organization provides to its customers.

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