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5 Ways to Keep Your Call-Center Staff

Get creative to keep your agents – and improve your bottom line in the process.

By **Pam Baker** on **April 3, 2008**

A major cost problem in call centers is the constant and seemingly unstoppable **turnover of call agents**. “It costs \$10,000 to \$15,000 in hard expenses to replace a single **call-center worker**,” said Matt Katz, vice president of business consulting at **Merced Systems**. By contrast, he noted a company saves from \$2,000 to \$3,000 for every month a single staffer is retained.

To prevent attrition, many companies are turning to innovative **incentives** to keep agents on the job. Here are the five most popular, and arguably most successful, ways to retain those valuable call agents:

- 1. Skip the numbers and call the name.** Call-center agents report they feel nameless, faceless and disposable. To curb the dissatisfaction that brews from anonymity, increase positive interaction between supervisors and call agents. An occasional pat on the back goes a long way. “We push for more contact with supervisors that are not punitive,” said Katz. “It’s important to listen and treat staffers as people.”
- 2. Make training fun.** Call agents **based outside the U.S.** are doubly valuable as it is often difficult to find bilingual replacements. To motivate this group, consider combining trips with training sessions. “Some of the most successful retention programs offer advanced training and certification programs, and in the case of multinationals, an opportunity to travel to the U.S. and other countries as part of training and team building,” explained David Anderson, CEO of **Utopia Group**.
- 3. Offer family perks.** Several companies report that showing appreciation for the call agent and his or her family is an assured win in the retention war. Everything from inviting families to company picnics to offering free movie passes when the call agent works late are very popular, according to Jack McElaney, vice president of sales and client services at **E Communication Advantage**.
- 4. Bend time.** Burnout is a huge problem for underpaid and overworked call agents. To relieve the pressures that lead to burnout, consider being more lenient on time issues. Flexible schedules and added paid time off for excellent performance are great incentives for call agents to pull all those extra hours.

Conversely, little perks before the shift can help agents perform better on the job and curb punctuality problems. “I recently saw one call center increase morale and productivity plus nearly eliminate tardiness by offering donuts for those coming to work 15 minutes early,” said Anderson.
- 5. Get off the bucks and bank the savings.** While universal pay raises are often too harsh a blow on company profits, **reward programs** are both affordable and effective retention measures. “I have seen call centers give away motorcycles, large cash bonuses and other types of big incentives,” said Anderson. “Think outside the box and look for something that really appeals to your staff.”

From dressing up work spaces to throwing pizza parties, the **little things** make the biggest difference. Be creative and allow your staff to have fun.