



# 3 Reasons Why Senior Executives Must Be Listening





Those within the contact center know the importance of great agent and customer experiences. They may not, however, know how to deliver those experiences while appeasing the concerns of budget holders.

Those within the C-suite know the importance of profit. They may not, however, know how to maximize the role the contact center plays in achieving that coveted business result.

As a senior customer contact executive, you have the power to unite the two worlds – and achieve the two results. Richly cognizant of what customers and business stakeholders crave, you can lead the contact center to implement *the right* initiatives. You can help the contact center live up to its potential as a “value center.”

In your pursuit of that objective, you will want to pay attention to three trends that are radically transforming – and complicating – the world of customer contact management.

## 1. Employee Engagement

When a business consistently delivers a great experience, it develops loyal customers. Those loyal customers buy more products down the road – and promote the business to friends and social media followers.

The same logic holds true of the agent experience. When a company does right by its agents, those agents commit to the business. They stay for the long haul, thus keeping their knowledge and skills inside the organization. They also advocate for the business, markedly bolstering recruiting efforts.

They, moreover, *perform better*. In addition to projecting a better demeanor when interacting with customers, these agents *care* about the health of the business. They work to gather valuable insights when interacting with customers. They strive to mitigate customer frustration that would otherwise lead to lost business or brand-bashing. They aid their peers in solving problems and developing skills.

Indeed, employee engagement is one of the truest pathways to a successful contact center.

Senior executives play a pivotal role in cultivating that engagement. The tone they set and practices they employ determine whether agents are individuals filling seats or brand ambassadors working rigorously to satisfy customers. To successfully engage agents, leaders must emphasize several facets.

**Voice of the agent:** Knowing what agents want – and how they feel about the business’ success in meeting those needs – is the root of any great employee engagement strategy.

**The “soft” agent experience:** People appreciate warm, friendly, collaborative environments. Through parties, cultural initiatives and personal interactions, leaders are responsible for cultivating an agent-friendly atmosphere.

**The “hard” agent experience:** While culture is important, CCW Digital research identifies *empowerment* as a bigger agent experience factor. Agents must ensure the systems, equipment, processes and learning programs help, rather than hinder, job performance.

**Performance management:** No matter how many times one says the “customer comes first,” employees are conditioned to answer to their bosses. Leaders, therefore, are tasked with setting metrics and objectives that are clear, intuitive and customer-centric. They are responsible for giving agents a sense of purpose – and a rubric for evaluating their success in achieving that vision.

**Career development:** Contact center work has long been victim to the “job rather than career” stigma, and the rise of the “gig economy” is only compounding that reality. If goal is to secure long-term agent buy-in, it is up to leaders to create a career roadmap. Through incentives, trajectory planning and professional development leaders can paint an attractive long-term future.

## 2.Workforce Transformation

As contact center demands become more rigid, the contact center workforce is becoming more fluid.

Today’s employees are not bound by walls, schedules or any other formalities. They expect the opportunity to work from home (and when they do report to the office, they anticipate an open work environment). They seek flexible, unconventional hours. They crave variance in their tasks and autonomy over how they focus their attention.

On the one hand, these demands fly in the face of contact center convention. The contact center is a notoriously regimented section of the business. It is a physical “center” in which employees adhere to strict seating arrangements, scripts, procedures and scheduling assignments.

On the other hand, breaking from that convention can provide tremendous upside. In addition to making the contact center more attractive to prospective hires, adapting to the new workforce normal can boost agent happiness, foster workplace collaboration and markedly elevate performance.



**Agile Contact Center System:** Engaging the next generation of employees is impossible if the contact center framework cannot support their “liquid” nature. It is imperative to source contact center technology that allows agents to work remotely. Those working from home must have the same access to key systems as their in-office peers.

**Enterprise Mobility:** In addition to adopting a flexible, cloud-based contact center environment, organizations must empower agents to perform on their own terms. This involves building an enterprise mobility strategy. From selecting the technology to managing the security standards, senior executives must ensure agents can connect – and perform – on the go.

**Future Workspaces:** While helping agents connect to the contact center is important, leaders must also help agents thrive within the contact center. Adopting future workspaces – specifically, open environments that stress collaboration and eliminate monotony – is the key to creating a contact center *for* the contemporary workforce.

**Culture Across Borders:** Adopting a customer-centric, performance-minded culture becomes quite difficult when all employees are not under the same roof. Leaders must ensure their cultural initiatives extend beyond the walls of the physical contact center – and attract buy-in from all employees.

**Rethinking Training:** To the extent that the “liquid workforce” resents formalities, conventional contact center training represents a particular problem. Great leaders do not expect agents to sit in lengthy, impersonal classes; they deliver personalized training on employees’ terms. To achieve this reality, leaders must leverage a combination of robust analytics and automated eLearning systems.

### 3. Automating a “Human” Function

According to CCW Digital research, automation customer engagement represents the #2 priority for contact center executives in 2018. Over 60% of businesses meanwhile plan to leverage process automation to boost performance.

In short, automation is the epitome of a top-of-mind topic.

That reality is quite intuitive; most contact centers are subject to intense budgetary scrutiny, and automation promises significant efficiency benefits.

Senior leaders must, however, consider another key element: the impact on the customer experience.

While boosting efficiency is great, they know that the ultimate goal of the contact center is to satisfy customers. They cannot let the organization abandon that goal merely because automation technology is in vogue.

To prevent that unwanted sacrifice, they must adopt several strategic best practices.

**Emphasize Customer Intent:** The engagement journey should not be an imposition; it should be a source of empowerment. It should be designed to help customers achieve their goal. By emphasizing customer intent, executives urge their organization to focus on *why* customers are really engaging. With that knowledge, they can most accurately determine which interactions to automate – and which to reserve for human employees.

**Measure the Impact:** Great leaders cannot be blinded by “cool” technology; their focus must always be on outcomes. When it comes to automation, leaders must constantly demand steak over sizzle. They must constantly monitor to ensure the solutions are creating meaningful value.

**Demand Augmentation:** Not merely a way to simplify menial tasks, automation can add legitimate value. In certain situations, chatbots can deliver a more valuable customer experience than live agents.

In most situations, process automation tools can empower agents to more effectively perform their “meaningful” tasks. Great leaders are fixated on identifying – and seizing – these opportunities.

**Brace For Impact:** Automation fundamentally changes the contact center dynamic. Most notably, it allows agents to focus on nuanced, substantive interactions with customers. While this change is typically viewed as a positive, it can easily become a negative. If agents are not prepared to handle these higher-stakes, more challenging engagements, they will squander opportunities to connect with customers. Leaders must ensure workflow – and training – empower agents to transition from “support representatives” into “engagement agents.”

**Build an “Automation” Function:** Automation is not a “plug and play” initiative; it is a transformation. To execute this transformation, leaders must establish an “automation function” within the business. They must create a team (or contract a vendor) that can administer the implementations, manage the data, “train” any AI-driven systems and adapt operations based on the impact of (and insights gained from) the automation solutions.



## MEET THE AUTHOR



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Brian additionally serves as managing editor and director for CCW Digital, which is the largest web publication and community for customer experience professionals. CCW Digital’s articles, commentaries, infographics, executive interviews, webinars and online events reach a community of over 140,000.

A passionate advocate for customer centricity, Brian regularly speaks on major CX conference agendas. He also advises organizations on customer experience and business development strategies.

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