A woman with long brown hair is wearing a black headset with a microphone. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera. In the background, there is a large white computer monitor. The overall scene is a professional office environment.

4 Steps to Supercharge Contact Center Agent Performance

Turning Insights into Action and Engagement

Medallia

Introduction

Uncovering the insights you — and your agents — need

Contact centers are the critical front lines for many businesses — a crucial channel available to assist and support customers, especially when immediate answers are needed. In fact, one of the most common ways people interact with brands — sharing concerns, feedback, and frustrations — is via contact centers.

The problem: Contact centers are difficult to operate, with inefficiencies, turnover, and variability in agent effectiveness.¹

The opportunity: The good news is, most contact centers are also sitting on a gold mine of insights, resulting from thousands, or even millions, of hours of conversations between agents and customers across channels. These offer invaluable information about a company's products, services, and agent experience.

And while mining that data at scale is a challenge, leading contact centers are putting systems and processes in place to extract these nuggets of information and shed light on where to focus their customer service and training efforts, enabling them to....

- Get to the root cause of top service issues
- Unlock coaching opportunities to guide agents
- Increase agent engagement and performance
- Boost customer satisfaction and loyalty
- And reduce agent and customer churn

...and you can, too!

¹ According to Deloitte's 2019 Global Contact Center Survey: Use citation #1 from https://www.medallia.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/resources/5245_Medallia%20Ebook_Speech_D9.pdf





Step #1: Analyze 100% of customer and agent interactions

It would be nearly impossible to transcribe and analyze all of your company's conversations — across calls, emails, texts, live chat, and more — at least in a timely enough manner to act on the insights. As a result, organizations have had to do their best to understand these customer experiences manually, resorting to sampling a small percentage of random calls and conversations. But that's not enough. Although sampling enables fast feedback, it provides a vastly incomplete picture and risks missing critical information. When it comes to calls in particular, brands typically focus on metrics like abandonment, average time on hold, time per call interaction, or first-call resolution percentage as benchmarks for assessing performance. While these are useful data points, they miss the context and conversational details between agents and customers that could yield actionable insights.



74% of 700 global contact center executives surveyed by Cisco in 2020 cited difficulty analyzing data as one of their top challenges.²

² Cisco, data survey 2020:2 from https://www.medallia.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/resources/5245_Medallia%20Ebook_Speech_D9.pdf

Harnessing the power of AI-powered text and speech analytics

More agents are working remotely and fielding more inquiries than ever.³ This at a time when anxious customers are looking for immediate answers.

Instead of sampling customer experience insights to determine what's working and what's not, contact centers need a scalable, efficient lens to sift through every interaction.

That's the power of AI. Data-savvy brands are using artificial intelligence to reveal the hidden meaning awaiting in vast amounts of data to inform more meaningful insights and decision-making.

AI-backed analytics are now more important than ever as organizations try to keep pace with changing consumer behavior and fluctuating demand. When brands tap into AI-powered speech and text analytics, the experience signals from each interaction can drive unique value across the enterprise, including effective ways to educate and empower agents.

³ <https://www.pindrop.com/blog/flash-report-five-insights-of-covid-19-in-the-contact-center/>

Key Use Cases of AI for the Contact Center

- **Speech analytics** (for calls): By applying machine learning algorithms to speech acoustics, organizations can tap into a wealth of data that reveals customer sentiment, common call topics, and key themes in near real time. Voice recordings can codify silence during a call, or enumerate overtalk indicating a customer's excitement or disappointment.
- **Text analytics** (for written sources, like emails, surveys, chat logs, social media, and more): AI can also analyze text in structured formats, such as survey feedback, and unstructured formats, like email, chat transcripts, or agent notes, while offering suggestions on what customers might need in the moment.

By capturing both what your customers are telling you directly and indirectly through speech and text analysis, artificial intelligence can easily review every interaction, and surface the insights you need to pinpoint recurring issues.

7 Ways to Activate Your Contact Center Data and Drive Contact Center Performance

By capturing 100% of customer interactions and analyzing the data in near real time, your organization has the power to...

1. **Accelerate key decisions to improve contact center experiences** through more detailed insights, overlaying call and interaction analytics with survey feedback.
2. **Proactively optimize contact center scripts and response protocols** to improve first-contact resolution and other KPIs.
3. **Illuminate self-service opportunities, introduce product or service innovations, and detect coaching opportunities** by discovering emerging trends, topics, and themes.
4. **Identify which agents need additional support and training and which are top performers** who can assist in coaching.
5. **Anticipate and respond to customer pain points** across channels — before they become major concerns.
6. **Implement structural changes and process improvements** based on deep and detailed insights about why.
7. **Use best practices to improve your team's customer service responses and customer satisfaction** by comparing trending issues in contact center interactions across channels.

Medallia's Contact Center Suite can help you get started with:

Digital solutions to collect near real-time customer feedback across digital channels including web, mobile, and in app.

Text Analytics to turn every word into insight and action by leveraging AI and machine learning to unlock the rich potential of unstructured data.

Speech Analytics to get fast transcriptions with powerful analytics to uncover customer pain points.

Action Intelligence to automatically identify customers in need of attention and discover the most actionable feedback.



Step #2: Use near real-time customer insights to upgrade training

The classic contact center training formula involves one manager instructing a group of many agents all gathered together. The sessions occur at set times, and the message is one-way and woefully generic.

The goal of the training is to advance the careers and skill sets of everyone in the room. Yet this one-size-fits-all approach tends to fail agents at both ends of the spectrum.

The best agents may find it boring, irrelevant, or even patronizing. Worse yet, others on the team who are still learning may feel overwhelmed and tune out the message.

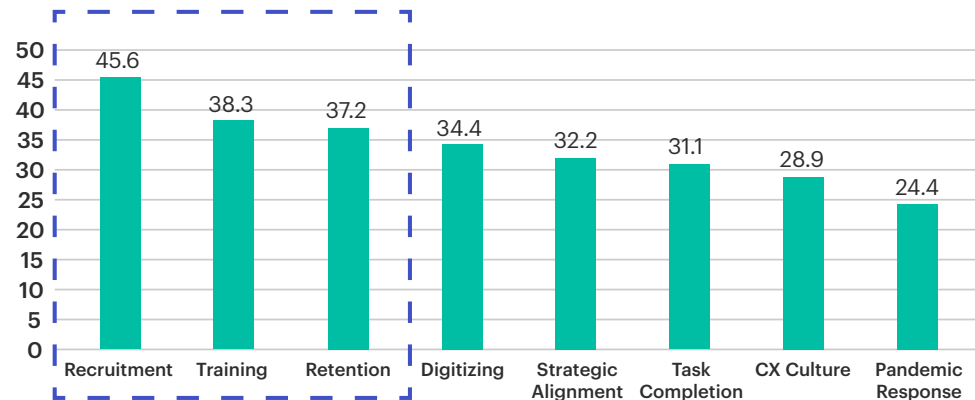
Agent training is one of the top 3 challenges today's contact centers struggle with⁴ — yet external training courses are still the #1 method companies use when training agents⁵.

⁴ <https://www.medallia.com/resource/socc-canada>

⁵ <https://www.medallia.com/resource/socc-canada>

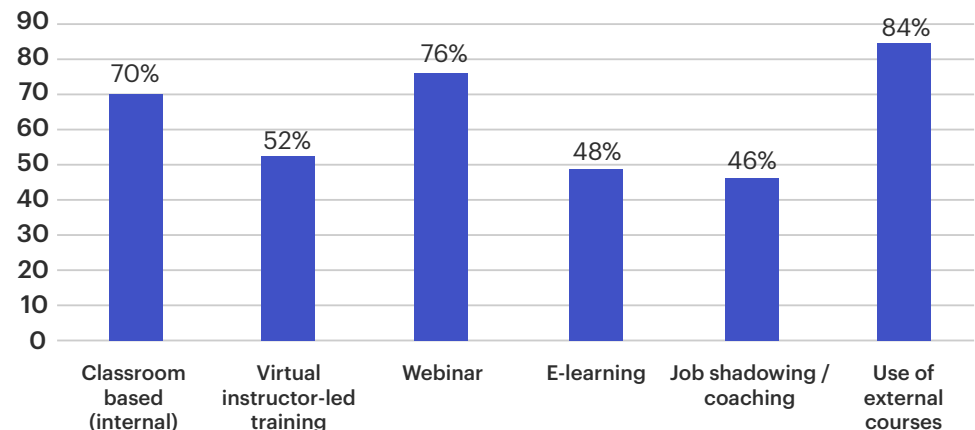
What are the major strategic challenges you are facing within your contact center?

While there is greater diversity in challenges facing contact center leaders, it is clear that **talent management – recruitment, retention, and training** – remains the largest challenge.



What training methods are most commonly used?

External training courses continue to be the most common for critical skills, followed by virtual webinars and in-person training.



The familiar one-to-one coaching scenario is a step up — but not without its drawbacks. QA teams, supervisors, or training teams listen to a small (thus not representative) sample of recorded calls, and trainers choose from four or five different syllabi to advance high performers' skills and address any problems that may be coming up.

In many cases, decisions about which agents' calls to listen to aren't driven by data, but by hunches.

Leveraging data-driven micro-coaching to step up outcomes

With a majority of companies having fully or partially distributed workforces, gaining insight into agent performance and applying that directly to agent training is more important than ever.

That's why increasingly brands are implementing data-driven micro-coaching, a type of coaching that happens in short bursts in which supervisors coach individual agents on the spot following a given customer interaction, leveraging specific customer feedback or insights. It's an approach that's far more effective than old-school contact center training methods.

In fact, contact center micro-coaching can improve team performance by as much as 12% — while overreliance on old-school training sessions can actually drive team performance down by 5%.*

This type of data-driven contact center performance management has another benefit as well: It motivates agents to self-correct and keep aiming higher.

⁶ <https://www.medallia.com/resource/socc-canada>

* <https://stellaconnect.com/blog/contact-center-micro-coaching-performance-management/>

Make Micro-Coaching Work for Your Team and Your Customers



Step #3: Use micro-coaching best practices

Tip 1: Make coaching sessions 1:1, always.

Group training programs may be easier to execute, but 1:1 meetings allow managers to give personalized attention, tailored to each agent's individual needs based on customer feedback and insights most relevant to their performance. That said, 1:1 meetings allow managers to give personalized attention, with coaching sessions that can be tailored to each agent's individual needs and based on customer feedback and insights that are most relevant to their performance. If someone isn't performing to your team's standards, for example, you may want to focus your coaching on the tactical aspects of their job, like response time on tickets or their behavior when interacting with customers.

On the flip side, your best performers likely don't need to run through how to handle basic ticket issues and FAQs that come up with your customers. Instead, these coaching sessions should be focused on how they can go from good to great — highlighting specific customer feedback and ratings they've received or opportunities for improvement your AI-powered analytics have uncovered.

Use these 1:1 coaching sessions to focus on an individual agent's specific needs and concerns, without judgment or comparison from the rest of the team. The more personalized the learnings you can share, the better. This individual attention will allow them to continue to grow in their career, and you can use these opportunities to discuss any new skill sets or opportunities they would like to explore.

As an added bonus, 1:1 meetings help agents feel more comfortable opening up and offer facetime that can leave them feeling better equipped and more valued.



Tip 2: Start off on the right foot.

Coaching isn't about passing judgment or calling out inadequacies and failures. The goal is to encourage your agents and help them achieve their personal best. During each coaching session, make sure you start off on the right foot by using these three approaches:

- 01 Highlight the positive.** No one wants to walk into a 1:1 with their manager and immediately start discussing something they messed up or an area where they're lacking. Instead, as a manager, put your agent at ease by highlighting the work they're doing and any cases they've handled particularly well since you last spoke.
- 02 Ask open-ended questions.** Don't talk at your agent; instead, create an open dialogue about their work and give them the opportunity to explain their thought processes, provide context, and talk through potential resolutions or next steps.
- 03 Focus on behaviors (not them as people).** This one is pivotal for managers and team leads to keep in mind. When planning your 1:1s, keep in mind that your agent may have had a bad day or week, especially if their performance is usually high. Focus on the concrete things they can do to better their work, and don't make any critique about the agent themselves.

Tip 3: Have one specific purpose for each session.

The more you try to pack into a coaching session, the less the agent will get out of it. These discussions should be limited to a single aspect of performance. Each 1:1 should highlight one focus area to discuss. For bonus points, provide your agents with a heads up, so they can prepare for the conversation. Keeping the conversation focused on one topic will not only help prioritize the most important area of improvement first, but will also offer a framework for tracking and measuring real progress in that specific area over time.

Tip 4: Micro-coach them throughout the day.

A strict 1:1 schedule may not be the best fit for every single agent or team lead. By coaching in short bursts, managers can use impromptu micro-coaching sessions to pull agents aside to discuss specific, near real-time performance data, making the session both personal and actionable for the agent.

These are great for a variety of instances, such as to quickly debrief when a 1-star review comes in.

Use micro-coaching to congratulate top performers, strengthen mid-performers' service delivery, and mentor agents who are struggling.



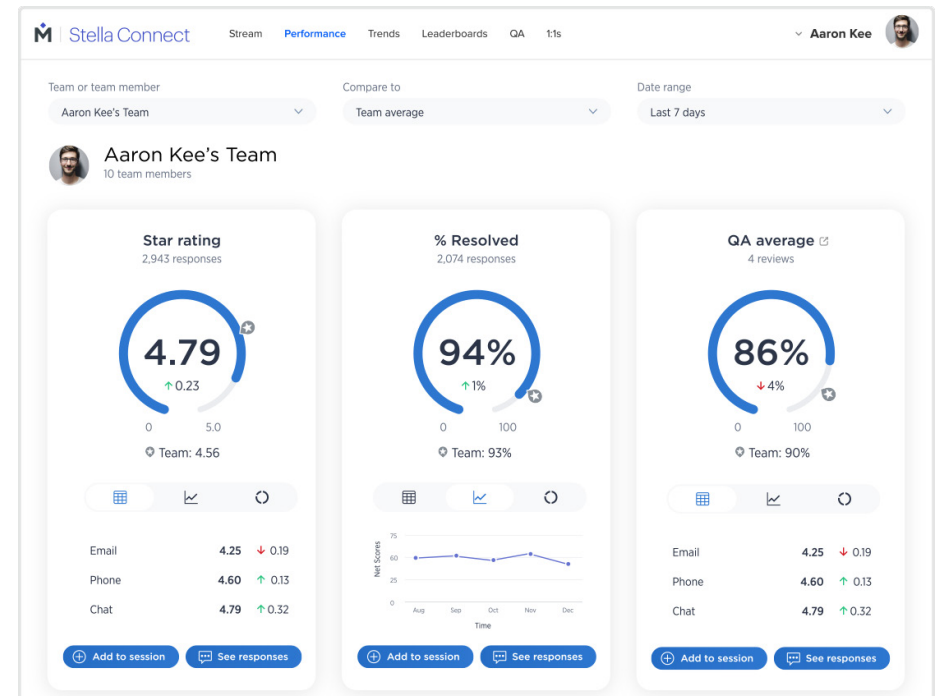
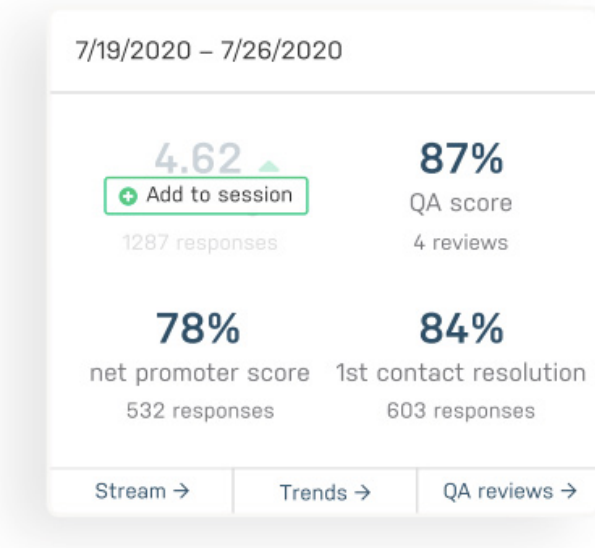
Tip 5: Use firsthand, specific, timely data to put things in context.

The most effective coaching is coaching that is based on context. Democratizing access to both qualitative customer feedback and quantitative customer satisfaction metrics is an effective strategy for keeping customer service team members informed and engaged. Not only will these valuable insights help your agents self coach and self correct, sharing agent-level feedback and KPIs can help guide 1:1 meetings, coaching sessions, and performance reviews.

By basing each 1:1 session on a specific call that's been analyzed, recent customer feedback, or other performance data tied to a timely interaction, these coaching opportunities will immediately become more meaningful and more impactful.

Using a combination of near real-time customer feedback and AI insights, you can discuss:

- Individual, agent-level performance metrics for KPIs like CSAT, FCR, NPS®, and CES
- Specific customer interactions



Step #4: Increase agent engagement to drive customer outcomes

When agents feel appreciated, supported, and engaged, they're more likely to be productive, remain with the company, and help strengthen customer retention.

The True Costs of Poor Engagement

Brands can't afford not to keep agents engaged

- Contact center agent attrition rates average between 30 to 45%⁷
- The cost of agent turnover adds up to anywhere from \$25,000 to \$50,000 per lost employee⁸ due to:



Productivity



Customer satisfaction



Costs of recruiting and training new replacement hires

⁷ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/maximize-the-lifetime-value-of-your-sales-force>

⁸ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/maximize-the-lifetime-value-of-your-sales-force>

The Many Benefits of Healthy Engagement

Greater profits, productivity, and longer term retention of both customers and employees are some of the ways companies that prioritize engagement benefit. Companies with recognition programs⁹ see a:



63% in productivity



61% in employee engagement

57% return on profit margins



52% in customer retention



51% in employee retention

⁹ <https://www.globoforce.com/press-releases-archive/shrmgloboforce-survey-reveals-growing-impact-of-recognition-programs-on-performance-management/>

5 tips you can take to start strengthening agent engagement

Tip 1: Listen, don't lecture.

Coaching should be a dialogue. Your agents should be just as invested in their own growth, progress, and success as you are. Encourage agents to assess their own performance and identify any barriers to improvement (time, additional training, tools, and so forth).

In addition, as a general rule of thumb, managers should try not to be too prescriptive and instead ask agents for their ideas on how to correct the problem(s), challenge their ways of thinking, and help them get on track to keep moving in the right direction.

Tip 2: Show confidence in the agent.

Setting a collaborative tone is key to encouraging better outcomes and paving the way for more productive customer service coaching sessions in the future. That's why it's important that agents know that leadership understands how much they contribute with the thought and care they bring to each interaction. Managers should use positive customer feedback, KPIs, and insights to build agents up and be clear in communicating they trust their agents to bring their A-game each and every day.



Feedback should always come in two forms: bold motivational — this is about praising what went well and is intended to acknowledge success and build confidence; and bold developmental — this is about explaining what could have been done differently or better and is intended to build competence.

Agnieszka Anna Jozwiak

CX & UX Consultant, Business Integrity Manager at Meta,
formerly known as Facebook

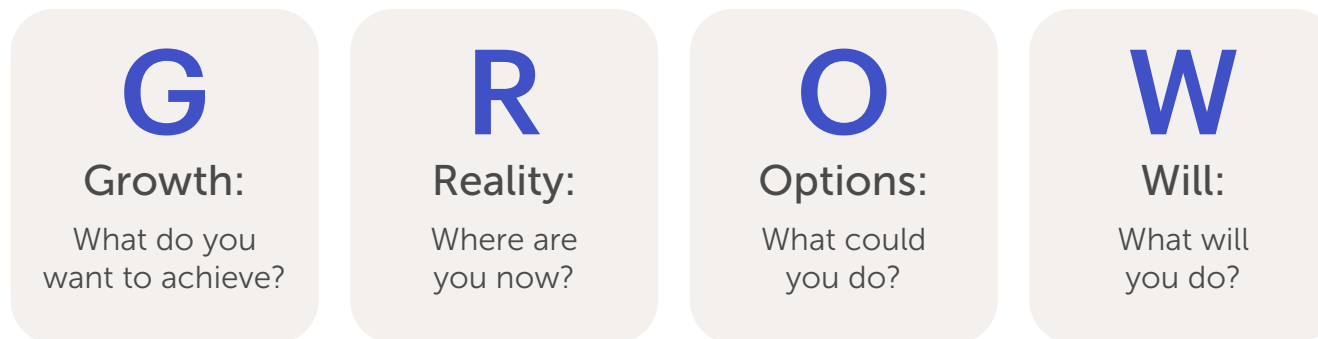
Tip 3: Use the GROW model to develop goals and action plans.

First developed during the 1980s by three business coaches named Graham Alexander, Alan Fine, and Sir John Whitmore,¹⁰ the GROW model of coaching seeks to simplify the complexity of coaching (and being coached) by helping people clearly articulate their aspirations and plans for the future.

The GROW model puts the power back in the users' hands, and gives them the tools to think about a complex issue or situation in four key steps. When it comes to customer service coaching, the GROW model is an incredibly powerful framework to have at your disposal. All too often, agents are measured purely based on corporate-decided metrics.

With the GROW model, managers can have meaningful conversations about what your agent wants to achieve, like working toward a certain CSAT or QA score, and help them discover the things they need to do to make those goals a reality.

By focusing on agents' personal aspirations (not just high-level corporate objectives), you'll not only serve your brand's strategic interests, but also challenge and inspire your team.



¹⁰ <https://f.hubspotusercontent40.net/hubfs/273742/2020/Ebooks+Whitepapers/Customer%20Service%20Coaching%20Plan%20ebook/Customer%20Service%20Coaching%20Plan%20-%209%20Tips%20for%20How%20to%20Coach%20More%20Successful%20Agents%20-%20Stella%20Connect.pdf>



Tip 4: End on a positive note.

Everyone loves to feel appreciated at work, and we all know that working on the front line of any business is not without its fair share of challenges and tough days. Use your coaching and 1:1 time to really show your appreciation for the hard work your agents do every day to represent the brand.

You're on fire!

Keep it up!

Celebrate



Within Medallia's Contact Center Suite, 1:1s allows managers to easily send kudos to agents on a job well done. These offer an opportunity to shout out wins and accomplishments and thank team members for their hard work.

Using this feature will help you celebrate your teams' successes, knowledge or expertise, effort, or prowess for demonstrating your company's values, and will serve to remind them of their essential role and their value to the team and the company.

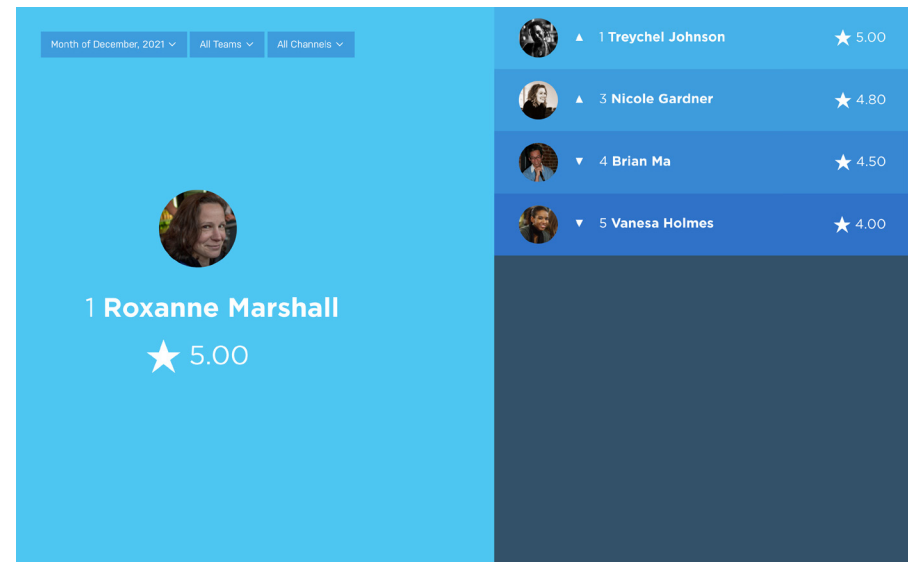
With many team members working from home, the ability to provide positive reinforcement is an asset to team leaders looking to boost morale and ensure their agents feel supported and appreciated.

Tip 5: Enhance your coaching program by layering in recognition and rewards.

While the cost of agent attrition is high, some of the most effective employee rewards cost next to nothing. Here are four easy and impactful ideas.

- 01 Share positive feedback on Slack, in company emails, and at all-hands meetings.** As part of a broader rewards program, local listings platform Yext¹¹ motivates employees by recognizing positive customer feedback team members receive in the company's Slack on a daily basis and in round-up emails and at all-hands meetings on a weekly basis. Given the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction, it's no surprise the company has seen its CSAT scores jump by 8 points, with averages well above 90%.
- 02 Let customers pick the perk.** Utilizing Medallia's Contact Center Suite, Yext and Earnin, the fintech startup backed by Andreessen Horowitz, offer customers the chance to share near real-time feedback about agents and suggest the rewards they should receive for a job well done (or leave recommendations when there's room for improvement) after each interaction.¹⁴

- 03 Give company freebies as rewards.** Customers love your brand, and if your agents do, too, giving away your company's products and swag may be a cost-effective way to reward and recognize your customer service team members for a job well done. Brooklinen and Lane Bryant offer up freebies for their team members as a way to help strengthen agents' product knowledge and their company pride.¹³
- 04 Utilize team leaderboards to gamify agent-level customer scores.** Retailer Brooklinen, shaving company Harry's, and retailer TechStyle all use team leaderboards to showcase and rank agent-level average customer ratings.¹²



¹¹ <https://stellaconnect.com/content-types/case-studies/yext-improves-service-performance-and-client-satisfaction-with-stella-connect/>

¹² <https://stellaconnect.com/resources/how-techstyle-uses-stella-connect-supercharge-performance-outsourced-contact-center-teams/>
<https://stellaconnect.com/content-types/case-studies/how-the-harrys-customer-service-team-puts-its-best-face-forward/>
<https://stellaconnect.com/resources/brooklinens-winning-formula-customer-service-training-performance-management/>

¹³ <https://stellaconnect.com/resources/8-questions-with-jack-lorentzen-from-brooklinen/>
<https://stellaconnect.com/resources/contact-center-sales-how-lane-bryant-built-a-sales-machine/>

¹⁴ <https://stellaconnect.com/content-types/case-studies/earnin-driving-agent-engagement-improving-customer-experience/>

Conclusion

Your customers aren't willing to wait for you to get things right. That's why today's leading brands have the framework and solutions in place to listen to and act on customer insights right in the moment, driving agent performance and brand loyalty.

53%

of consumers are likely to stop buying from a brand after a poor customer experience.¹⁵

80%

of customers say that when customer service solves a problem for them, **they feel more emotionally connected to the brand.**

Meet with a Medallia Expert →

¹⁵ <https://stellaconnect.com/blog/5-customer-service-stats-you-need-to-know/>

¹⁶ <https://stellaconnect.com/blog/5-customer-service-stats-you-need-to-know/>

Ready to get access to a fast and accurate analysis of every customer interaction and hear directly from your customers in the moment to level-up agent performance?

Medallia is the trusted partner of more than 220+ contact centers worldwide. We support 19 languages, 21 dialects, and dozens of integrations with leading contact center technologies. Our team of in-house contact center experts is made up of leading professionals with deep real-world expertise within their respective industries.

We're here to help you unleash your contact center's full potential with tools that foster coaching, engagement, and service delivery.

- Empower your frontline agents to improve NPS® and CSAT with data-driven insights to supercharge your coaching and training programs
- Democratize access to overall customer sentiment and feedback to drive agent engagement
- Enable your team to capture and analyze contact center data from across channels in near real time to optimize the omnichannel customer journey
- Eliminate silos to enhance operational efficiencies
- Understand and optimize your key metrics
- Pinpoint and solve root-cause issues once and for all

Discover Even More Contact Center Best Practices

From Brooklinen and Birchbox to FreddieMac and Volvo, learn how leaders across industries are leveraging these latest strategies for gathering and acting on customer insights, driving agent performance, and improving customer experience outcomes:

- **eBook:** Contact center and digital, better together
- **eBook:** Transforming the modern contact center
- **eBook:** Get powerful insights from every call
- **Blog:** How to Improve Contact Center Performance Under Pressure
- **Webinar:** Digital and Contact Center: 1+1=3
- **Webinar:** Agents Are People, Too: How E-Commerce Brands Are Revolutionizing Digital CX

About Medallia

Medallia is the pioneer and market leader in Experience Management. Medallia's award-winning SaaS platform, the Medallia Experience Cloud, leads the market in the understanding and management of experience for customers, employees and citizens. Medallia captures experience signals created on daily journeys in person, digital and IoT interactions and applies proprietary AI technology to reveal personalized and predictive insights that can drive action with tremendous business results. Using Medallia Experience Cloud, customers can reduce churn, turn detractors into promoters and buyers and create in-the-moment cross-sell and up-sell opportunities, providing clear and potent returns on investment. www.medallia.com

Follow us: [in](#) medallia [RSS](#) blog.medallia.com [Twitter](#) @Medallia
