CCA Standard© White Papers

Staff Attrition

CCA Standard© User Groups

Since the launch of the CCA Standard© in 2001, over 100 contact centres have successfully achieved CCA accreditation. At the end of 2004, it was agreed that the knowledge and experience garnered by these accredited organisations would benefit being shared by the group and within the broader circles of CCA members. CCA has established several working groups to examine specific topics known to be of importance within contact centres, to learn how to overcome problems, and to establish how best practice can be implemented in line with the ethos of the CCA Standard© of continual improvement.

Based on a presentation given by Debbie MacIver of Lloyds TSB, this white paper outlines the key findings of the Recruitment, Induction & Retention User Group relating to the issue of staff attrition.

CCA would like to thank the following additional individuals and their organisations for their input to discussions on this topic. As organisations that have demonstrated best practice in their own contact centres, their contribution to the development of these specific guidelines is greatly valued.

- Colette Miller – Indigo Lighthouse Group
- Nancy Spreckley – National Australia Group
- Jackie McCammon – Student Loans Company
- Stephen Murphy – MMTeleperformance
- Victoria Burchill – Royal Bank of Scotland

The Basics

Staff attrition is an issue in many contact centres. If staff recruitment and retention is not managed effectively then the financial cost related to this will be significant. In addition valuable time and effort has to be spent on this activity instead of being able to focus on contact centre improvement opportunities. It is therefore essential that contact centres really take the time to understand WHY people leave. Only by doing so can they develop prevention strategies. Organisations striving to improve customer service delivery must have a solid basis of caring, experienced people to interact with their customers.

- An acceptable level of staff turnover should be established for the organisation as a base point. Remember that nil turnover is not necessarily a good thing as this can lead to stagnation in the centre. A reasonable change of personnel is healthy as long as staff are leaving for positive reasons.

- Organisations should understand the cost of recruitment and training, and identify the length of time required to retain an employee to see ‘payback’ on this investment. It is essential that this type of analysis takes place in order that an effective retention strategy can be developed.

- It is difficult to make meaningful comparisons between contact centres as a result of the variety of ways in which staff attrition is calculated. At present, there is no standard method for measurement, highlighting a perceived need for the development of a common metric for the industry.

- Organisations must understand why they are losing staff. This is not always easy to define, as individuals will give different reasons to different people in the organisation – however, these reasons need to be established in order to identify patterns or trends (these could be related to, for example, shift patterns, work activity, line management, etc.). The outputs should also be analysed to determine whether attrition rates are higher for males or females, any particular age groups, or to establish any link with length of service. Without this information an organisation cannot begin to shape and re-shape its strategy for staff retention.

- Boredom should not be underrated as a reason for going to another contact centre.

Managing Staff Turnover

There are a number of 'drop-out' points in the life cycle of a contact centre employee. These can be defined as follows:

- Pre-employment
- During training
- Post-training (during first 3 months, between 6-12 months, or after 12 months)

The following guidelines have been developed to assist organisations as they look to avoid losing staff at these trigger points:

Pre-Employment

- Recruiting appropriate individuals for a role is the basis of addressing attrition. The organisation must understand the role that they wish the employee to fill and what it entails. Through clearly understanding these factors, they will be able to define the required attitude, skills and competencies of the type of person who would be successful in that role. Existing staff can be utilised to help develop this behavioural model. NB: There is evidence that CCA accredited members put greater focus on the required attitudes over and above the required skills, as the latter can be incorporated into training.

- Ensure that those involved in the recruiting process have the required management/interviewing skills and experience to be able to select appropriate people and to discern which candidates would not be good fit for the organisation (employing someone who appears unsuitable can be costly and cause long-term problems). This applied both where organisations are recruiting in-house and where external agencies are used.

- Agencies must be carefully selected to ensure that their approach and skills are above reproach and that they meet the needs of the organisation. They must be able to distinguish unsuitable candidates and "job-hoppers" from serious and suitable candidates. It is essential that a partnership approach be developed between the organisation and the agency.

- Involve Team Leaders when it comes to selecting for their own teams, and equip them for this task by ensuring that interviewing techniques and role-play are included in their training. Team Leaders will understand the current mix of personalities and be able to judge how well the new employee will fit in. Teams often work best when there is a good mix of ages and personalities. Remember, mature employees can provide balance and common sense!

- Try before you buy! It can be helpful to invite prospective employees into the contact centre to speak with existing staff. They can be your best advocates, and are likely to give an honest view of what it is really like. This is often very positive.

- Employment is a partnership between an employer and the employee. Both parties have a role to play. Make sure that the applicant is clear about what will be required of them in terms of the job, attendance, working conditions (such as shifts), etc., but also ensure that they understand the positive reasons for working with the organisation. These could include employee benefits, opportunities to develop, etc. The interview should aim to give a fair and accurate overview from both sides. Checklists are useful to ensure that all aspects are covered in the same manner.

- Assessment centres can be useful in the recruitment process. Evenings and Saturday/Sunday mornings seem to be successful and attract people who do not want to take time off from their existing job.

- References are commonly used, asking specific questions about attendance, re-employment, etc. Evidence shows that in most cases previous employers are prepared to provide this information.

During Training

- This early stage is the time at which the new employee is usually at their most enthusiastic about the new job. They want to be successful and they want you to help them to be successful. At no other time will you have so much opportunity - so do not waste it! Help them to fit into this new environment.

- Give the impression that you care as an employer – that the new member of staff is important to you. At the same time, ensure that there are clear expectations around what they bring to this new partnership. You have the responsibility to train, but they are the ones who are to take this on board and utilise it in the workplace.

- Make sure that you have a well-developed induction programme which includes: information about the organisation and the people who work there; the responsibilities of the new member of staff within the organisation; the products, services and technology used to do the job. It is helpful to explain how the contact centre works, whom it serves and how they can be successful in their role.

- Use an interim stage such as a 'nursery' for the transition from training to day-to-day activity. This eases the new person into their role and provides additional support, which is usually needed in the early days. Mentors can also be used for this purpose.

- Provide the Line Manager with a handover document from those who have trained the new member of staff, in order that there is a clear understanding of performance, strength, and areas that will be in need of development once induction training is over. This can then be built into the Professional Development Plan and provides continuity.

Post-Training and Ongoing

- It is critical to get the **right management with the right people approach.** This will make a huge difference in your centres. Management who visibly play an active part in the running of the contact centre and who take time to interact with staff are critical. Walk the walk, and talk the talk!

- Line management should keep a close eye on new recruits, support them and help them to be successful. Regular feedback, praise and constructive criticism will help them to progress.

- Help new employees to fit into their team and to feel part of the wider organisation.

- Line Managers need well developed interpersonal skills to manage teams, and to understand their team members as individuals. Make sure that Team Leaders understand motivators, etc. and that they can apply them to the team.

- 'People Champions' may be used to support staff.

- A staff feedback scheme should be in place to identify and eliminate (where possible) minor issues. These will come to the surface when the scheme is first implemented, and should be quickly dealt with before they become major issues. Longer-term staff should be encouraged to volunteer suggestions for work-related improvements.

- 360-degree feedback should be encouraged and action plans developed to address any issues.
- Involve staff in business improvement schemes. They have great ideas and this can be an excellent way of recognising the contributions of individuals.
- Be sure to recognise individual and group achievements.
- Demonstrate flexibility towards staff where possible. This can help to overcome issues around shifts, etc. and can reinforce to all staff the caring attitude that you want to convey.
- Ask staff who have been with you a long time why they stay! Reinforce these reasons to all staff.
- Have some fun in the workplace, and encourage social activity. Make it a great place to work without losing sight of why you are all there.
- Ensure that Senior Management speak with staff. Strategic sessions with senior management can make a real difference and are appreciated.
- Make sure that team meetings and 121's happen - employees look forward to them.
- Ensure that pay and conditions are in line with other organisations in the same sector or vicinity. Reward higher levels of performance through incentive or bonus schemes.
- Encourage attendance by building events into incentive and bonus schemes, such as a special event for those with maximum attendance over a period of time.
- Avoid a situation in which employees leave to work in another part of the organisation, until they have proved themselves in the contact centre. Agree a minimum timescale with HR.
- The majority of staff employed in contact centres fall into the 18-24 age group. Serious thought needs to be given on how to engage and manage this group as research has indicated that they have different values and outlook to previous generations.

Further Information

For further information on this topic, or for more details regarding the CCA Standard© User Groups, please contact Judy Smyth, CCA Best Practice Specialist, at judy.smyth@cca.org.uk