**Call Center: 6 Best Practices for Hiring Agents**

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Of all the challenges that can haunt a call/contact center, high agent turnover/attrition has got to be the worst. You spend all that time and money recruiting and then training someone, only to discover you made a poor hiring decision, or they choose to walk out the door before they’ve even become productive. For most credit unions it takes at least ninety days, and often much more, to train a new agent before they become at least somewhat proficient in handling member inquiries.

Contact centers in general average between 30% and 60% attrition annually, and it's not uncommon to find it as high as 100% – employees lasting not even a year in the job. These tend to be entry level positions and therefore more subject to turnover, often times to a more appealing job within the same organization.

The costs of agent turnover, an operating expense often overlooked or at least underestimated by many credit unions, consists of many categories of hard costs as well as soft, intangible costs. Turnover is considered the “silent killer of profits” in any call center operation.

So reducing agent churn should be a top priority for any credit union call center. One of the best ways of reducing attrition is with effective hiring practices targeted toward hiring the right people in the first place; agents who fit the profile of an employee who provides excellent member service, likes their job, and tends to stay.

We’ve identified six call center hiring best practices proven to reduce attrition, save money, and increase agent productivity, efficiency, and engagement:

**1. Create a Compelling Job Ad**
Make no mistake about it: your job ad is also an advertisement for your organization. There's a war for talent going on. Why should a great candidate apply to your job and not a competitor’s? Every great job ad must do two things well: 1) help candidates assess whether the job and organization are right for them, and 2) persuade the ideal candidates to apply. With this in mind, the job ad should never be written from the perspective of "what can you do for me" (like most are). Instead, the ad should focus on "what can we do together". The best candidates need to see that you value their presence and think of them as partners, not pawns.

**2.** **Build an Ideal Candidate Profile**
It was Socrates who often advised to "Know thyself". This introspective view should be used to begin your hiring strategy. Ask yourself: What is your call center and credit union culture? What personality types fit best with this culture? What are the member service strategies of the credit union overall? What do you value more – flexibility and member service or predictability and process? Consider the attributes of your top performers to assist in determining what’s needed to succeed at your credit union. List the key traits of these employees and how these traits drive their behavior. How do they respond to stress and pressure? What is their attitude towards routine and procedures? What is their level of pace and detail orientation? Do they solve problems independently or constantly look for help? Likewise, an attribute list of those that have failed is instructive as well. The more questions you ask, the more detailed a portrait of your ideal candidate emerges.

**3. Reach as Many Qualified Candidates as Possible**

There are more than 40,000 job board sites in operation today, and the number is increasing steadily as niche job board creation and hosting tools are making it possible for just about anyone to build one. To get the maximum number of responses from the most qualified candidates, it is critical that you advertise on the right job boards. A good rule of the thumb is to post on at least one site from each of the three categories; Big Boards, Niche Boards & Free Boards. We highly recommend testing multiple sites while tracking the volume and quality of applicants from each one separately.

**4. Use Virtual Interviews**

A recruiter conducts a virtual interview by creating a set of pre-recorded questions which the candidates have to answer on their own time via a video session or audio call. Candidates that show promise in the virtual interview can then be called for an actual face-to-face interview.

**5. Use a Psychometric Assessment for Initial Screening**

Being a great credit union contact center agent is usually more about personality and soft skills than it is about technical savvy. You could have years of phone experience, type 80 words per minute, and know Microsoft Office inside out, but if you don't actually love to solve member problems you won’t be successful. This is the reason why the best contact centers have moved away from using the resume assessment as sole element of the initial screening process, and have added a psychometric test to measure the person-job fit. Psychometric tests have been proven to be a better predictor of agent performance than other screening or assessment practices. They should be given to all applicants - not just the ones who get past your interviews – so the right personality types for the position go into your initial hiring funnel. You very well may locate a candidate without the ideal resume yet perfectly cut out to excel as a call agent.

**6. Automate Reference Checking**

The final step in the hiring process is to verify the candidate’s references – a task that is crucial yet time-consuming, and at times can be quite misleading. Fortunately, there are now new, automated, reference-checking services available.

No modern contact center can afford to use old-school recruiting tactics. In our experience, improving your hiring practices is a proven way for contact centers to minimize attrition rates and attract employees who will become invested in the long term success of the credit union.

About AnyHour Solutions

[AnyHour Solutions](http://www.anyhoursolutions.com/) is a highly flexible provider of comprehensive, 24/7, contact center outsourcing services for credit unions via our AnyHour MSR and AnyHour Loan-By-Phone services. Our purpose is to help our credit union partners to enhance service to their members, increase loan volume, and reduce operating expenses. AnyHour Solutions has been providing contact center services to credit unions for nearly 20 years, longer than any other company. Highlighted by the industry’s most experienced staff of agents and an annual turnover rate under 10%, our contact center goal is to provide “Service They Will Remember.” In addition, AnyHour also provides online loan application functionality as well as a full suite of mortgage processing services for credit unions.

For additional information, or to receive a copy of our white paper entitled *Credit Union Call Center Outsourcing: 8 Reasons to Use a Third Party Outsourcing Provider* contact Steven Holmes, VP Strategic Development, at 888.622.8696, sholmes@anyhoursolutions.com.