

TIME FLIES WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN

Ideas to liven up the contact center environment and encourage learning.

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“Time flies when you’re having fun” is an idiom quite familiar to anyone that has been to a great party, family event, vacation or concert. First recorded around 1800, the idiom still applies today. Time flies *while* it is fun. If however, you are delayed at the airport for even a couple of hours those hours stretch out before you as if they will last forever. Your experience skews the perception of time.

The contact center (aka call center) industry has evolved quite a bit since the start of my career in the '80s. When the industry was young, having “fun” was as integral a part of the management process as any other. It is over the past decade or so that I have seen “fun” efforts wane. I am not sure why this is, but the turmoil in the social, economic and political landscapes over the past decade may have something to do with it.

Leaders understand that the contact center job has attributes that inherently make it “different” in terms of handling demand across multiple access channels. There is a lack of flexibility within a totally sedentary environment and management is often overly focused on metrics. If improperly handled, these differences make for a stressful and “not fun” environment. It takes very little research to discover what makes contact

centers a good or bad place to work. Simply Google “call center job reviews” and read what is bad and good about working in a contact center.

Bad reviews tend to highlight mismanagement by metrics, lack of training and a poor work environment. Good reviews highlight the company’s investment in training, advanced technology, and management that is interested in both staff AND customers. Good reviews also tend to highlight feeling connected and part of something. That may be the fun part!

Today’s contact center leaders must understand the importance of a good work environment when it comes to a most important duty—attracting and retaining competent and

engaged staff. As presented in many industry articles, the job of the contact center representative has become more complex. They are the humans assisting customers unable to resolve their problem on their own via any of the alternative and

automated channels. So keeping your problem-solving folks engaged is a multipronged effort of which fun must be a part.

I say that it’s time to do a checkup on your work environment and consider new ideas to liven up the place and have some fun! There are many variations and definitions of fun and some have no cost. (There is no budget

for such “frivolities”... so say the EFOs or Evil Financial Overlords.) Some ideas of course benefit from a budget, but that’s a different article! More important than budget is bringing dignity and respect to this effort and to the frontline position. It is a means to engage your teams, to stimulate creative assets that have been underutilized (or not utilized at all) in the current job, and to encourage curiosity and learning.

Taking a fun approach to requisite activities like training, coaching and communication demonstrates leadership’s willingness to put the same level of effort into the frontline experience as the front line is expected to put into the customer experience.

Here are some fun ideas and activities for your contact center that will help “time fly” in a meaningful, enjoyable and productive way.

Sport Fun

Find a way to have frontline representatives responsible for the planning of pure “sport” fun. Organize a rotating committee with scheduled meetings. Inform the workforce management staff and do your best to see that these planning meetings are NOT canceled. That would take the “fun” right out of it! Sport fun includes activities unrelated to performance metrics.

DRESS-UP DAYS

I have seen everything from super heroes to farm animals, beach day to prom night, and sports teams to



“Time flies.
It’s up to you
to be the navigator.”

—Robert Orben,
American Comedy Writer

movies/TV/rock stars. The ideas are endless. Keep in mind that these initiatives depend on participation; make sure that themes resonate, different ideas are acknowledged, and that staff actually enjoys dressing up for various occasions.

HOBBY DAY

This activity is both fun and telling. Have some percentage of staff over a rolling period make a poster or storyboard at their cube or designated “show area” demonstrating interests and skills outside of work. (These will be as varied as your staff.) Coaches and leaders take notice... knowing about outside interests may give clues to learning styles and preferences as well as provide additional insights. You may be amazed by some of the talent in your midst!

SPRING-CLEANING DAY

Have a contest! Who can find the oldest dated item in their workspace? Whose workspace has the best *Before* and *After*? There are so many metaphors using Spring Cleaning as a theme... everything from workspace and junk drawers to digital filing systems. The creativity of you and your staff makes the possibilities boundless!

MONTHLY POT LUCK

 This can be any theme around food or a meal... All-Day Breakfast, Healthy Edibles, International/Regional Cuisine, Under (X) Calories, Five Ingredients or Less, My Favorite Dessert, etc.

Sport fun activities offer many benefits. Call center leaders become better at the human side of management and learn about their staff as people, not just as job task performers. These activities also have a strong team building impact for frontline team members who get to interact with someone new for something new. It breaks the cycle of “same old same old.”

Learning Fun

Learning fun is different than sport fun and perhaps more important. Contact centers are environments in motion; activities are layered upon one another and tied together within

a framework of dependencies. There is a lot to know! And it goes well beyond the core knowledge needed to manage the transaction. However, it is on core knowledge and transactional skills (often system related) where many well-intentioned and dedicated trainers spend their time.

Sadly, time DOES NOT fly when learners feel bored to death or completely overwhelmed. Often, the boredom is a factor of the delivery and not necessarily the content or material.

Here are a few techniques to consider.

SCENARIO-BASED LEARNING

Scenarios give equal diligence to the transaction (task) and the interaction (feelings) by using real-world, everyday examples. They offer powerful instructional benefits when woven into your learning modules. The power is in using and combining examples that come directly from frontline staff and supervisors on an ongoing basis. These capture the reality of daily contact center life: most frequent and critical transactions, most complex (“bugaboo”) transactions, toughest customer interactions, ways to diffuse escalating situations, techniques for upsell and cross-sell, and on and on. It takes a bit of effort, but it is a lot more fun and meaningful to learn how specific transactional elements relate to systems and interactions. Learners love to see their examples used and feel that their input matters.

FIND IT!

There is no better way to help staff use their informational resources efficiently or learn about their company than to have them search for specific information. Scavenger hunt activities are easy to develop and document; they can be used to “find” specific information, facts, or answers related to your corporate website or intranet, transactional systems, user guides, products, quick-reference/job aids, glossary, HR policies, contacts in a phone list, etc. You can add to the challenge by timing the activity!

SMARTEST/DUMBEST THINGS

This activity yields very rich results for the contact center. Initiate a program with frontline staff to identify the “Top 10 Smartest Things We Do.” Bubble up the answers and share them. Conversely, identify the “Top 10

Dumbest Things We Do” and follow the same process. The information gathered and the insight gained is invaluable for operational and process improvements. It comes from the folks most impacted by management decisions.



OUR CUSTOMERS

This is a personal favorite. Begin an initiative to capture feedback every week from each team in the contact center on this topic: What did we learn about our customers this week? By the end of the year, you will have 52 weeks of information to share within the contact center and with crossfunctional partners.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the No. 1 incentive-based reward I know of... recognition from management for a job well done. It takes but a few seconds to whisper an encouraging word, write a quote or quick note on interesting paper, or place a stick of gum or candy on someone’s chair. The world is full of folks too busy or too unaware to bother. We live in a world where self-absorption has been elevated to an art form. Well, it doesn’t work in busy and demanding operations like contact centers.

Please be patient with yourself and your staff if this “fun thing” is all new to you. For some, tapping into fun and creative genius is scary. But trust me; it is worth it. Fun reduces stress, increases feelings of confidence in one another, and just plain breeds good will. Remember, time flies when you’re having fun! ♦



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