Contact Center Pipeline

IDIOM INSIGHTS
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PROXIMITY AMBITION AND THE CONTACT CENTER

Land of Opportunity

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LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

BY KATHLEEN M. PETERSON, POWERHOUSE CONSULTING, INC.

Proximity[1] is defined as "the property of being close together." The concept of "Land of Opportunity" is one in which individuals have ample chances to succeed and achieve their goals. Historically, the Contact Center has epitomized this ideal. Numerous narratives exist of individuals who began their journey in the Contact Center and ascended to diverse positions.

> ***THE CRUX HERE IS THAT OPPORTUNITY, IN AND OF ITSELF, IS NOT ADEQUATE; SEIZING AND ACTING UPON OPPORTUNITIES NECESSITATES AMBITION.***

The Contact Center is an arena that demands a broad spectrum of skills; these enable individuals to enter as agents and evolve into such roles as data analysts, trainers, coaches, managers, and senior executives. This historical trajectory has established the Contact Center as a quintessential Land of Opportunity. However, the pertinent question remains: Does this perception persist today? And if it does, how does one take advantage of opportunities in the era of remote/hybrid work and emerging technology advances? Let's explore these questions.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity isn't merely the presence of favorable conditions; it is akin to a favorable wind guiding a boat into a harbor and easing its docking. Yet, for those to recognize and take this opportunity, more than favorable conditions are essential. Even with a favorable wind, if the boat's captain lacks proficiency, is impaired, or the vessel is ill-equipped, the risk of crashing into the dock remains imminent. The crux here is that opportunity, in and of itself, is not adequate; seizing and acting upon opportunities necessitates ambition.

Ambition, characterized by a fervent desire to accomplish goals plays a pivotal role and demands determination and hard work. Contact Center management embodies a realm where hard work is a prerequisite and opportunities abound.



[1]https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/proximity

Managing a Contact Center involves navigating multifaceted elements to yield desired outcomes. The widely-accepted definition of Contact Center management by Gordon McPhearson[2], the founder of ICMI, underscores the complexity: "The art and science of getting the right number of people, in the right place, at the right time, doing the right things." Each stage of the management path encompasses distinct requisites, skills, and opportunities.

Opportunities rarely manifest themselves visibly. Often, they resemble mirages that necessitate pursuit and clarity to enjoy their benefits. This is where ambition becomes the driving force. Ambitious individuals seek not only monetary gain but also continual learning, increased job autonomy, recognition, and added responsibilities. They are the ones adept at seizing opportunities. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the ambitious might sometimes face criticism from their less-driven counterparts who perceive preferential treatment from senior leadership. But I contend, "So what if they are favored?" When individuals step up, offer to do more, and extend support, they are essentially earning recognition necessary to capitalize on opportunities.

In contemporary times, some individuals publicize commitments to adhere strictly to their job descriptions. I characterize this stance as "lazy does it." In advocating for a work-life balance (or as I recently heard, the less rigid "work-life harmony), the inherent risk lies in solely focusing on the essentials and avoiding ambitious endeavors. Regrettably, these individuals are unlikely to recognize or benefit from professional opportunities; they believe that doing less at work will lead to a better work-life balance. Contrary to this misconception, ambitious pursuits need not jeopardize a harmonious personal life. This is a well-established reality. Ambition should align with personal aspirations without necessitating extreme trade-offs. Those who choose to use their ambition to focus on what they won't do are in many ways trading off lost opportunities.

Individuals' aspirations are the guiding force behind ambition. There are a multitude of areas available to those folks who aspire to do, learn, and contribute more as the Contact Center industry continues to be transformed.

A CRUCIAL CROSSROAD

The Contact Center stands at a crucial crossroad in its evolution, especially considering the significant disruptions caused by the pandemic. The launch of a massive remote workforce requires new methods of management. Initially applauded for their resilience, Contact Centers across various industries swiftly adapted by collaborating with a multitude of cross-functional partners to transition to remote work setups. Contact Centers now have a high percentage of remote workers and most leaders have been learning in real time how to manage the new model. At the same time, leaders must comprehend the implications in terms of opportunities for growth and advancement within the Contact Center and the business.

The shift to remote work has catalyzed substantial changes in management dynamics. At the same time, advancements in technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) offer automation opportunities that extend beyond customer interactions to take on various Contact Center functions. We must ask: What implications does the remote transition hold for the perceived Land of Opportunity?

For decades, premise-based operations have been fertile ground for the ambitious seeking advancement. Proximity has its advantages when it comes to understanding organizational and operational dynamics.

Remote setups limit informal encounters that foster human connections. They often deprive leaders of opportunities to truly understand needs, processes, hierarchies, and influencers. It becomes challenging to form authentic relationships or identify advocates for mentoring or issue resolution. Remote models, reliant on scheduled interactions, tend to prioritize task-based relationships and metrics; holistic development of individuals is often side-lined. The reliance on task-based metrics and cost reduction methods epitomizes the shift towards a purely task-oriented Contact Center. I find this concerning.

My apprehension lies in the potential jeopardy to the Land of Opportunity when entire business units function remotely and entities like the Contact Center might not be entirely able to control their dependencies. IT typically governs the technology and in a remote landscape myriad considerations arise. These range from remote tech deployment, support, and maintenance from the network to the agent level and to supporting management needs with *timely* access to crucial data and reports.

> ***AMBITIOUS INDIVIDUALS SEEK NOT ONLY MONETARY GAIN BUT ALSO CONTINUAL LEARNING, INCREASED JOB AUTONOMY, RECOGNITION, AND ADDED RESPONSIBILITIES.***

Moreover, when Human Resources (HR) oversees hiring and training remotely, the absence of physical proximity diminishes natural rapport and relationship-building dynamics. Similar concerns arise within the Workforce Management sphere in terms of whom they report to, who "owns" their tools, and where they get their training and certifications.

REVOLUTIONIZING QUALITY ASSURANCE

My main concern centers around the automation of Quality Assurance (QA). The idea of a bot offering "coaching" seems far-fetched and, frankly, disheartening. A bot can only assess compliance with predefined criteria (e.g., using the caller's name three times). The trend of capturing "sentiment" seems reminiscent of the tale of "the emperor's new clothes." While a bot might enhance efficiency, receiving performance feedback on human interactions from a non-human source lacks the essential human touch crucial for genuine growth and development. Referring to feedback from a bot as "coaching" undermines the true essence of the term. Coaching, by definition, refers to a PERSON that gives instruction.

There are significant opportunities available today to revolutionize quality programs within the Contact Center by shifting the focus from individual enhancement to cross-functional align-

[2]https://www.icmi.com/

ment. This involves a concerted effort to streamline processes, invest in intelligent agent user interfaces, minimize clicks needed to complete tasks, and ensure easy access to accurate information. By adhering to these guidelines, we can effectively reduce error rates and identify obstacles hindering excellence.

Exploring innovative uses for speech analytics can yield valuable insights. For instance, a quick search for the word "ridiculous" often leads to underlying problems that need addressing. It is crucial to pinpoint repeated errors stemming from inaccuracies in information or gaps in agent training or tools. Essentially, expanding the Quality Assurance (QA) model to uncover global quality issues beyond individual scores is essential.

> ***WHAT IMPLICATIONS DOES THE REMOTE TRANSITION HOLD FOR THE PERCEIVED LAND OF OPPORTUNITY?***

It is crucial to anticipate the queries posed at the executive level regarding the value delivered by the QA program. However, the focus cannot merely revolve around agent scores. QA must proactively transform to have comprehensive answers before these questions arise. The real value of QA efforts lies in their application across all transactions and ability to impact every agent. While enhancing individuals is vital, it is no longer sufficient.

Shifting the QA focus from individuals to the origin of contact leads to process improvements that influence duration, agent utilization, and the Customer Experience. This modern and purposeful shift exemplifies the ambitious steps Contact Center leaders can take to significantly impact visibility and progress. Regrettably, many Contact Centers are transforming into revolving doors of hiring and training due to abysmal retention rates. This perpetual churn stifles the entire management team and hinders progress and development.

I hold firm the belief that the essence of the Contact Center as a hub of opportunity hangs precariously in the balance. The evolving landscape, shaped by remote operations, poses a risk of deterring the ambitious from viewing the Contact Center as a gateway to growth. It is imperative for leaders to foster and adapt ambition to thrive in this new environment. They must understand operational nuances and leverage them to convert challenges into opportunities. As well, remote operations must bridge the gap created by distance to ensure that this cherished Land of Opportunity continues to flourish well into the future.



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