THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE... KEEP IT SHINING!

Generate engagement momentum and fuel to "light the lights" of your frontline agents.

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"This Little Light of Mine" is a popular gospel song of unknown origin that is sung all over the world. I recently was surprised when my Spotify AI selected Sam Cooke's version of the song as part of my Saturday morning playlist. I found myself captivated... what a message, perfect timing and a pleasure to sway to! The lyrics really got to me. Given these crazy times when we feel like "hostages" to a virus, I thought that we all could use a reminder to let our little lights shine!

The contact center is a people-driven business. It typically takes a lot of people working together to satisfy both the contemporary consumer and the employee. If you have people whose lights "have gone out," they could be turning the lights off for your customers, as well.

I propose that we think of this song's lyrics and ask ourselves: Have we an environment where everybody's little light can shine or are we too deep in the metric maze to catch the shadow being cast?

This little light of mine (x3)
I'm going to let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine (x3)
Even in my home, I'm gonna let it shine

Imagine what happens when every little light shines and everyone truly works together to produce desired customer experience outcomes. Our everyday work must be included in the "everywhere I go" lyric. After all, most of us spend a healthy portion of our waking hours at work, whether at home or in the office.

What does it take to light you up? To light up your team? If you don't know, the time has come to find out. I believe that people are moved by this song because they are hopeful; each of us is challenged to let our little lights shine.

The first step in letting our little lights shine is deciding to invest time and energy into building an optimistic environment that generates "engagement momentum," particularly at the front line. I believe that there has never been a more important time than now to tend to the frontline's needs... on a human level. Engagement is a key ingredient in feeling valued; it is also a prerequisite for an optimistic culture.

In my opinion, optimism is a powerful force that is underutilized and underappreciated at a strategic level. People who bring an optimistic outlook, feel valued and whose emotional needs are met quite simply do a better job. They are more pleasant to be around and bring more creativity and critical thinking to the table. Their lights are the most likely to shine!

Create a SHINE initiative—a program to help all contact center staff deliberately engage in acknowledging and demonstrating optimism in day-to-day work. For example, create a scavenger hunt for optimism hints; ask agents for ideas that will help fuel those little lights.



Imagine a month when the QA team declares a focus on a "job well done." Make it a score-free month with a NO CANCEL sign on coaching sessions. Agents can experience being told only what has been done well! Don't go all nuts about all the "what-ifs" (e.g., if they swear at someone, you don't need a QA program to address a code of conduct violation). Relax, be optimistic and have some FUN! To build momentum, gather the team and talk about what you're thinking: "Let's work together on a little something new. Everyone has been through so much, it's time to take a moment and check whether our lights are on or off, shining or dim!"

The pursuit of optimism may not resonate with all. Leaders need to be acutely aware of the many forms of passive-aggressive behaviors that may exist within the operation. These behaviors snuff out little lights all along their path and turn the contact center environment dark and toxic. Generally speaking, removing the toxicity is best, though it is sadly hard to do in far too many places.

Help your staff perform to standards in all categories, including the organization's code of conduct. This should play a much bigger role in organizations than it currently enjoys. If a staff member's conduct can't change, they no longer fit the job requirements. Hopefully, they can take their little light and let it shine in a position to which they are better suited. I once listened to a contact center leader from a major utility company in Hong Kong who said, "Negativity is a cancer in the contact center." Keep in mind that behaviors that are tolerated have been granted permission to exist and ultimately contaminate the center.

For some, a remote workforce is a great cultural challenge. Engagement must be much more deliberate and the evidence that you actually "care" more compelling. I've said this many times, gamification-type tools are a great way to build engagement momentum for remote workers (not to the exclusion of premise-based, mind you). Often, the executive level struggles with any funding request for "gaming," so ask for engagement tools!

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To build engagement momentum and fuel "to light the lights," business leaders have the responsibility to create a work environment in which all people in all roles feel valued. How is value demonstrated? Genuine appreciation is a really good place to start and to shine! Consider what is necessary to appreciate. First, you must pay attention. To appreciate an individual or a group, we really need to understand (i.e., pay attention to) what they are doing and how they are contributing. I don't mean spouting off a bunch of metrics as evidence of paying attention. I mean more like, "Jean, QA played me that tough call you handled so beautifully the other day. Well done!" As a leader, shine a light on how the workforce management team is assuring that training and coaching sessions are taking place. If these activities are canceled or minimized, your engagement momentum will decline and lights will dim.

Pay attention and catch negative trends early, especially around training and coaching, while accentuating the optimistic. Part of that plan must be to keep agents current on products, services, processes and performance... all the elements that keep them feeling informed and a "valued" part of something. Meeting one's information needs breeds confidence, and the confident are inclined toward optimistic views. And guess what? Feeling part of something creates energy, and energy is fuel for the little lights!

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Today's cost of attracting, training and retaining the kind of talent that human interactions require must not be squandered. As contact center leaders, we need to focus on building engagement momentum. Then we might enjoy the benefits of all those little lights shining. They yield a kind of engagement illumination! *Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*



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