

DAWN of a NEW DAY

THE NEW YEAR IS THE OPPORTUNE TIME TO STRATEGIZE AND PLAN FOR A NEW BEGINNING.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

THE “DAWN OF A NEW DAY” IS AN EXPRESSION THAT MEANS “A NEW OR FRESH BEGINNING OR A TURNING POINT THAT ACHIEVES AS MUCH” (according to freedictionary.com). What a great theme for any contact center kicking off the New Year! However, far too often, contact centers field so many initiatives and demands that this time of year passes like “sands through the hourglass” and the new dawn passes unnoticed.

The New Year is the opportune time to strategize and plan for what could be a new beginning and even a “turning point.” So what are your plans?

First and foremost, recognize that a lot can get done within a short period of time. Often when thinking about things like crafting a plan for a new beginning or navigating a turning point, the first inclination is to fret over the “time” it will take. Internal dialogues suggest repeatedly that “there is no time to invest in

such a ‘frivolous’ pursuit. We have work to do!” Our own minds can jeopardize the ability to move toward a new path.

I thought I might provide a “Dawn of a New Day” shortcut by offering a few key focus areas to help overcome overwhelming feelings and take advantage of all that the New Year has to offer. These things take both time and participation. Leaders need not do all the work; they only need to allow the work to be done! Engaging frontline staff in planning a new beginning or simply improving key areas is in and of itself a “New Dawn” for some. Leaders that suffer from the “I don’t have time” mantra are now beginning to really sweat. If they don’t have time, how can it be possible to take time from frontline staff and ask them to do anything but their jobs? Aren’t these staff busy, too? Well there you go, this is your first “Dawn” initiative... find the time to evaluate opportunities. To get started, think in half-hours—not days.

I never cease to be amazed at how much rich information can be gathered by bring-

ing folks into a conference room and simply exchanging ideas. The more targeted the discussion the richer the return.

Here are some topics to target for the “Dawn of a New Day.” Discuss the specifics of key strategic areas such as vision, strategy, brand and the customer experience. These areas provide the “why” of the work we do. This is where the passion to perform emerges. This is where the talented want to invest. Ask staff to come up with definitions; make it a scavenger hunt to add some excitement. Find the CEO’s letter in the annual report where vision and strategy are defined. Then identify the ways the contact center can provide support or make vision and strategy come to life.

Brand and the customer experience go hand in hand. Define the “behaviors” that support a branded experience. The branded experience will provide the powerful components of the customer experience. These elements are the glue... the WHY. This is a great way to kick off the New Year. Have fun with it; engage the team.

Think about what is “new” in the contact center industry and how it may apply to you, your staff and your operation. This is another topic to put out to the front line to solicit participation in the “discovery.” Then share findings via bulletin boards (physical or virtual), lunches, half-hour briefings... wherever, be clever! Keep in mind that the very act of independent discovery stimulates learning; couple that with contributing to a collective learning experience and you have momentum. This can be part of a new beginning for how those young professionals in your care view the contact center industry... its power and potential.

Here is another thing to consider (and I know I have been saying this for years). Start a program to document what is being learned about customers. Ask the front line to recall and document what they have learned about customers this week; it can be funny, crazy or relevant. The point is to get people thinking this way as much as it is to capture the information. One organization I have worked with has a “journal” type of book in the contact center where staff can enter customer stories. Believe me, there is quite a collection of funny, touching and crazy moments as well as some policy and procedural changes. More importantly, there is a team focused on the many dimensions of the experience and taking ownership of that experience.

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Here is another thought... as a team, evaluate your center in terms of this widely utilized definition of contact center management: "The art and science of getting the right number of people, in the right place, at the right time, doing the right things." The first three elements of the definition (i.e., the right number of people, in the right place, at the right time) represent more of the science. These are the workforce management objectives. Establishing the proper disciplines around these key areas is a turning point for many contact centers and a "New Day truly Dawns." This is the first step one takes to move from managing by the seat of your pants to managing by objectives. Mastery here takes

focus and learning. (*Pipeline* has archives of articles related to the specifics and is a good place to start.) However, let's be clear here. If your contact center is not engaged in the professional disciplines of workforce management, you will most likely be lost in terms of achieving your goals.

A lack of knowledge and discipline in the science of contact center management leaves the leader short on long-term insight. This lack of insight manifests in poor decisions being made when attempting to fix problems that emerge without proper workforce management. On the customer side, there are high abandonment rates, long delays and prickly agents; on the agent side there is burn out, absenteeism, tardiness, and a reduction in accuracy and quality. Resolutions for customers may mean more segmentation, hand-offs, etc. These create chaos rather than calm. Resolution for agents may mean additional scrutiny or rules put in place that add to the stress rather than relieve it. Sadly, in these environments the impact on agents is often misread as simply poor performance.

As for "doing the right things," I firmly believe

this is the intention of most people. It is also where the "art" comes into managing a contact center. People management is not about metrics! It is more about driving the behaviors that yield the desired metrics. Crafting those behaviors collaboratively with your team engages them on a new level... a New Dawn!

Dawn is an awesome time of day! When the eastern horizon begins to glow as the sun becomes visible there is truly a feeling of possibility. It is this same feeling that drives us to craft our New Year's resolutions and welcome the "Dawn of a New Day." ☺

**"AND IT SEEMS LIKE,
YES IT FEELS LIKE,
A BRAND NEW DAY,
BRAND NEW DAY."**

—VAN MORRISON



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