

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO EMPOWERING
**SUPERSTAR CALL
CENTER AGENTS**



CONVOSO

To be a successful business, you must have employees empowered to make a difference within your company. CEO of Campbell's Soup, [Doug Conant](#), put it best "To win in the marketplace you must first win in the workplace." However, for call center managers, adopting a company culture that breeds a winning workplace environment has always been a rocky road. This has in large part been due to the rampant turnover rates that affect every call center, which unfortunately seem to be on a steady increase.

The call center industry currently suffers from a 30-45% average turnover rate. In comparison to the [15% rate that the industry suffered in 2013](#). Although it varies based on the role, it could cost call centers up to \$25,000 per agent they lose to turnover. To cure call centers of rampant turnover rates, a well built-out company culture must be present.



"To win in the marketplace you must first win in the workplace."

— [Doug Conant](#)



Every call center strives to be filled with “superstar agents,” but how can you truly create a company culture that consistently breeds out agents motivated to exceed company goals? Importantly, there is no set definition of what a “superstar” agent looks like within a call center. Every business is different. However, every call center manager wants employees that are constantly striving to exceed expectations. *Motivated and empowered agents are superstar agents.*

At Convoso we have been building expert call centers for well over a decade. We did this by hearing our customer complaints and building a software designed to empower call center agents. By using our platform, clients have routinely reported a 100% increase in agent productivity. Within this ultimate guide of empowering superstar call center agents, you will find that we also surveyed some of the most influential minds in all of the Call Center Industry. Including the likes of: [Chip Bell](#), [Adam Toporek](#), [Todd. M Noftall](#), and many more!

WHAT DOES “AGENT EMPOWERMENT” MEAN ANYWAYS?

Renowned customer experience & call center expert Chip Bell had a lot to say regarding the definition of empowerment. According to Bell, “Empowerment does not mean ‘unlimited license;’ it means responsible freedom—balancing ‘go the extra mile’ service on behalf of the customer with stewardship of the assets of the organization.” Bell is confident that for call center agents to truly feel empowered, it all starts at the top of your call center. “Leaders do not “give power;” they release power. When leaders say, “I need to empower my employees,” it is a bit like saying, “I need to motivate my employees.” We all know motivation is

internal. Leaders create circumstances and relationships that encourage self-motivation. Empowerment is similar. So, the goal of leadership is to eliminate the barriers to employees releasing power.”

WHAT PREVENTS CALL CENTER AGENTS FROM FEELING EMPOWERED?

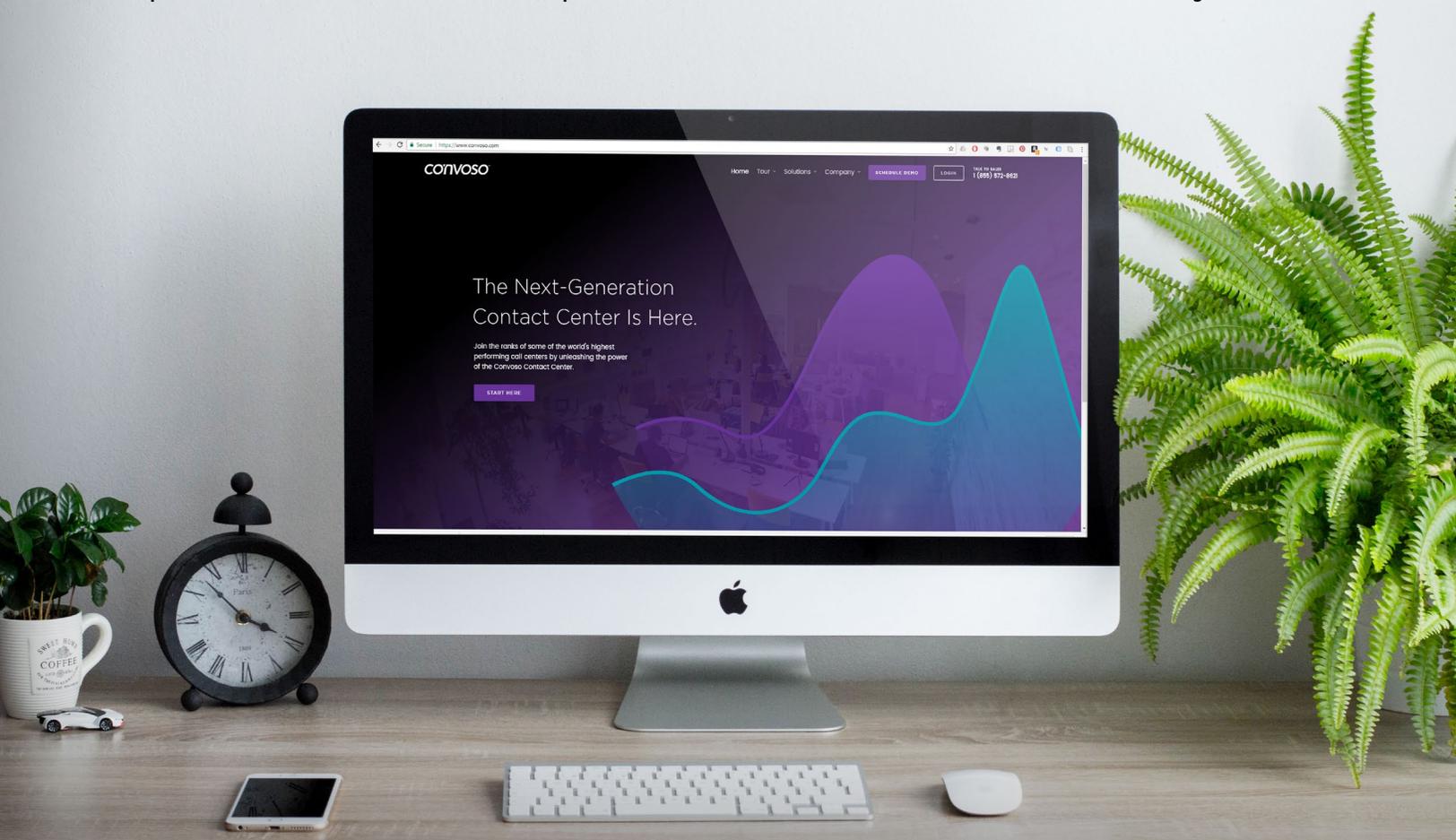
According to Chip Bell, there are at least five barriers to employee empowerment:

- 1. No purpose:** Employees need a higher vision, calling, aspiration. Leaders should provide a cathedral-building purpose, not just a brick-laying task.
- 2. No proficiency:** “Knowledge is power”—Alexander Pope. Leaders should establish a training program that enhances employees knowledge.
- 3. No permission:** Leaders should provide trust-building guidance, not obedience-driven orders.
- 4. No protection**—employee mistakes that result in growth, not rebuke. Employees learn if they are truly empowered when they make an error. Is there a net of support, or a hard floor of judgment on which they fall?
- 5. No payoff:** Do employees experience affirmation when they take responsible risks?



WHERE DO I START?

As a call center manager, you will face many difficult decisions throughout your day to day work life. Before you begin your journey of empowering superstar agents—you must first surround yourself with an excellent management team. This way, you will ensure that you have multiple expert opinions on every major decision that you are faced with. As a team, one of your first objectives should be to set a list of your company values, otherwise known as “core values,” that will guide your decision-making processes and company culture for the duration of your call center’s existence. Setting these company values is quite possibly the most important moment in setting a standard for the culture of your workforce. Convoso CEO, Nima Hakimi, instilled Convoso’s core values at the foundation of the company. “Eventually you realize that it is impossible to hire as a complete cohort. This realization turned my focus



from hiring the best candidate on paper—to one that better aligns with our company values. You have to realize that a call center truly is a team effort. When you have one team member that fails to align with company values, then odds are that employee will begin to be disengaged. While he/she may seem like a bad apple, their negative output could have a real lasting effect on your company culture.” said Hakimi.

Picking core values does not have to happen overnight or during the course of one meeting. The inner culture of your company will always change as your business develops. However, you can set a standard for how your team members react to industry change, or company change, by keeping values consistent. Whether you do have a full management team or are just setting examples for your small business, core values should act as a visionary guide. In order to set core values you might want to consider these top six questions:

1. How do I want entry level employees to view management teams?
2. How do I envision inevitable turnover affecting company morale?
3. What does my ideal employee look like?
4. What would make my best employees need to stay at my company?
5. How do I want customers to visualize the internal culture of my operation?
6. What would my ideal customer look for in one of my employees?

SET COMPANY GOALS

After you have addressed your core values, next you need to address the company goals that you wish to achieve. While some call centers might get caught up in trying to gain as much revenue as possible or making every customer satisfied—the best call center managers always focus on the nitty gritty details. These details always come in form of key performance indicators.

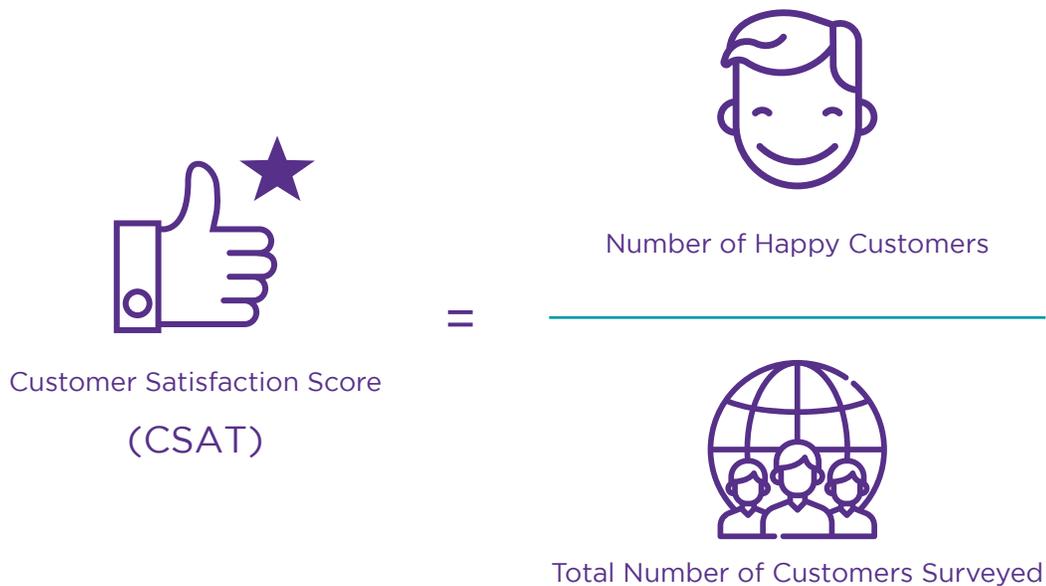
Having major company goals and overarching projects is very important for the momentum of your call center. However, it will be your operation's KPIs that really act as the infrastructure of your call center.

WHAT ARE COMMON CALL CENTER KPIS?

As you know, there are three different kinds of call centers. Inbound, outbound, and blended. You may need your call center to service customers, or to make sales. So KPIs will likely vary depending on the focus of your operation. Here are a few examples of Inbound call center KPIs and Outbound call center KPIs:

Top Inbound KPIs:

Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT): According to [business insider](#), 86% of customers quit doing business with a company because of a bad customer service experience. To calculate CSAT score, you take happy customers and divide that by the number of customers Asked (also illustrated in the image below).



Customer Satisfaction Score
(CSAT)

$$= \frac{\text{Number of Happy Customers}}{\text{Total Number of Customers Surveyed}}$$

Customer churn rate: Customer service, while largely overlooked, is actually one of the most effective ways to **GAIN** profits and retain customers. Customer churn rate accounts for the amount of customers that are revolving through your business. To calculate Customer Churn Rate:

$$\frac{(\text{Customers beginning of month} - \text{Customers end of month})}{\text{Customers beginning of month}}$$

First call resolution: is a strong indication of how knowledgeable your agents are, and how streamlined your call center process is for your customers. First call resolution is the percentage of inbound customer calls (tickets) that are resolved upon the first inquiry. This is widely considered as one the most important metrics in all of customer service.

Transfer rate: Your call center's transfer rate highlights how often a customer needs to be redirected to a better skilled or better-fit agent for their needs. Measured as a percentage, a high transfer rate indicates your operation could benefit from a detailed audit of your entire inbound call flow and processes.

Net promoter score: Widely known as the most **important metric** for businesses and call centers alike. Net Promoter Score, or NPS, is the likelihood of a customer's willingness to recommend a company's product or services.

Outbound KPIs:

Conversion rate (measured as a percentage) is the calculation of the percentage of calls that resulted in a successful sale or in some cases, can also mean a successful contact with a customer. The higher your conversion rate percentage is, the better. A low conversion rate increases your cost per lead and ultimately impacts your company's overall revenue.

First call close: The First Call Close (FCC) metric indicates the number of sales that were made on an agent's "first call" or contact with the customer. While closing a sale on the first call may be difficult for some business types and offerings, the ability to do so will not only drastically improve your business' overall efficiency, but will ultimately allow you to generate more revenue, faster.

Hit rate: Sometimes known as Contact Rate, is defined as the number of sales of a product divided by the number of customers who go online, call, or visit a company to find out about the product. For call centers, calculate the Hit Rate by dividing the number of calls made by an agent by the number of those calls that were answered by a customer or prospect. If this rate is low, your list is not as accurate as it needs to be.

Occupancy rate: refers to the time an agent spends on calls versus the time spent between calls. This KPI directly covers how productive your agents are. Increasing job productivity within any industry is a difficult

task however, there are many options out there for you to increase productivity within your call center. Gamification is a proven method within call centers to increase agent productivity.

Abandoned call ratio: calculates the amount of callers that answer but leave the queue prior to connecting to a live agent. To calculate Abandoned Call Ratio:

$$\text{Abandonment rate \%} = \frac{[\text{Number of Calls offered} - \text{Number of Calls handled}]}{[\text{Number of Calls offered}] * 100}$$

HOW DO I ENSURE THAT MY HIRING PROCESS WORKS?

With set company values and goals for all your new hires to meet, you are finally ready to begin the exciting process of bringing on new employees to your call center. By paying close attention to your KPIs, you will be able to see exactly what areas of your call center you need new employees in. Especially for blended operations, this dissection of company KPIs can be extremely valuable in the long run. This will be the time where you can see what is working, what is not working, and importantly: how would a new employee fix this issue?

Many call centers won't fray from hiring extremely entry level candidates with limited experience. This actuality is a stern contributor to the rampant turnover rate that affects call centers. However, hiring managers in call centers need to be more aware of how much agent turnover affects the revenue of your operation.

Quality Assurance and Training Connection (QATC) broke down the costs of a call center financing the hiring campaign to bring on 20 new employees:

As shown in the financial data above, agent turnover might go unnoticed financially due to the domino effect that it has. However, it plays as a key financial burden to every call center affected.

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Recruiting cost = Campaign to hire 20 employees | \$ 5,000M |
| Hiring cost = (40 HR hours (2 per candidate) @ \$20/hour) | \$ 800 |
| Hiring cost = (60 call center hours (3 per candidate) @ 20/hour) | \$ 1,200 |
| Training cost = (5 sessions x 80 hrs @ \$20 trainer cost) | \$ 8,000 |
| Training cost = (Materials/expenses @ \$500 per person) | \$ 10,000 |
| Unproductive training time = (3 wks paid time x 20 people @ \$12/hr) | \$ 28,800 |
| Supervisory time = (10 add'l hours per person @ \$15/hour) | \$ 3,000 |
| Overtime costs = (25 days x 8 hours x 20 people @ \$12 x 1.5 rate) | \$ 72,000 |
| Total Hard Cost of Turnover | \$ 128,800 |
| Per Person Turnover Cost | \$ 6,440 |

These numbers bring us to how important the SOAR hiring method is for your call center. SOAR is widely accepted as one of the most effective hiring methods and should be implemented by your hiring managers in his/her job postings/descriptions. SOAR is an acronym with four key components:

- 1. Substantial department goal:** This is how you detail how the KPI's of the new employee are suppose to meet fits into your company's mission. This is where you really express the importance of your employees and how a team effort is what your operation *relies* on.
- 2. Obstacles:** This is how you relay the challenges that your operation faces and how that potential new hire adequately fixes that need. This is how your call center can relay how one department of your business fits into the bigger picture. More importantly, how the challenges that department faces will be better off when met with specific criteria based on employee's past experience.
- 3. Action:** This is where you spell out the KPIs that you expect that person to meet.
- 4. Results:** This is where you really convey your core values. How will that employee's results affect the company? Make the new hire feel like they are joining something that is bigger than themselves.

The SOAR method allows you to vet your company's unique characteristics to open positions. This enhances your pre-interview processes by allowing candidates to truly see the opportunity.

During the interview process, use the SOAR method (along with your core values) to ask questions that matter most to you. For example, if teamwork is a major core value then ask them to tell you about the experiences they have working in teams and their teamwork achievements.

TRAINED TO BE EMPOWERED

The onboarding process is the most important time for any employee in every company. This holds doubly true for the call center industry. Oftentimes, call center managers will simply ignore, or rush through the onboarding process. Thinking that their systems are self-explanatory, managers have agents rely purely on scripts to get their foot in the door. However, this impersonal method of onboarding offers little to no taste of company values. New employees want to feel rewarded and engaged at work and just giving them static/boring scripts to work with is going to only lead to that employee feeling distant from the company.

Blake Morgan, an acclaimed Forbes columnist, believes that it should be company culture that really takes the forefront of your onboarding experience.

It is extremely hard to integrate company culture into your scripts, and even harder to breed positivity without reinforcing the motivating factors to why employees *love* working for you. However, if you were to create a more rewarding learning experience, then agents will be more inclined to embrace your company culture. Only growing upon their liken to your business beyond the SOAR method.

Morgan continued on her take of onboarding, “The contact center is literally the place where customers



“When it comes to the onboarding experience for new agents, your culture is your advantage. When you have a positive culture based on a strong value system, that will shine through in the behavior of your contact center agents.”

— Blake Morgan

make contact with your brand. How hard did you work to get those customers in the door? You want the people tasked with handling the customer to feel good about their workplace, and that will shine through in the experience they offer to customers.”

Adam Toporek, a customer service expert, continued on Morgan’s note on how to tie in customer values to company values within agent onboarding.

In summary, your agents should have the same exact positive experiences that you want your customers to have.

To achieve positivity & empowerment within your onboarding, look no further than your learning management system.

DOWNFALLS OF MOST LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

In our blog series, “Why your Call Center Learning Management” system we addressed the typical downfalls that most managers face using disengaging learning management systems. Three main issues arise within call centers due to these systems:

Lack of engagement: Currently, the most common LMS in the call center space provide solutions that



“Training should emphasize the organization’s customer-centric values and demonstrate a culture in which empowerment to act on the customer’s behalf is supported, not second guessed. Only then will teams use the empowerment they have been given.”

— Adam Toporek

are impersonal and extremely complex. Leaving the agent striving for just enough knowledge to get by. This impersonal method of learning leaves the agent baseless, unrecognized, seeking direction, and unmotivated. For call centers, engagement reigns as a particular focal point. Without a truly engaged interaction with every customer—customers can be left feeling unsatisfied and unimportant. Call center managers must find new and innovative ways to ensure that their agents are engaged and communicative with every single customer. This all begins with a successful onboarding and training procedure.

High turnover rates: Any unmotivated employee, no matter the industry, is likely to seek a change of scenery if they're not given some sort of stimuli to regenerate their motivation. With a lack of motivating factors conveying from standard call center industry LMS, there is no wonder that the call center industry always has been an industry heavily impacted with turnover.

Inefficient: With limited incentive to learn the proper materials—supervisors are left with a very inefficient and ineffective LMS. Even an intermediate LMS process leaves the agent seeking rewards and a sense of direction within the company. Unfortunately for most call centers, entry-level positions seem to be the peak of opportunity for unengaged employees.

Limited growth potential. Limited knowledge of the company. Call Center agents are left continuously underperforming on key performance indicators (KPIs).

MAKE TRAINING ENJOYABLE

What if I told you that there is a way to make agents feel empowered to reach KPIs... and have a great time doing it! Welcome to the world of a gamified LMS. Gamification, of any product/service, aims to heighten engagement by adding game-like mechanics to a normally standardized process/platform. The goal of gamification is to add motivation by increasing engagement through users' fun and interaction with the gamified solution. By tying this into a learning management system, thus creating a "gamified" LMS, a call center agent is incentivized and rewarded for their successes.



A gamified LMS offers three major benefits:

1. Increased agent engagement:

A learning management system gives a call center manager a platform to convey and test an agent on their knowledge of their processes. However, a gamified LMS offers the same quizzical aspects of a standard LMS, but adds a game-like component to the system to allow for recognition and/or incentive-based learning. These game-like mechanics leaderboards, badges, and rewards based on performance or learning. This system is more advantageous than a standard (non-gamified) LMS because it facilitates a sense of achievement and enhanced motivation amongst agents. Thus, increasing overall engagement. [David Brown](#), a customer service expert added his experience implementing gamification into a LMS.



“When we first started to introduce the concept of gamification into our training and onboarding solution, everyone seemed a bit skeptical. However, something amazing started to happen a few months later. Fellow managers and I started to get asked the oddest question by our agents: ‘Is the next certification ready?...Because I want to take it.

— David Brown

2. Reduction in turnover:

Increasing employee satisfaction and motivation in the onboarding process is a key metric in keeping your agents onboard and striving to make sales or delivering a quality customer experience. [Study after study](#) have indicated that an incentivized work environment, or one that rewards based upon performance, plays an instrumental factor in an employee’s decision to stay at the company. This holds true for agents within the call center industry.

3. Increase in ROI:

By using a gamified LMS, a reduction in onboarding time lowers the overall costs of training and heightens the ROI within your own company's hiring procedures. Most call center operations **spend on an average thousands** on each agent during the onboarding process—a gamified LMS is a great utility for call center managers. With added gamification, managers are training agents faster, exceeding key performance indicators, and seeing a higher number of first call resolutions.

IT'S NOT ALL JUST GAMES

Gamification offers a way for call centers to empower their agents to reach KPIs, simply by actively rewarding their successes and participation. Mike Aoki, a call center training expert, is fascinated with the concept of gamification. “The key is to make training an interactive experience. Gamification is a cutting edge method of empowering Agents by making training fun and competitive. That can be as simple as giving out points each time an Agent answers a question correctly in class. Interactivity is such a major component to gamification. Give Agents a chance to contribute their thoughts and experiences during training. That will empower them to speak up, share tips and ask questions.”

Adding leaderboards and rewards brings a sense of community to your call center. A sense of pride and teamwork will be built around agents yearning to achieve better results. You will find that agents will be reaching out to the agents at the top of the leaderboards for advice as to how they can do better.

BE TRANSPARENT & TRUSTING

Once training ends, that is when the real learning begins. By the end of your gamified LMS onboarding experience, you should have motivated and empowered agents looking forward to better your call center. However, you need to make sure that you are always coaching your agents and making sure they are engaged. You can do this by always being transparent and honest with their progress within your company. Show them how hitting their KPI's will lead to growth for them within your company. Give them an incentive to always work harder to surpass goals.

According to Todd M. Noftall, a customer service expert in the hotel industry, trust is one of the most important measures you can have with an employee for them to feel empowered. "Empowerment is all about trust and confidence. You trust that your team will make the right decision based on the circumstances they encounter. Your team, with that trust, has the confidence to make decisions - they feel empowered." Said Noftall.

LISTEN

Always remember to have a forum for questions. Be open to hearing employee complaints and make sure that there is an era of openness around worklife discussion. Going back to transparency, there can oftentimes be tension between agents and managers due to a lack of communication. Likely due to lower employee's inability to share their thoughts or ask questions. By consistently listening and proactively taking steps to implement solutions to employee concerns... you will actively make employees feel more apart of your call center.



COLLIDING WITH THE “CALL CENTER CULTURE”

Company culture is clearly the most important aspect of generating empowered call center employees. By establishing company values in the onset of your hiring process, you will begin your hiring journey with a focused approach. While the call center industry is typically met with a bad stigma, your operation can break these notions by setting forth policies that breed empowered and motivated agents.

With this guide you learned all the tools of the trade. Empowering agents begins long before they ever speak to a customer. It is now up to you to build out a comparable system that your managers can use to build a stellar call center!



ABOUT US

Convoso provides the industry's first Gamified Cloud Contact Center Software. Convoso's end-to-end contact center platform is designed to improve customer interactions and experiences at every stage of your business operations. From designing to executing campaigns and customer service strategies, our platform ensures the user experience and interactions are productive and enjoyable for both your customers and employees alike. Convoso's mission is to maximize productivity and minimize hassle by housing your enterprise's inbound and outbound call/contact center operations and processes in one intuitive end-to-end platform.

Browser-Based Call Center Software | Convoso