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CX Insight

AN EXecs IN THE KNOW PUBLICATION

Celebrating the Human Side of Customer Care

Thinking about the industry's most important resource – our people.

ELIMINATING MENTAL HEALTH
STIGMAS IN THE WORKPLACE

CRACKING THE CODE OF A TIGHT LABOR MARKET

BRAND SPOTLIGHT: FULTON
COUNTY GOVERNMENT

FIVE KEY AREAS OF CX AGENT EVOLUTION



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Welcome to the July 2021 edition of CX Insight magazine, an Execs In The Know publication.

Providing Support For What Matters Most

Over the past 12 months, companies have asked a lot of their people. From where they work to how they work, the past 12 months have forced many folks to juggle work responsibilities with home life in a whole new way. While these changes may have stretched the limits of what most leaders thought possible, particularly in terms of timelines and critical initiatives. In many ways these challenges have helped companies refocus on what matters most – their employees.

In this issue, we dive into some of the most significant changes and challenges to face the CX industry over the past 12 months, especially when it comes to finding, hiring, training, and retaining the right people. Specifically, we look at what it takes to be successful in a tight labor market, explore the characteristics of the next generation customer care agent, and learn what's needed to create a more positive work environment with mental health at the forefront.

Additionally, this issue contains an insider's look at Fulton County Government through a special Brand Spotlight featuring Brigitte Bailey, Director, Customer Experience and Solutions, as well as a one-on-one conversation with Diane Haluszka, Director, PVH Customer Service N.A. at PVH Corporation. As always, we hope you'll find these and our other articles to be both informative and inspiring, especially as you and your organization refine future plans and further evolve existing strategies. ✨

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Cracking The Code of a Tight Labor Market

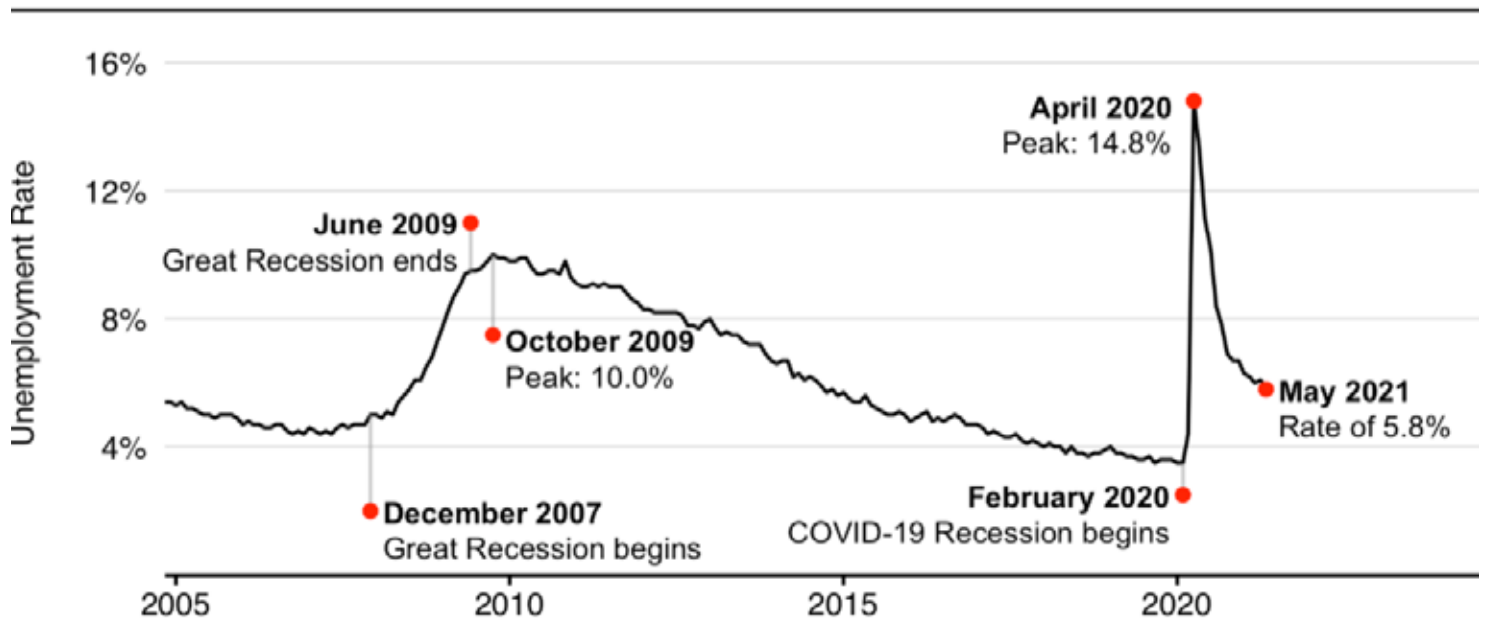
By Execs In The Know

Achieving Greater Recruiting, Hiring, and Training Success

With renewed optimism as the world starts to open back up, it is great news for all industries. Restaurants are full again, people are resuming their travels, and unemployment is falling. Per the [chart on page 9](#)¹, (reproduced on the following page) U.S. unemployment reached a high of 14.8% in April 2020, but as of May 2021 it improved to 5.8%. 559,000 jobs were added to the US economy in May 2021, compared to just 266,000 in April 2021. This job growth is slower than many economists and leaders had expected but this is indeed an indication that things are headed in the right direction.

Figure 2. U.S. Unemployment Rate

Seasonally adjusted monthly data, November 2004 to May 2021



Source: Created by CRS using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Extracted using the Labor Force Statistics data series at <https://www.bls.gov/data/>.

With this positive news comes some perplexing trends and challenges reported by all industries; one of which is that although jobs are being added, they are not being filled at the pace expected, thus creating a labor shortage in many industries. In fact, employers reported 9.3 unfilled jobs in April 2021 according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).²

The contact center industry is not escaping the challenges of hiring and retaining qualified candidates. The industry is most certainly in uncharted territory, and no one has a crystal ball to know how long this will continue or what additional dynamics may surface. It is important to understand what is happening at any given time and be nimble enough to take measures that mitigate challenges as they occur.

This article will explore some of the theories behind the labor shortage, specifically how it is impacting contact center hiring and retention,

and what organizations can do to mitigate the challenges.

Possible Root Causes of Labor Shortage and Hiring Challenges:

There are several factors potentially causing these hiring challenges, but all of these are still evolving on a daily basis.

CONTINUED RELUCTANCE DUE TO COVID-19:

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), about three in 10 working age Americans were fully vaccinated as of mid-May. This number continues to increase, but some workers are still wary of the risks associated with returning to a physical site. Therefore, for centers either recruiting for on premise positions or conducting training in-person, they may find some percentage of qualified candidates who are not ready to re-enter the workforce due to lingering COVID-19 concerns. As more workers

get vaccinated or feel more comfortable about potential risks, some of this angst could decrease.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND STIMULUS

PACKAGES: There is some belief that continued unemployment benefits and stimulus packages provided to unemployed workers have caused some to delay their return to the workforce for various reasons. Whether this is true or not, these benefits will soon be expiring, and some states have ceased them earlier than their original expiration date.

CONTINUED CHILDCARE AND SCHOOL

ISSUES: A large percentage of U.S. mothers were forced to leave the workforce during the pandemic to care for children and homeschool due to school closures. In January, around 10 million U.S. mothers were not actively working, which is 1.4 million more than the prior year according to [U.S. Census Bureau data](#)³. As fall

approaches in the U.S. and schools reopen, it could reverse this trend. The risk for some is the fear that more outbreaks will occur, forcing school closures again.

REASSESSMENT OF CAREER GOALS: While out of work during the pandemic, many have reassessed the kind of work they want to do. The pandemic obviously had a negative impact on the workforce, but it also gave workers the opportunity to re-evaluate what is important to them and what they want to do. In fact, Pew research revealed that 66% of unemployed workers “seriously considered” changing their field of work. Some are taking their time to explore new opportunities or educating themselves in a new field of interest.

HOLDING OUT FOR PREVIOUS (OR BETTER) JOB: Many workers are reportedly optimistic that their “pre-pandemic” job will become available. Or, related to the previous point, they



are hoping a “better” job will become available. Since they may still have unemployment benefits, they believe the longer they wait, the better off they will be in the long run.

Impact to Contact Center Hiring and Retention:

In talking with leaders and researching these dynamics affecting the labor market, there are several ways the contact center is being impacted by these dynamics:

COMPETING COMPENSATION: Since other industries are also struggling to find qualified candidates, higher salaries and even hiring (or retention) bonuses are being offered. This is making it even more difficult for both in-house and outsourced centers to compete with, from a salary perspective. There is typically little room for sweeping compensation increases in contact centers, so organizations face the added pressure of attracting and retaining skilled agents while struggling to compete based on compensation.

LOWER ACCEPTANCE RATES: Due to the competing demand and compensation, companies may be making offers for contact center positions, but receiving fewer than expected acceptances. Additionally, because of the competitive nature of the current market, speed becomes important. Recruiting teams must be fast to screen, interview, and make offers or they risk losing an applicant to a competitor or another position.

INCREASED TRAINING “NO-SHOWS”: Companies are reporting an increased number of “no-shows” for training. A candidate may accept an offer, but before training begins, they receive what they consider to be a “better offer.” They then accept the competing

offer, leaving organizations in a bind before training even begins. This forces organizations to make offers to more applicants to ensure they meet required headcount.

INCREASED ATTRITION DURING TRAINING OR EARLY IN THE AGENT’S TENURE: Many leaders are experiencing a situation in which candidates accept a position and they complete training, but they do not intend to stay for long. They are either waiting for their previous job to become available again, or they receive what they consider to be a better offer after the fact. So, the company spends time training

VOLATILITY OF APPLICANT VOLUME: On one hand, with increased competition for highly skilled workers, some organizations may experience fewer applicants than expected. On the other hand, with more applicants considering a switch in occupation, organizations may receive more applications from workers who were previously working in other industries. And for centers offering more work-from-home (WFH) positions, this could open applicant floodgates. While organizations may receive more applications, it also means recruiters must filter out more applicants who may not meet minimum requirements.





and upskilling employees, only to lose them to another company before they are fully productive.

At the end of the day, the overarching impact is increased recruiting effort and costs, decreased training effectiveness with higher costs, damage to morale and culture, and ultimately a negative customer experience.

What Leaders Can Do to Minimize the Risk:

Given the ever-changing dynamics of the labor market and these challenging implications, there are several steps organizations can take to mitigate these risks.

UNDERSTAND THE MARKET: First, it is important for organizations and recruiting teams to stay abreast of the market. The labor market next month will likely look different than it does this month as the economy continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic. Understanding the complexion of the market and potential

applicants is critical to responding appropriately. This means knowing what the competition is doing beyond direct competitors. As discussed above, contact centers are currently competing with other industries, so a holistic view is needed to make appropriate decisions.

REIMAGINE THE RECRUITING PROFILE: Even though centers are experiencing recruiting challenges, there are also opportunities. Because a higher percentage of WFH is here to stay for most organizations, this potentially opens new markets for contact centers if they are willing to expand beyond the proximity of their physical sites. Also, the minimum skills required of the ideal candidate should be reconsidered. Because applications may be received from candidates who would not have previously applied (and who may not have contact center experience), they could have attractive skills that translate from one industry to another. In other words, companies may have a larger pool of applicants with critical skills that prove even more important than previous contact center experience.

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY FOR THE

RECRUITING PROCESS: Due to the competitive nature of the current market, recruiting teams may need to turn to more automation and artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to optimize the recruiting process. This technology exists and would allow for faster screening and ability to navigate the entire process faster, so no applicants are lost due to a lengthy recruiting process.

OFFER MORE FLEXIBILITY: Given the reluctance that some of the workforce has with returning to physical centers, or even a typical 8-hour schedule, flexibility in scheduling could be attractive. Offering staff the ability to choose their shifts, work split shifts, or easily switch shifts with colleagues when needed could be perceived as a competitive benefit to prospective workers.

REASSESS COMPENSATION/BENEFITS:

It is not going to be possible in all cases to increase salaries, but this is a time to reassess the packages offered for the skills required. The complexity of transactions handled by agents is increasing, so the minimum skills required are changing as well. This could mean compensation adjustments should be considered. However, organizations should be sensitive to this especially if working with outsourced suppliers and recognize that offering higher wages is not always realistic. Getting creative with benefits and focusing on the organization's culture and development opportunities becomes even more important.

STRONG AND FLEXIBLE PARTNER

AGREEMENTS: Business process outsourcing (BPO) suppliers are perhaps more important to organizations than ever before. As such, it is critical for organizations and suppliers to be transparent and work together through these uncharted waters. More flexibility and a spirit of partnership on both sides is critical.

RETHINK TRAINING APPROACH: Due to the current transient nature of incoming employees, organizations need to do anything they can

to decrease training time. This could involve choosing to train new hires on specific skills until they reach a certain tenure. Or it could involve using a blended training approach which is part self-guided and part instructor led. Most importantly, leveraging technology that allows trainees the capability to practice with "real life" simulations. Additionally, continuing to expand the use of AI and related technology to support agents can shorten the learning curve. Providing real-time, automated tools and resources, like virtual assistants, that guide them through customer interactions to the right resolution will ensure consistency and get agents up to speed faster.

Summary:

It is difficult to predict the future in these uncertain times, and the situation is evolving almost daily. This makes it challenging to make long-term decisions to address labor market issues impacting hiring and retention. The underlying priority for organizations should be focused on flexibility enabled by processes, tools, and strategic partnerships. Even though these dynamics will likely resolve themselves over time, any actions organizations take now to address these issues will not be wasted. Taking action to improve recruiting effectiveness and efficiency, reduce training time, and improve retention through attractive policies will serve organizations well now and into the future. ✨

Links:

- 1 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R46554.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/jolts.pdf>
- 3 <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/moms-work-and-the-pandemic.html>

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Eliminating Mental Health Stigmas in the Workplace

Setting the Example in Tackling a Hidden Crisis

By Execs In The Know

There is no question that mental health concerns have increased since the pandemic, but the truth is that mental illness and its devastating repercussions on individuals, families, society, and the economy was prevalent long before COVID-19. One of the reasons for the increase in mental health concerns is because of the stigma that continues to be associated with it. In fact, according to [studies](#)¹ by the American Psychiatric Association:

- Approximately 50% of workers are concerned about discussing mental health concerns at work.
- More than one in three workers are concerned about retaliation if they seek mental health care.

Those two sobering statistics alone should be cause for concern among all leaders.

The good news is that every single person can make a difference in how mental illness is perceived and addressed. Our industry and its leaders have an opportunity to set the example in making meaningful and lasting change by:

- Understanding mental illness and its impact on employees and families.
- Creating a culture and support for those who suffer from it.
- Actively working to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

This takes real work, commitment, and courage to



face the problem head-on. But those who are up to the challenge will be rewarded professionally and personally while making a difference in the lives of employees and their families.

This article seeks to shine a light on the scope of this global and growing issue, providing leaders with a foundation to help stamp out the stigma of mental illness at your own organizations.

Statistics

First, let's further frame up the scope of the problem that directly impacts every one of us. You do not have to look far to find statistics that clearly show the scope of the problem, including the following reported by the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#),² [The American Psychiatric Association \(APA\)](#),³ and [Indeed](#)⁴:

Think about these statistics for a moment in the context of your own organization. In your next meeting, look around the room. The likelihood of someone in that group experiencing mental and emotional challenges is high. Given this and the statistics mentioned above, you can be assured

ONE IN FIVE
U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.

ONE IN 20
U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year.

FIFTY-SEVEN AND TWO-TENTHS PERCENT
of adults with mental illness received no treatment.

SIXTY-ONE PERCENT
of workers say their mental health affects their productivity.

Mental health disorders and substance abuse issues cost U.S. employers between \$79 and \$105 BILLION a year in direct costs.

Mental illness costs the economy about \$200 BILLION in lost earnings each year.

that your organization and the people you care about are being affected. The human implications are huge in addition to economic implications, yet over half of employees are reluctant to seek help at work.

What is mental health stigma?

As indicated above, [more than half of people with mental illness do not receive help](#)⁵ for their mental health challenges. Additionally, the average delay between the onset of mental illness [symptoms and treatment is 11 years](#).⁶ Think about that - 11 years! Can you imagine going 11 years without treating cancer or diabetes? The consequences of waiting to treat mental illness are just as severe. And one of the main reasons for either a delay in treatment or receiving no treatment at all is fear of being treated differently, discrimination, and/or losing their jobs.

Before you can begin to take steps to reduce stigma in your organization, it is important to understand what it is and where it comes from.

In short, any stigma means a person is viewed negatively because of a particular characteristic. This could be race, gender, sexuality, nationality, disability, or in this case, mental illness. And when anyone is treated in a negative way for any of these reasons, that is discrimination. People with mental illness can experience stigma in many ways - within their own families, in society, and in the workplace. And the impact can be unbelievably harmful. The social stigma and discrimination they experience can make the problem even worse by causing them to avoid getting the help they so desperately need to recover.

Mental illness stereotypes and the stigma associated with it is not something new. They



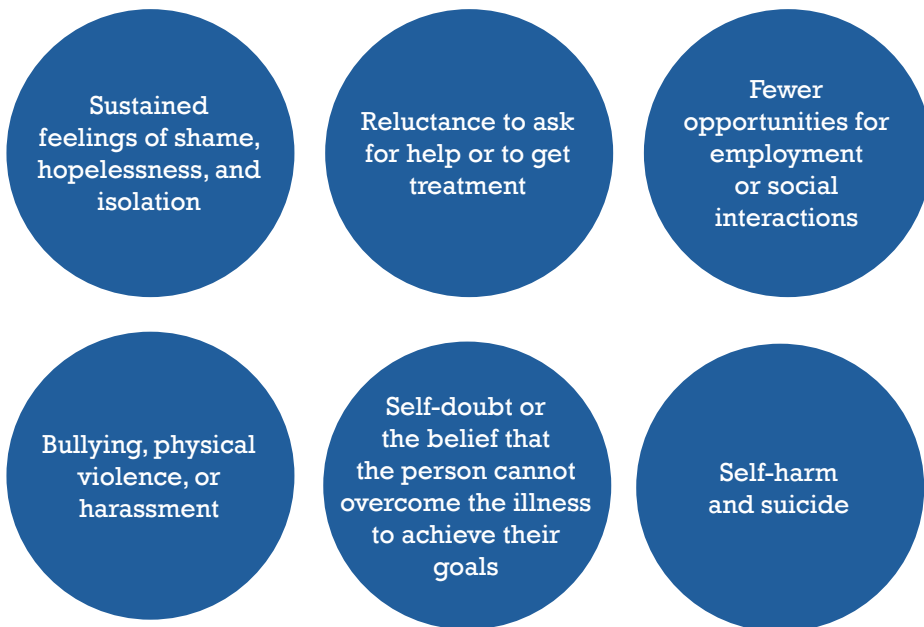
have persisted over time, even viewed as religious punishment in early civilizations. The mentally ill have also been institutionalized over the course of history, often in unhealthy, dangerous, and inhumane ways.

Thankfully, treatment over time for the mentally ill has evolved, but the stigma associated with it persists.

Mental health stigma (like all stigmas) originates from a lack of knowledge, fear, and misperceptions. So, how might you know if your

own organization is perpetuating this stigma and the issues surrounding it? Some indicators include:

- Careless comments about mental health, such as calling someone “crazy”, or saying “they must not have taken their meds today.” These kinds of comments may be said with no ill intentions per se, but imagine if someone struggling heard these comments? It can be very damaging.
- The perception by staff that those experiencing decreased productivity or other performance issues have made a “choice” and could “fix” their issues if they really wanted to or had the desire to “just power through.” Of course, you may have staff with performance issues which are not related to any mental health challenges. But if you hear these types of comments for those who are experiencing challenges, you likely have an issue.



There are several points of disconnect between employer and employee perspectives on workplace mental health

Our national survey findings reveal differing perspectives between employers and employees across three areas: level of **employer support for mental health**, employee **access to mental illness and substance use disorder treatment**, and **workplace stigma** (level of shame, prejudice or discrimination toward people with mental illness and substance use disorders perceived in the workplace).

The disconnect is most pronounced when it comes to perceived benefits for **frontline employees** and access to care for employees with a **substance use disorder**.

		Disconnect	
Employer support for mental health	65%	of employers report that employee mental health is supported well or very well	51%
			of all employee respondents agree
Access to mental health supports	71%	of employers with frontline employees report supporting mental health well or very well	27%
			of frontline employee respondents agree
Workplace stigma	20%	of employers report that improving access to substance use disorder treatment and recovery supports is a priority	84%
			of employee respondents with a substance use disorder report it is challenging to access care
Workplace stigma	31%	of employers report that improving access to mental illness treatment is a priority	67%
			of employees with a mental illness report that it is challenging to access care
Workplace stigma	23%	of employers report that they implemented an anti-stigma/awareness campaign in the last year	79%
			of all employees report that an anti-stigma/awareness campaign would be valuable

McKinsey & Company



- Those who seek counseling or take medication cover it up (or avoid it) due to fear that they will be treated differently.

Why should you focus on reducing mental health stigma?

Because this is still a prevalent issue among most organizations, you may likely find that this stigma persists at some level within your organization. And if so, the impact is far and wide. Not only does the business suffer in terms of decreased productivity and engagement, but the human toll is even more severe, resulting in:

This does not just affect the person

experiencing mental health issues, but everyone in their lives – family, friends, acquaintances, society, and colleagues.

Besides the obvious reasons all leaders should focus on reducing the stigma, there is a disconnect between what employers and employees believe is being done to address the issue. This is evident in a [study conducted by McKinsey & Company](#),⁷ which can be found below.

The most notable insights from this study are:

- Less than a quarter of employers reported they had implemented an anti-stigma

awareness campaign, yet almost 80% of employees report this would be valuable.

- A small percentage of employers are focused on improving access to substance use disorders (20%) and mental illness treatment (31%). Not surprisingly, most employees state that it is challenging to access care.
- The majority of employers (71%) believe they support mental health well among frontline employees, but only 27% of employees agree.

How can you reduce mental illness stigma in your organization?

We can probably all agree that this should be

a priority, and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness starts at the top. It should not be “the focus of the month,” or something you say is important, but the company’s actions do not align with the words. It takes a concerted and sustainable approach at all levels to create a culture that eliminates the stigma attached to mental illness. Below are seven specific ways you can begin to alter the perception in your organization:

CONDUCT LEADERSHIP TRAINING - Mental illness is complex, and the ability for leaders at all levels to recognize it and sensitively approach it requires education in areas such as:

- Identifying warning signs and appropriately responding to them.



- Understanding potential workplace triggers and how to avoid them.
- Creating a safe environment that promotes open dialogue for staff.
- Being aware of how words and language matter.
- Talking openly about one's own struggles and feelings.

PROVIDE EMPLOYEE TRAINING - Similarly, all staff should also receive training to:

- Identify warning signs among peers (and themselves) and know appropriate actions to take.
- Be aware of how words and language matter.
- Understand the resources and support available to them.
- Be comfortable talking to their managers about any struggles or stressors they encounter.

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION - Foundational to all efforts leaders can take is to normalize the conversation about mental illness. Encourage leaders to openly discuss their own struggles and how they have coped with them. Ensure language used in the workplace does not unintentionally further contribute to the stigma. Phrases such as "she is really acting psycho today..."; or "his split personality is showing today - tread lightly!" can have catastrophic impacts on people who are struggling. Words matter and when one hears others speaking in this manner, even if jest, it further prevents them from seeking help.

SEEK FEEDBACK - When trying to change or improve the culture related to mental illness, leaders should seek input from staff - in other words, do not implement actions in a bubble.

Conduct focus groups or offer employees the ability to provide anonymous feedback. As an organization, it is important for you to know how your employees feel about how you approach mental health and the processes and policies you have in place that drive unnecessary stress and anxiety. Most importantly, hear directly from staff what you can do to further reduce the stigma surrounding it. You might be surprised at what you hear - perhaps it is something as simple as offering more flexible work schedules to reduce stress, or maybe it is more break time to handle personal issues while working at home. Or it might be something you have not even thought of that could make a difference. The most important thing to remember is if you seek feedback - act on it and communicate what you are doing as a result.

OFFER AND PROMOTE ROBUST RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- We have heard countless stories of employees who did not seek help from available resources - not only because they were afraid of how they would be perceived, but also because they were not aware they existed, or they had to jump through a lot of hoops to access them. Talk about the resources available often - encourage the use of all available support and make it easy for employees to access them. Also, think creatively about the type of resources you offer, beyond insurance benefits. For example, offer internal support groups, or provide information and access to external support.

CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE AND GET SUPPORT

- In remote environments, this is even more important. But regardless of where employees are located, they need to feel like there are safe spaces for conversations, and that they can trust those participating in or leading those efforts. Think outside the box - again, are there support groups for various challenges you can offer? Or links and connections to external support?

RECOGNIZE, REWARD, AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES - This should go without saying, but all employees want to feel their work is valued, that what they do matters, and the company cares about their future. So, structured recognition programs and true development plans are essential to contributing to a positive work environment overall and indirectly to reducing the stigma associated with mental health. If you care about their future, it is an indicator that you care about their general well-being.

Conclusion:

Mental illness and the stigma associated with it is a global crisis. While progress has been made in recent years, we still have a long way to go. As leaders, we have a responsibility and opportunity to make a significant difference in how these challenges are perceived and addressed. It can start with us, and the positive impact we can have will cascade not only through our companies, but in our families, among friends, and throughout society. It is up to us to challenge our organizations and make stamping out the stigma a priority that is reflected in everything we do. 🌟

Links:

- 1 <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination>
- 2 <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>
- 3 <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/about-half-of-workers-are-concerned-about-discussing-mental-health-issues-in-the-workplace-a-third-worry-about-consequences-if-they-seek-help>
- 4 https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/mental-health-in-the-workplace?aceid=&gclid=Cj0KCQjw16KFBhCgARIsALB0g8LD7RuxXnETZgCOcEBBaBWL4HE-umBZc8CG8GbsaMPaWHGuwZf487EaAoDuEALw_wcB
- 5 <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination>
- 6 <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>
- 7 <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/national-surveys-reveal-disconnect-between-employees-and-employers-around-mental-health-need>

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Execs In The Know



BRAND SPOTLIGHT FULTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT, GEORGIA

Making A County Feel Like a Home

An interview with Brigitte Bailey, Director, Customer Experience and Solutions at Fulton County Government

Brigitte Bailey has been a part of the Fulton County Government family for more than 20 years, focusing exclusively on customer experience for the past four years. In late 2019, we spoke with Brigitte in the creation of a Know It All (KIA) Online Community Member Spotlight feature. Now, more than a year later, we were able to catch up with Brigitte once again to find out how things are going and learn about the exciting things she and her team have in store for Fulton County citizens, visitors, and employees.

Execs In The Know (EITK): Thanks for making the time to talk to us again, Brigitte. For those who may have missed your previous feature, can you set the stage for our readers? Can you tell us a little about Fulton County Government, and what your role is at the organization?

Brigitt Bailey: Sure. Fulton County Government is located in North-Central Georgia and is home to 15

cities, including Georgia's capital city, Atlanta. Over one million residents call Fulton County home, and these residents are served by over 5,000 county employees spread over more than 40 departments, including things like emergency services, state and local courts, community development, and libraries.

My role is with the Customer Service Division where I serve as Fulton County Government's thought leader and change agent, responsible for driving customer value and county-wide service delivery and operations. I oversee county-wide customer service initiatives, departmental customer service performance metrics and surveys, and management of the County's employee recognition program – in addition to managing special projects under the direction of the County Manager and Chief Operating Officer. The work of myself and my team stretches across all areas of government.

Believe it or not, residents and employees alike are served by myself and a team of four dedicated agents, handling about 13,000-14,000 interactions per quarter. In fact, as a whole, Fulton County Government is committed to customer service excellence. My team and I stand at the forefront of this mission, working everyday to deliver efficient, high-impact service to every resident and visitor of Fulton County, as well as each and every one of our Fulton County employees.

EITK: How would you describe your customer, and what sort of an obligation does your organization have to your customers?



Fulton County Government launches a new website.



BRIGITTE BAILEY

Director, Customer Experience and Solutions

Brigitte: Our customers are everyday citizens, just like you and me, looking to obtain services or solve a problem. At Fulton County, we are committed to providing five-star customer service where we look to get it right the first time. We have added customer service into our overall model of performance, so it is important for us to ensure our customers are provided with efficient and expedited service, all with a smile. We realize the service we provide is not only tied to our government's reputation, but also to how customers might perceive Fulton County as a whole in terms of where they want to live, work, and play. As an organization, we have made investments into our infrastructure, people and performance metrics, all toward the aim of making sure we hit the mark in providing excellent customer service.

EITK: Since we last spoke in December 2019, the world has been transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic. How prepared was Fulton County Government for this first-time event, and what has been the specific impact on you and your team?

Brigitte: I think Fulton County Government, like every other organization, was taken by surprise by the pandemic. However, with the investments already being made in our infrastructure, emergency management operations, and contingency plans, the County was well prepared to effectively deal with the crisis at hand. We immediately began to identify ways to continue service to our customers who not only expected it but needed the services we have to offer. We did this while keeping our employees safe as well.

Being an organization with so many arms, our executive leadership team, department directors, and elected officials went to work right away, adjusting wherever necessary to ensure there would be no gaps in service. As an organization, we had to pivot (and pivot quickly) from not only providing in-person services, but also providing virtual services in some areas. This required us to leverage technology to respond to the most immediate needs. We provided COVID-19 information and testing for our citizens and for our county government, doing so in collaboration with other agencies. We established COVID-19 testing sites throughout the county, as well as a COVID-19 call center where citizens could obtain information related to the pandemic, and its impact on them and other Fulton County residents.

Through our Information Technology (IT)

Department, the County was able to provide access to more online services for citizens, facilitating business across various departments. More specifically for my customer service team, technology played a major role. Through the use of software already within the County's reach, we were able to transition our in-person call center staff within 48 hours to an at-home call center set-up, whereby staff could work from home, effectively answering calls and providing direction to customers. In addition, with our enhanced technology, the County was able to provide the ability for many other employees to telework during the height of the pandemic without having a decrease in service offerings. For employees who had to report onsite, the County provided personal protective equipment (PPE) and implemented additional precautions such as temperature screenings, new physical barriers, hand sanitizing stations, and an increased cleaning schedule – all in an effort to reduce the spread of infection.

Whether it was providing court services, emergency rental assistance, water services, classes, conducting elections, ensuring senior care, library, or other services where available – the County answered the call with a well-planned and well-defined roadmap that we are still operating under today.

EITK: Like everyone else, we're sure you're eager for a return to normal. But the changes brought on by the pandemic have highlighted



Brigitte Bailey celebrates with Fulton County Manager, Dick Anderson.



Fulton County employees celebrate success with a special annual luncheon

what matters most to people. Recognition is one of those things. Can you talk a little bit about how Fulton County Government recognizes moments of excellence among its employees?

Brigitte: We recognize employee excellence through a program called the Fulton 100 Customer Service Legend Program. It doesn't matter if an employee is interacting with a Fulton County resident, visitor, or employee, the program is all about catching someone in the act of doing something exceptional. When an employee is recognized as a part of this program, they join the Fulton 100, and are celebrated in a variety of ways.

The Fulton 100 is recognized before their peers as a part of a special annual luncheon with giveaways, swag bags, and games, as well as more frequent and informal events like dessert-filled social hours. At the annual luncheon held in October during National Customer Service Week, the Fulton 100 Customer Service Legend of the Year is awarded to the employee who best demonstrated exceptional customer service in the prior year. Members of the Fulton 100, and their amazing deeds, are also frequently highlighted within the Fulton County Newsletter.

In addition, the County also hosts the Fulton F.O.C.U.S. Awards employee recognition program. This program recognizes employees, or a team of employees, that have significantly improved Fulton County operations benefitting customers, improved the image of the County, made a significant impact on service delivery and safety, exhibited courage voluntarily by risking their lives

to save another, created innovative problem-solving techniques utilizing state of the art technology, and demonstrated vision and/or strategic thinking – all to ensure professional excellence in support of the County's core functions.

These employees are recognized quarterly with a framed certificate, a gift card (budget permitting), and a written description of their achievement. They are also eligible to receive the Annual F.O.C.U.S. Award, presented at the Annual F.O.C.U.S. Award Ceremony held in December. Year-end winners are provided a cash prize funded through the Employee Service Fund.

EITK: During your 2019 interview, you highlighted the rollout of kiosks to collect real-time data on customer satisfaction. With the impact of the pandemic aside, can you share a little bit about how this initiative has been going? Which areas currently have kiosks, what insights have been generated, and are any additional kiosks planned for the future?

Brigitte: The Satisfaction Kiosk Pilot Program was created to allow customers to provide a satisfaction rating via a kiosk immediately following service delivery from a test group of departments. This pilot program was rolled out in February 2020 with four of our forward-facing partner departments. These included:

- Customer Service
- Clerk of Superior Court
- Senior Services
- Finance Department-Treasury Division

This method of surveying allows the County departments to be able to isolate fluctuations in service levels, track and manage performance, and provide validity for recommended improvement actions where deficiencies may exist.

The Satisfaction Kiosks contain a three-question survey that takes less than 60 seconds to complete, even in the instance where a negative review is given and feedback from that review is input into the kiosk. It's very simplistic, but simplicity, in some instances, can give you the outlook you need to make immediate adjustments in service levels. Following a transactional service, customers are asked to rate their level of satisfaction using a smiley face rating

scale that represents excellent, good, mediocre, or poor service. In an instance where a customer rated their experience as good or excellent, the survey literally takes less than 10 seconds. In the instance where a mediocre or poor rating is given, customers are given the option to provide feedback utilizing pre-selected choices, or they have the option to type in additional information. They are also asked to provide their name, email address, and/or phone number, which is completely optional, so that a manager is able to contact them to address (and hopefully correct) a negative experience.

By adding this new evaluation initiative into our customer service framework, we hope to be able to have a more direct impact on the overall customer experience, further improve our satisfaction ratings, and better align the needs our citizens with services provided by our agencies. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this pilot program was placed on hold. That said, plans are underway to reintroduce the pilot program during the third quarter of 2021 in all the same departments, as well as the addition of Fulton County libraries.

EITK: Consumer behaviors have undergone significant change over the past 12 months, yet some things remain the same. Can you talk about any shifting expectations you've observed, either among residents or employees, and what remains the same for you and your team?

Brigitte: For Fulton County residents, I feel comfortable in saying our customers expect the best, and we have to commit to rising to the occasion to give them that. They deserve nothing less. That hasn't changed. The expectations remain the same: be ready, be available, and be willing to serve. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our service delivery efforts, and we do this by engaging with our customers. We talk to our customers to see what we can do better. We conduct departmental surveys, and we conduct an annual County Resident Survey, both of which give us very good insights into the needs and wants of our customers. The results from this surveying is used in a variety of ways, including preparation of our County's strategic plan. One important thing we do is we hear our customers. We listen to what they have to say and we act on it. We are all public servants, working for Fulton County Government to serve, and that's something we take very seriously. My customer service team is what I like to call, the "Face of Fulton." We are, in most instances, the first contact for a citizen or visitor, so it's important that every person feel valued and important.

EITK: You have implemented a lot of innovative initiatives in your four years, all focused on improving customer service for Fulton County residents, visitors, and employees. What is the next area of focus for you and the county? Which initiatives have you excited for the balance of 2021 and beyond?

Brigitte: We have been successful in implementing several new customer service initiatives within the last few years, including the implementation of a customer service policy, establishment of two information desks, the creation of a customer service training program for employees, the establishment of customer service performance metrics, the implementation of a signage and wayfinding project, and a total overhaul of our website. We've been blessed to have these efforts recognized by way of two awards: the National Association of Counties Achievement Award and the National Customer Service Association All-Star Award. Although we've accomplished a lot, I like to think of this as just the start.

Looking forward to the second half of 2021, I'm excited to reintroduce the Customer Satisfaction Kiosks within other county departments, and I hope to work with our Training and Development Division and the Department of Diversity and Civil Rights Compliance Department, ADA Division, to develop a training module on how to provide customer service to customers who may be disabled. We want to be sure that every citizen and visitor to the county receives the same level of service, and that our employees are given the resources to provide that service. ✖



Execs In The Know

Execs In The Know partners with brands that are providing outstanding customer service (CX) experiences. The Brand Spotlight Series showcases innovations and solutions to CX challenges faced by today's leading brands.

Thank you to Brigitte Bailey and the entire team at Fulton County Government for contributing to the Execs In The Know Brand Spotlight.

Interested in taking part in a future Brand Spotlight feature and sharing your story?

Contact us at info@execsintheknow.com.



Five Key Areas of CX Agent Evolution

**Insights from Bank of America
and Uber**

By Execs In The Know

The customer experience (CX) industry was rapidly evolving prior to the pandemic and this evolution shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, the impact of COVID-19 forced many organizations to accelerate strategic initiatives to respond to evolving customer and employee needs. Technology, work-from-home (WFH) staffing models, and customer behavior are just a few factors altering the complexion of contact centers. So, many organizations are now taking an even closer look at what these changes will mean for them as they prepare for the next generation contact center and agent.

Two industry leaders have provided their valuable perspectives about how they are preparing their own organizations for the future. These leaders are Amber LeGrett, Senior Vice President of Client Experience with Bank of America (BoFA) and Anindya Sundar Das, Senior Director and Head of Global Service Design with Uber.



Amber LeGrett

BANK OF AMERICA 



Anindya Sundar Das

Uber



Overview

Before discussing the next generation contact center and agent specifically, it is important to understand, from the customer's perspective, how they will be interacting with organizations as technology continues to evolve.

The rise in digital capabilities and engagement transforms how customers resolve issues.

BofA is a great example of this. The company is known for its mobile app, and in late 2020 launched Life Plan®, a high-tech and high-touch experience that enables clients to set and track near- and long-term financial goals based on their unique life priorities. Additionally, clients can receive personalized guidance and recommendations and the ability to directly schedule in-person or virtual one-on-one appointments with a BofA financial professional.

Digital engagement has also surged, especially with its artificial intelligence (AI)-driven, virtual financial assistant, Erica®. Clients can request help from Erica for a range of everyday banking actions, including searching past transactions, accessing rewards, viewing balances, activating a card, viewing bills and scheduling payments, transferring money, setting up alerts, and more. Erica can tackle more complex tasks by providing personalized, proactive guidance and insights. Ninety-nine percent of clients who engage with Erica can find the information they need without calling a contact center. As LeGrett explained, "We are committed to delivering

exceptional experiences to our clients no matter how they prefer to interact and manage their finances."

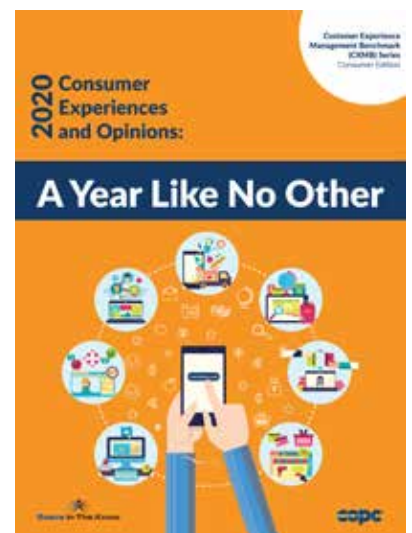
Uber has long been at the forefront of innovation, with customers able to complete many requests via their mobile app. Expanded functionality, capabilities, and personalization are always evolving to meet Uber customers where they are.

Just considering these two forward-thinking companies alone, it is easy to see that more and more activities that once required a human will be handled by technology.

Self-service and digital channel adoption requires higher-skilled agents

Transactions handled by agents will continue to become more complex. However, while an increasing percentage of simple issues will be resolved by technology, customers still want the ability to speak to an agent, especially with a complex or emotional issue. Results from the [2020 Consumer Edition](#) of the Customer Experience Management Benchmark Series bears this out with 68% of consumers stating that if they knew their issue would be resolved, they would prefer the help of a live agent. Further, when automation cannot address the customer's issue, human intervention is required. As Sundar Das with stated, this means that in the future, agents with higher IQ and EQ will be required.

For example, in Uber's case, think of a safety issue that is reported to customer service – a



machine would not be well-suited to handle that, but an empathetic agent with high emotional intelligence is critical. If handled incorrectly, the consequences are disastrous. So, the skill levels needed in future will be greater than what is normal today.

Similarly, for BofA, consider a client who is experiencing a complicated life change such as a deceased spouse or family member. This requires an agent with a special touch to not simply resolve their issue, but do so with great sensitivity.

In addition to high emotional intelligence, more advanced problem-solving skills are required, as well as technical ability to leverage multiple tools, data sources, and knowledgebases to effectively support the customer.

Five key areas to address evolving agent requirements

With this as the backdrop, it is clear the agent profile and processes will need to change as the nature of transactions and customer expectations change. To ensure companies can attract and retain the right agents with the right skills, there are five key areas of focus, including:

- 1) Minimum skills and knowledge required
- 2) Compensation and benefits
- 3) Training
- 4) Agent tools, support, and management
- 5) Growth and development

Each of these areas are reviewed in detail through the rest of the article.

1 Minimum skills and knowledge required

There is no question that the future agent will require different skills than the agent of two

years ago, or even today. Organizations must now start the process of identifying specific skills required and continuously review and adjust as needed. Generally, the over-arching skills required for the agent of the future are:

- High emotional intelligence
- Advanced problem-solving skills
- Genuine empathy
- Ability to multi-task
- WFH capabilities
- Technologically savvy
- Fast learners
- Respond well to change

This is the first step, but companies must go a step further and specifically define what these mean for their organization and identify how they will verify agents possess those skills.

For example, what does high emotional intelligence mean specifically? And what type of problem-solving skills are needed? They are likely different for every company, as we can see in the case of BofA and Uber.

BofA EVOLVING SKILLS

BofA agents need to sensitively respond to personal and difficult life circumstances, gently walking the client through the steps they need to take. In this case, the agent is more of an advisor than a contact center agent following a resolution process. BofA is also moving toward “super agents”, where agents will need the ability to handle all types of client situations. This will require advanced problem-solving skills to address each type of situation. As LeGrett explains, “This is a huge benefit to clients because they will no longer be transferred to resolve multiple types of issues.” Additionally, with a “digital-first” strategy, BofA agents are tasked with educating clients on how to resolve

simpler issues with technology. This, too, requires different skills to help the client resolve their issue in the moment but, also hold their hand through the education process.

UBER EVOLVING SKILLS

In Uber's situation, agents need the ability to immediately recognize when an extreme customer situation is unfolding and assure the customer they are in good hands. From a problem-solving and technological capabilities perspective, Uber explains, "Agents will need to make sense out of what the 'machine' has done, why it did not resolve an issue, and seamlessly pick up where it left off to resolve the issue." Uber also will need people who: can solve complex problems; have a high degree of curiosity and desire to learn; and are fast learners to respond to the rapid rate of change.

Conclusion: Determine specifically what your agent of the future (short and long term) need. Remove any bias or pre-conceived notions from your mind, without considering your current profile. Be specific on exactly what agents will be required to do. This is the place you start because without this foundation in place, everything else will fall short.

2 Compensation and benefits

Everyone is in the same boat, so higher skilled employees will be in great demand. Compensation is certainly one factor that must be investigated to ensure pay is aligned with required skills and market demand. This has cost implications but the critical interaction with the customer can make or break the customer's experience and long-term loyalty. As LeGrett said, "Across the board, people want to work where they feel valued, and companies will need to evolve their wages and benefits to stay competitive. After all, a satisfied employee who is valued and supported by their company will, in turn, take care of customers."

BofA COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS STRATEGIES

In May 2021, BofA's CEO announced several major investments, including an increase to the minimum hourly wage for U.S. employees to \$25 by 2025. Since 2010, the bank's minimum



hourly wage has increased more than 121%. The company also requires their U.S. vendors to pay staff \$15/hour or more to ensure fair and competitive compensation for any employee providing BofA services. They are also expanding its childcare benefit programs starting July 1, which provides childcare reimbursement up to \$275 per month, per child, for U.S. employees with up to \$100,000 in cash compensation. And for the 10th year in a row, they will not increase medical healthcare premiums for U.S. employees earning less than \$50,000 in 2022 to help address rising healthcare costs.

UBER COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS STRATEGIES

Sundar Das explained, "It is difficult to estimate how these changes will shape salaries and benefits from an absolute dollar perspective, but we'll of course maintain it at attractive levels. But the structure of compensation will differ greatly from what we have today." He went on to say that Uber has always been creative about finding different types of compensation and benefits, and they continue to do that. In his words, "all options are on the table." There are many factors at play as Uber considers compensation, some favoring pay increases and others that do not. Some of the significant factors impacting these decisions are WFH, consolidation in the industry, need for higher-skilled agents, return to onshoring, and gig work.

Conclusion: The compensation and benefits structure of the past will likely become obsolete given the future landscape. While all companies may not have the luxury of increasing pay significantly, decisions need to be made with the end-goal in mind. There are outside the box solutions, such as flexible work schedules or ability to take personal days versus just sick days. Regardless of approach, packages need to match the market demand and skills required to

ensure you attract and retain the right candidates.



3 Training

Attracting and recruiting staff with the right skills is one part of the equation. As transactions become more complicated and more staff are working remotely, training approaches need to be reimaged to be more dynamic, easier to consume, and more practical.

BofA'S TRAINING PERSPECTIVES:

BofA's training organization, The Academy, offers a variety of hands-on, experiential learning opportunities and innovative training formats. The bank is piloting several emerging technologies that can simulate real-life scenarios that their agents would likely encounter in their day-to-day jobs in a virtual practice environment. These solutions allow employees to immerse themselves in the learning environment and get real-world practice before they start in their roles. LeGrett explained, "Employees who use simulator technology in their training report feeling more prepared and confident in their positions, which leads to a better overall experience for both employees and our clients."

UBER'S TRAINING PERSPECTIVES

Sundar Das believes, "In the next few years, call center agents will need to morph from being

firefighters to being concierges. Therefore, training curricula and methodology should look different.” For example, more formal coaching programs and real-time feedback will be utilized versus large waves of classroom training that is more common today. Additionally, Sundar Das explains, “Given the speed at which work is becoming increasingly complex and data-driven, re-skilling at quicker intervals will be a major focus.” And with WFH here to stay, training will become more dynamic and digital, with more “bite-sized knowledge nuggets.”

effective. Agents will need much more practical experience through role plays, simulation, and hands-on practice. The training will need to be more visual, dynamic, and in smaller “chunks.” Last, one size does not fit all. WFH training must be designed and implemented differently than in-person.

4 Agent tools, support, and management

To ensure agents can do what they do best - solve issues and deliver a superior experience - agent tools are critical. But support and management are equally important. Just as agent skills and knowledge are changing, so too are supervisory skills. Supervisors will also need advanced problem-solving skills, a high degree of empathy, and ability to manage and coach highly skilled agents. And with a dispersed workforce, they need the ability to manage remote workers, which is quite different from in-person. Management also needs to understand that agents of the future will be handling more complex and potentially more emotional transactions. This needs to be considered in

Additionally, WFH home agents require much more support during training than in-center agents. So, not only does the actual training itself differ for these agents, but the time required and level of support increases. Anindya further explains that they expect to see an increase in the use of sandbox environments to train WFH agents in life-like situations offline.

Conclusion: Reimagine how you train both new and existing agents. The traditional models of a couple of weeks of classroom training followed by a “nesting” period will likely not be

policy-making. For example, more flexibility in schedules and the ability to take more frequent (but perhaps shorter) breaks may be necessary. Or more emotional support considering the potential of higher-stress transactions.

BOFA AGENT TOOLS AND SUPPORT

BofA agents can see what clients have done prior to the call, and the company continues to enhance these capabilities and integrate new technologies to be even more nimble in following the end-to-end customer journey.





BofA also recently launched a new mobile app for agents, where they can switch their shifts with a colleague or request a day off, giving them a real-time way of managing their lives and schedules.

UBER AGENT TOOLS AND SUPPORT

Sundar Das explained that AI will be used in several ways to support agents such as intelligent routing to agents, real-time assistance, targeted training, and potentially profile-performance matching. Uber also has many new tools ranging from those that help agents: identify the root causes faster; view the customer's journey to help them solve the issue (including if a solution has been attempted by automation already); and the ability to quickly get assistance solving the problem. From a support perspective, Uber is committed to

supporting agents, considering some of the disconcerting transactions they handle. There are measures in place allowing agents to take time between difficult calls and get counseling if needed. The company has even implemented creative ways to reduce stress such as bringing puppies into the physical center.

Conclusion: For companies who have not yet taken steps to elevate agent-facing tools and technology, it is time. Customers will expect agents to know their journey without repeating themselves. And agents need tools and resources to solve customer issues quickly and effectively. Technology will not solve everything, however. Supervisory skills must be redefined, and the right policies and processes must be implemented to support agents in this new environment.

5 Growth and development

To attract and retain highly skilled agents, career growth and development takes on a new level of importance. As required skills and knowledge change, companies must evaluate existing staff to determine if they have the right skills, and if not, determine if they can learn them.

BofA GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The BofA Academy provides career path tools that are accessible to all associates including formal mentoring programs as well. They offer great programs related to diversity with close to 30 different employee networks that associates can join. This gives them the opportunity to meet executives who sponsor these groups and make connections and be exposed to other opportunities in the company.

UBER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES:

Sundar Das eloquently said, "More often than not, people underperform because the role is not suited to them. Roger Federer (professional tennis player) would not be a great baseball player. Understand that everyone has the potential to succeed given the right opportunities and the right matching of skills to the job." Like many companies, Uber has realized that the contact center represents a huge pool of talent, with agents capable of moving into more strategic and senior roles. So, recruiting and development strategies will change to identify these individuals and give them opportunities to grow into other roles. Sundar Das explains, "Career growth is like rock climbing. It can be diagonal, sideways, or up." It will be important for supervisors and managers to identify and support this growth. Uber actively focuses on this and has several programs in place such as mentoring programs in which agents are encouraged to seek out mentors.

Conclusion: Contact center agents of the future are looking for careers, not just jobs. This is great news for organizations as they recruit, train, and develop these agents. Employee loyalty benefits the company and the customer. So, organizations should implement processes to proactively identify skills of candidates and existing agents, beyond what is required for the agent role. And then, ensure managers are trained to help agents with career development plans, through formal and informal programs.

In summary

The next generation contact center and agent is here, and most organizations have started this transformation. It involves reimagining all areas that impact the agent and the operation including required skills and recruiting, compensation, training, agent tools and support, and career development. The companies that can think outside the box (stepping away from the status quo) will have a competitive advantage, resulting in highly skilled and loyal employees, driving long-term customer loyalty. ✨

Four Post-Pandemic Trends of 2021

Reshaping Consumer Expectations and Shaking Up the Customer Contact Center Industry

"COVID-19 threw inflexible brick-and-mortar contact center facilities into a desperate state of flux, impairing customer experience, and damaging brand perception. In 2021, astute brand managers are demanding more agile operations from their customer care partner."

Andrew J. Bosko
Chief Executive Officer
Skybridge Americas

What every corporate leader must know today in-order-to sustain, let alone advance, a competitive edge among radically altered post-pandemic consumer behaviors!

IS YOUR CUSTOMER CARE TEAM READY FOR WHAT COMES NEXT?

For customer contact centers around the world, 2020 was a year of upheaval, unforeseen challenges, and fluctuating consumer needs. But the truth is, most of the changes we saw in 2020 had been set in motion years earlier.

A LONG TIME COMING

By 2019, a contact center revolution was already well underway, driven by technology innovation, a shifting market, and changing customer needs. Many North American brands had begun to expect greater agility and responsiveness from their customer care providers.

A handful of outsource contact centers recognized these trends early, investing heavily in the technology and infrastructure necessary to handle increasingly unpredictable call volumes and caller needs.

An even smaller handful of innovators tackled a call center sacred cow, abandoning the brick-and-mortar call center facility in favor of at-home agent staffing models.

THAT WAS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

Once COVID-related shutdowns began, North American contact centers were forced to make split-second decisions to minimize risks. In the rush to temporarily move agents home, critical success factors were ignored such as enhanced IT security, management training, and employee engagement.

For innovative customer care operations, 2020 was a year of reaping returns on previous investments. These innovators are now poised to transform the notion of “customer care.” Those who did not are facing an existential crisis: adapt quickly or perish.

What must YOU do next? Here are four trends certain to reshape essential customer care practices.

Click [Here](#)¹ to sign up to receive your copy of the new Skybridge Americas book, *The Post Pandemic Contact Center Enabling the New, At Home Customer Care Workforce*.

I. Understanding, Predicting, and Exceeding Customer Expectations

Consumer Demand Patterns Are More Volatile and More Emotion-Driven Than Ever

The extreme uncertainties of the first half of 2020 led to what Forrester describes in their Consumer Energy Index as consumer

“isolation, distrust, and vulnerability.” For these customers, each call to the contact center had become a “high stakes, often emotion-driven,” interaction. But for call centers scrambling just to move their agents to home, calls were handled more like widgets on a racing conveyer belt than human beings reflecting a human connection to a brand.

Many failed to give customers what they needed most: empathy, reassurance, connection, ease of access, and a sense of stability. Not surprisingly, these failures contributed to more than 75% of American consumers to shop around for something better.

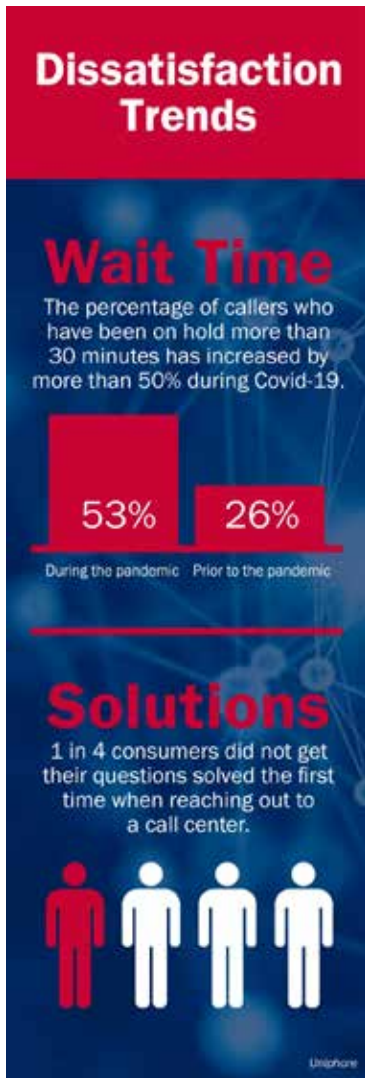
II. Customer-Centric, Cost Effective, and Geographically Unlimited

Technology Innovations Empowering Tomorrow’s Contact Centers

With telephony and agent desktops moved to the cloud, there is no longer the need for rows of cubicles in a costly, fixed brick-and-mortar facility susceptible to a finite supply of local qualified talent.

Geographically unbound, the cloud-based customer care center is free to recruit from across the continent, not just within a short radius of headquarters. This allows these centers to identify the very best and





brightest agents and supervisors, with abilities that match success profiles tailored to a client’s specific needs.

Game Changing Power of Conversational AI

Artificial Intelligence remains surprisingly under-appreciated. According to a Global Contact Center Survey by Deloitte, roughly one third of contact center leaders still have no plans to embrace AI technology. In fact, AI empowers call centers to handle unexpected tsunamis of customer calls, delivering extremely high customer experience, across multiple channels.

This fact was driven home by COVID, as so many North American brands - and their customers - suffered long hold times, disappointing agent responses, and other consequences of their AI resistance.

III. The End of the Revolving Door and the Rise of the Super Agent

While most brands now recognize that customer experience (CX) drives brand success, the truth is, very few contact centers have the agent and supervisor teams in place to reliably deliver superior CX.

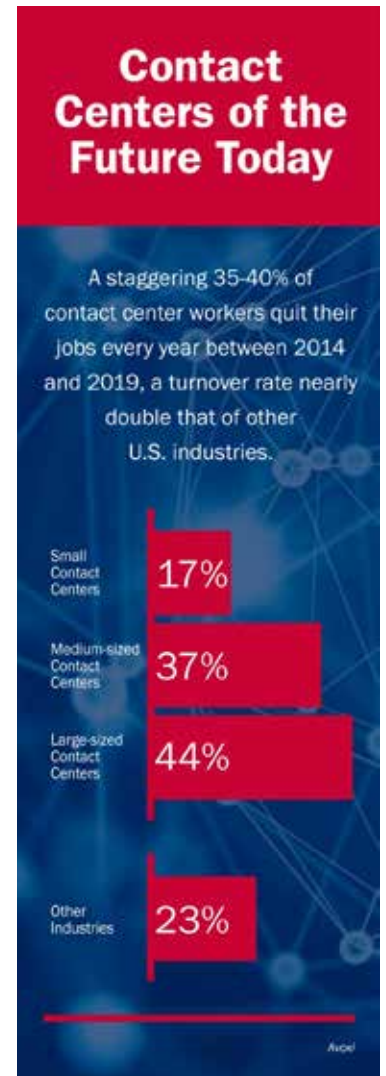
Those that do, did not get there by accident.

Rather, they radically redefined – and heavily invested in – every aspect of their

human resources model, from recruiting to onboarding, to coaching and nurturing talent. As a result, today there is a small but growing group of customer care centers that have cracked the code on attracting and retaining the talent who can deliver brand boosting CX.

Increasingly, we see discerning brands demanding that their customer care centers demonstrate an ability to recruit, onboard, coach, recognize, develop – and retain this new breed of Super Agents capable of delivering positive brand experiences, gathering, and reflecting on customer feedback, and offering recommendations with their leadership team.

This is an inaccessible vision for brick-and-mortar, community-based call centers, saddled with the limited realm of qualified talent. Only a customer service center that fulfills the vision of unlimited access to talent can deliver a vision of excellence for the future.



IV. What will it take to keep up with the next waves of change?

It has been a period of enormous cultural transformation for the customer care industry. Collectively, we have learned more, overcome more, and created more than anyone could have predicted.

Yet, we are just touching the tip of the iceberg – and we don't expect the pace of innovation to slowdown any time soon. That's the good news. But for the contact centers still trying to play catch up since COVID – and the brands they support – it begs the question: what will it indeed take to keep up with the next waves of change?

Our Vision is comprised of six initiatives.

1. Eliminate costly on-shore brick-and-mortar facilities and establish an "Agile Operations Profile" whenever and where-ever possible.
2. Replace inhouse, fixed IT infrastructures with an outsourced, PCI Level 1, "ever-fresh" IT Platform.
3. Deploy an "Agents Anywhere" initiative in lieu of limited, typically exhaustible, agent populations located in proximity to any fixed, brick-and-mortar, call center facility.
4. Ascertain an "ideal Agent Profile" to align with each brand's distinct requisites.
5. Introduce a robust "HR Engagement Enterprise" to achieve enviable agent retention rates.
6. Optimize the use of Artificial Intelligence to displace the financial rationale for offshore call center services.

years of experience in sales, marketing, product management, and operations. Thanks to his rich experience across multiple verticals (including government, retail, non-profit, e-commerce, telecommunications, wireless, travel and hospitality, consumer goods and healthcare), Bobby brings a strong customer-centric orientation to his client relationships.



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Bobby L. Matthews, Jr.
Senior Vice President,
Sales and Marketing
Skybridge Americas, Inc.

Since joining Skybridge Americas' in 2017, Bobby has been leading the company through a dramatic brand

and revenue growth transformation. He is one of the most trusted voices in the customer care and contact center industries with more than 25

Driving Brand Loyalty Through Consistency and a Customer-First Approach

KIA Online Community Member Spotlight: **DIANE HALUSZKA** By *Execs In The Know*



Diane Haluszka is a firm believer in taking a people-first approach, especially

when it comes to PVH Corp. customers. But people-first isn't just a mindset – it requires keeping pace with consumer behaviors and expectations that are constantly evolving. Because of this, Diane is a student of the industry, striving to stay on top of current industry trends and developments as they happen. Execs In The Know's Know It All (KIA) Community has played a pivotal role in this process.

In late June 2021, we had a chance to catch up with Diane and pick her brain on all things CX and PVH Corp. We were able to find out what makes Diane tick, and get her views on things like brand loyalty, the culture of her brand, and find out what's next at PVH Corp.

Diane is Director, PVH Customer Service N.A. at PVH Corp., Co-Chair of UPWARD North America, and Advisory Board Member of the Customer Experience Program at Seton Hall University. PVH strives to be one of the world's largest and most

admired fashion companies, connecting with consumers in over 40 countries with iconic brands such as Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger.

EXECS IN THE KNOW (EITK): Can you share how you found yourself in a career dedicated to serving the interests of customers? Was this always an area of interest for you?

DIANE HALUSZKA: Every job I've ever had has held a connection to the customer, and I love it.

Even back to my time as a waitress, simply understanding what returning customers preferred off the menu, or asking about the event they mentioned last time they visited – all to make for a better experience for them. This has always sparked my interest.

As I launched my corporate career, I made sure to grow this interest by partaking in any activity that would help me better understand the consumer, no matter what business I was in. From taking phone calls, emails, chats, associate surveys – you name it. I started from the bottom up, and I continue to do these sorts of things even today.

Before my time at PVH Corp., I was in Project Management and Systems Training. By managing large technology projects I had the ability to better understand the needs of numerous businesses, and help them develop a strategy to enhance employee and customer relations. I feel that really brought everything full circle,



understanding both business and customer needs.

Once the position of Quality Assurance and Training Lead opened up at PVH Corp., I thought it was a great opportunity to combine my experience, skills, approach, and passion for others into one company and one role. The rest is history.

EITK: What gets you most excited about this line of work, and what do you look forward to most in your day-to-day?

DIANE: First, I get the pleasure of working with such an amazing team, and for such an iconic company. That already makes every day exciting. Combine that with the constant changes that come with being in the Customer Service industry, it's impossible to get complacent.

I have the opportunity to work with cross-functional corporate and brand teams to

provide unsolicited consumer feedback to drive real change within the customer experience. Who can't get excited about that?

Lastly, the technology projects I get to lead, partake in (and even just witness) in order to keep up with the ever-changing needs of the customer, while also driving efficiencies for those who support them. It has been a constant, wonderful experience.

EITK: Can you share a little bit about PVH Corp., particularly in regards to the culture and mission as it relates to CX? Please also share a little bit about your role since joining nearly six years ago.

DIANE: The culture of PVH Corp. cascades in all that we do, and it is one of the primary reasons why I love working here. PVH Corp.'s values are focused around individuality, partnership, passion, integrity, and accountability. This allows those who work for the company to drive real change.

The vision, purpose, values, and priorities of PVH Corp. are not only focused on the associate, but the consumer as well. We strive to be one of the world's largest and most admired fashion companies, and we connect with consumers in over 40 countries. With all that said, it drives the way the company operates with the goal of capturing the heart of the consumer.

As far as my role, I was originally brought into PVH Corp. at a time when the company was transitioning to an internal corporate call center, supporting retail company stores and ecommerce business. I originally developed the training strategy and content, standard operating procedures, and was a part of that project in hopes to make it a success.

Because of said involvement, I wanted to become a larger player in our Customer Service Department and get into the management of the entire team. When the opportunity presented itself, I jumped on it – taking every opportunity to learn from our associates and consumers, setting our team up for future growth, while providing feedback to drive real business change, as well as much more. I am proud to work for PVH Corp. and, specifically, the Customer Service team.

EITK: Retail and fashion are both competitive spaces, and sometimes the customer experience is the deciding factor. Which parts of the retail and fashion experience (be they in-store or online) are most important for building customer loyalty?

DIANE: Wherever you may shop, brand consistency is important in driving customer loyalty. Your products have to be innovative and meet the needs of your purchasing audience.

What I consider to be most important is meeting the customer where they want to be met. Products, experiences, technologies, and service all need to adapt to the needs of the consumer, and these constantly change for the better in order to stay relevant in this industry.



EITK: Early on in your career at PVH Corp. you successfully managed a care team of 50+ associates. In this line of work, that almost certainly means taking a people-first approach. What are some of the ways you applied a people-first approach in managing your team?

DIANE: I have and will continue to put them first in all that I do. It is as easy as that.

As stated before, something as simple as continuously handling contacts to get that better understanding of what your team is going through (and your consumers) allows me to refine my approach. Ensuring my direct reports have growth opportunities, development plans, and are involved in the decision-making process, as well as projects, is also critical. I do all of this for my team to not only make sure they feel empowered, but also included and constantly learning. I hope this lets them know that I believe in them.

Now, more than ever, focusing on boosting morale, communication methods, and that feeling of togetherness (especially in this current virtual environment) allows us to strengthen our team bond. I consider this team to be such a critical function for our brands. Whatever it takes to continuously show them that is what I will always do.

EITK: Greater efficiency can never be overvalued, but it takes effort to get there. What efforts have you put forth in this area, and which of those efforts have seen the greatest returns?

DIANE: I could not agree more. I also think that 2020 really shed some light on the customer service/experience industry, and how we needed to immediately adopt greater efficiencies.

Technology enhancements were so crucial and continue to be. Implementing and continuing to enhance our chatbot, developing community centers for self-service, and reviewing all other contact verticals for process improvements – every effort has shown undeniable value.

Additionally, constantly reviewing our insights to inform others and to outline our strategic plan has allowed us to put the consumer first in everything that we do.

Combine that with the efficiency updates to our platform allowing our associates to navigate through systems quicker, access information when needed, and provide ongoing support, the returns from a customer and associate perspective will only continue to grow.

EITK: Earlier this year you took on the role of Co-Chair with UPWARD North America. Can you share what this organization is about, and what your involvement entails?

DIANE: UPWARD stands for Uniting Professional Women Advancing Relationships & Development and it is one of the many Business

Resource Groups (BRGs) here at PVH Corp. I am honored to be a Co-Chair for this organization and to work for such an inclusive and diverse company.

Our mission is focused on creating an environment of empowerment, equality, advancement, and community within the workplace.



As Co-Chair, my responsibility is to help develop our strategic initiatives, tie them to our goals, and ensure that the committees are executing them. I love partnering with our other Co-Chair, our members, other BRGs, and the PVH Inclusion & Diversity team in order to accomplish this.

EITK: What are some of the most exciting CX areas of focus for you in 2021 and beyond, and what are the expected impacts on your customers?

DIANE: Our focus for the balance of 2021 is on our people, our policies and training, improving self-service, digital channels, enhancing KPIs (such as CSAT), and developing deeper analytics. I understand that is a lot, but we have strategized projects and efficiency updates within these in order to make a positive impact for our associates and our consumers.



I am most excited about enhancing our analytics so we can gain a better understanding of what our consumers want and expect from us, and use this to drive our strategic vision for the future. We will only be able to continue to enhance their journey as we gain more valuable insights.

I would like to point out that the CX experience can only grow as we support our CS associates, so we make sure our focus on people, policies, and training is developed to motivate, empower, and strengthen our team.

All of this will drive a better consumer experience, improved customer satisfaction, and allow us stay relevant in a competitive marketplace.

EITK: You have been active in the Know It All Community since joining in April 2021. As a seasoned member of the community, what do you enjoy most and what benefits do you see in the community for other CX professionals?

DIANE: I could not be more grateful for this community. The ability to share best practices, solicit advice, and network with other CX professionals has allowed me to bring back insights to the team, expand future initiatives, and maximize opportunities for growth.

It's important to connect with people at your company, but equally important to connect with people in your industry. Considering the needs of the business, your specific area of expertise, and combining this with outside insights, it's possible to drive real change for internal teams, your company, and those you support (in my case, our consumers). I appreciate the Know It All Community for enabling me to do this. 🌟

Thank you to Diane Haluszka, Director, PVH Customer Service N.A. at PVH Corp., for her leadership, participation, and insights. To connect with Diane, or to participate in the wider conversation, consider joining the Execs In The Know "Know It All" (KIA) Community. The KIA Community is a private, online community designed exclusively for CX Leaders at consumer-facing brands. Come learn, share, network, and engage to innovate. [LEARN MORE*](https://community.execsintheknow.com/about-kia).

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