

October 1, 2013

Are “quick quits” inflating your service staff’s turnover rate?

Turnover has always been a problem for many customer service organizations and call centers, and one area in which it can be a significant problem is among new hires. New hires are in a particularly vulnerable state of mind, coming into a new company, not sure of what to expect, not really knowing anyone, and not knowing much about processes, procedures, and policies. And on top of that, you will probably be listening in on their phone calls.

But companies aren’t often very conscious of the vulnerability of their new hires, says Beth N. Carvin, CEO of Nobscot Corporation, and they rarely pay attention to the special needs of those new hires. They’re more worried about getting them up to speed, on the phones, and handling customers as soon as possible. Problem is, this lack of attention might be contributing to a growing phenomenon that Carvin calls “quick quits” — new hires who quit before their training period is over.

According to Carvin’s research, 22 percent of all staff turnover happens in the first 45 days of employment — and these quick quits or new hire turnover “can be tremendously expensive for companies who have invested so much in the hiring and training of new employees.”

Take aim at “quick quits”

What can companies do to reduce the number of quick quits that they have and reduce their turnover numbers overall? There are a number of things, Carvin says. “A company

needs to figure out what the particular stressors are in their organization for new hires and try to make the whole recruitment, hiring, training, and onboarding process smoother and easier. And they need to make sure that managers recognize how vulnerable new hires can be in the customer service environment and find ways to help them adjust to the stress and demands of the job.

Minimize new hire turnover by:

- Understanding new hire vulnerability
- Matching expectations to reality
- Boosting socialization efforts.

The problem often starts in the recruitment process. “Hiring good people is definitely a competitive business, and you want to ‘sell’ your company and how great it is to work there,” Carvin says.

You don’t want to oversell the organization by hiding or minimizing the realities of the job, but you don’t want to undersell the work either. “You want new hires to hear a good balance of exciting opportunities and the reality of the work that they will be doing and the environment that they will be working in,” she adds. “You want to make it clear to recruits — and to new hires — just what will happen during their initial training, what the call center environment is like, whether or not their calls will be monitored and why.”

Simply explaining the process to make it less intimidating and making sure that new hires know what to expect from day one, or from one stage of the onboarding process to the next, will go a long way toward smoothing out the process and removing some of the potential irritations and stress.

Get supervisors and managers onboard

“It’s also important that managers are cognizant of what is going on for the new hire and that they go out of their way to ensure new hires that being uncomfortable or uncertain is normal for someone new to the job,” says Carvin. “Managers and supervisors need to be sensitive and understanding. They need to be trained on how to handle new hires, and what it means to be a new hire.”

Managers and supervisors are also the first point of contact for new hires once they are on the job, so they should be attentive to new hires and what they are going through. “It is critical, on an individual basis, for managers to check in with new hires to allow them to voice their feelings or concerns about what they are doing,” Carvin says, “Try asking things like, ‘How are you doing? What can I do to help you? Is the job matching up to your expectations?’”

Managers and supervisors also play an important role in the socialization process for new hires in the customer service center. “You want to make sure that new hires are getting to know other people in their work group as well as understanding the culture of the organization,”

Carvin says. “And in a call center environment, one of the big reasons we see

people leaving is that dealing with other departments within the organization can be frustrating. There’s not a good bridge between departments.” Managers can help by making those introductions in a positive way, both within the department and across departmental lines.

Carvin adds that some companies have initiated fun training activities or other joint training activities to create more of a bridge or bond

between different internal groups.

Another way to socialize new hires and to introduce them to the culture and other aspects of your organization is to implement a new hire mentoring program, which uses more experienced customer service reps to work closely with new hires to introduce them to the culture and to make connections with others in the organization. “In addition, if a new hire has a mentor,” says Carvin, “they are less likely to leave the company when things get a little difficult, because they have someone to talk to.”

Survey tools can help

Surveys are also a great way to keep track of what is going on with new hires and to help identify issues that might be causing new hire turnover. Surveys can also be less intimidating to new hires than having a manager ask these types of questions, says Carvin. There are several types of surveys that companies might want to use. They include:

- **New hire surveys.** These can be done at several points along the new hire’s progress. The first one should be relatively early, and can ask about what sort of expectations

the new hire had coming in, based on the recruitment and hiring process, and whether those expectations were

met. It can also ask for details — what went well and what didn’t — about the recruitment process, onboarding, and the new hire’s early experience on the job.

At a somewhat later date, a survey might ask new hires: How did your training go? Was it effective? Was the role-playing helpful? Was it too much or not enough?

“And if you do one at around 75 days on the job, you can see how the

new hires are starting to fit into the organization,” Carvin says. “Are they being socialized, getting to know their coworkers and others? Are they starting to identify with the company — talking more in terms of ‘we’ and ‘us’ and ‘my team,’ etc.?”

- **Exit surveys.** If you do regular exit interviews with departing employees, you can begin to aggregate your data by how long employees have been with you — i.e., those leaving in less than 90 days, those leaving in less than a year, etc. “Likely there are going to be different reasons for leaving in those different categories,” Carvin says. “So you should be looking for what troubles people are running into and what is bothering them enough to make them quit, and then try to reduce those particular irritations.”

- **Quality of hire surveys.** These would be used to survey the managers or supervisors of new hires to get some feedback on the recruitment process from the manager’s perspective. It essentially asks how the new hire is doing. Do they have the skills they need? Are they a fit for the job and for the culture? “The information obtained can be used to create a sort of scorecard on how we are doing, to bring that information back to the recruiters,” Carvin says.

Carvin concludes by saying that, even if you use surveys to track the new hire experience, it’s important for managers to be sensitive to what’s going on. “It’s a matter of watching and gauging new employees and how their interactions on the job are going,” she says. “Are they happy? Are they unhappy? It’s important that supervisors be very cognizant of how people are behaving and look for signs of distress among new hires. Because these days, they are not going to tough it out.”

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