



How Do Your Call Center Supervisors Measure Up?

In surveys we've done over the past couple of years, The Call Center School has found that over 80% of supervisors and team managers in call centers today were moved into that position from being a frontline agent. And while most new supervisors receive training on general supervisory skills, only about 20% of these supervisors receive any more advanced call center operational training.

Below is a checklist of the knowledge and skills needed by supervisors in today's contact center, in addition to general supervisory and leadership skills. How do your supervisors measure up?

Supervisory knowledge and skills typically fall into two categories – people management and operations.

People Management

Recruiting and Hiring. Supervisors in some centers are more involved in this process than in other centers. But even with a specialized team of recruiters and staff to do screening, the supervisor will at one point get involved in at least the interview process. It's important for them to have the necessary interviewing skills to ask the right questions and read responses to find the best match for the job.

Motivational Techniques. There are seven main types of strategies for keeping staff motivated and happy on the job, and every supervisor should understand basic motivational theory and how to select the motivational techniques that are best suited for their unique staff. Understanding which techniques work best in the unique world of call centers is critical to performance success.

Retention Strategies. Turnover is running rampant in many centers today. While compensation and job fit are the reasons in some centers, in many others, turnover can be directly attributed to supervisor/employee relationships. Each supervisor must understand what the key drivers are to team and individual satisfaction and strive to meet them.

Defining Performance Standards. Defining realistic goals and expectations and measuring their attainment are critical to every call center's success. These goals should be defined with corporate and business unit objectives in mind and then be defined down to the individual behaviors that you want to see demonstrated by the frontline staff.

Diagnosing Performance Problems. Once goals and standards of performance have been defined, supervisors must be well-versed in comparing actual performance to the goals to identify performance gaps and diagnose the root cause of performance issues unique to the call center environment.

Coaching and Counseling. One of the most fundamental skills needed by frontline supervisors is the ability to coach and motivate employees. There are many things about



working in a call center that make it unique and coaching skills that work in another environment may need to be fine-tuned to be successfully applied to call center issues.

Human Resources Issues. While some of the human resource issues will be the same from one department to another, there are some elements of call center operations that generate additional personnel issues and potential legal problems. It's imperative that each frontline supervisor be aware of these from an interviewing, monitoring, coaching, and discipline perspective.

Staffing and Scheduling. Given that call center staff are at the mercy of incoming customer calls, the issue of staffing and scheduling staff is one that every supervisor will likely have to address. While each supervisor doesn't have to be able to forecast workload and create staff schedules, every supervisory or management person should understand the basic concepts of call center staffing and the tradeoffs with cost, service, and productivity.

Operations Management

Call Center Math. Managing in today's call center means managing by the numbers. There is a vast array of numbers available from today's call center systems and the savvy manager will understand how to assimilate the statistics to isolate performance trends and exceptions.

Call Center Technology. While most supervisors don't need to be able to trouble-shoot problems or program the switch, it is important for this group to have a basic understanding of the technologies at work in their contact center. Each should understand the basic concepts of call routing and delivery and how each technology is used to support the customer interaction.

Staffing Alternatives. There are many solutions to call center staffing and organizations today often employ a variety to meet their callers' demands. These alternatives may include outsourcing, telecommuting and remote staffing, contract staffing, and others. Supervisors must understand the overall tradeoffs and supervisory strategies associated with these various staffing alternatives.

Reporting and Communications. Every supervisor should understand the various reporting options available and have a systematic reporting and communications plan in place that meets the needs of the frontline staff, other departments, call center management, and corporate objectives.

Site Selection and Facility Design. While most supervisors don't get involved in selecting the site for a call center, they should be involved in the design of their center. Facility design affects morale and productivity, and therefore a basic awareness of design issues, ergonomics, and workflow is a necessity for every call center supervisor.



Performance Measurement. Every call center should have a list of the top twenty performance indicators that cover measures of service, quality, efficiency, and profitability. Call center supervisors should understand what these measures are and how their team affects the overall call center's performance success in each of these categories.

Budgeting and Finance. Every center has a budget to define and meet and every call center supervisor should understand the basic concepts of budgeting to support departmental and corporate objectives. Each supervisor should understand the cost implications of overstaffing or understaffing, as well as the impact that staff turnover or dissatisfied customers have on the bottom line.

Contingency Planning and Disaster Recovery. Every supervisor should understand the company's and the call center's strategy for contingency planning as well as what each person's role will be should a disaster happen.

Free Online Assessments

Would you like to see how your supervisors measure up in some of these categories? The Call Center School provides a free online assessment that will test knowledge and skills in a variety of categories.

We suggest frontline supervisors and team managers try the Supervisory and/or Operations tests. Call center managers or directors might like to try the Leadership assessment. There are also assessments for specialized staff such as workforce planners or technical specialists.

All assessments will be graded with scores provided back electronically in a couple of days. You can see your score as well as how you compared against others taking the assessment in the same timeframe. There is no cost for the assessment.

Return on Investment

Benjamin Franklin perhaps said it best, "An investment in knowledge pays the biggest dividends." Whether it's filling in some gaps in your frontline training program, or implementing an expanded supervisory/management training curriculum, you'll find that the time and money invested will pay for themselves many times over in terms of increased call center operational efficiency, improved service, and decreased staff turnover.

About the Author....

Penny Reynolds is a Founding Partner of **The Call Center School**, a Nashville, Tennessee based consulting and education company. The company provides a wide range of educational offerings for call center professionals, including traditional classroom courses, web-based seminars, and self-paced e-learning programs at the manager, supervisor, and frontline staff level. For more information, see www.thecallcenterschool.com or call 615-812-8400.