



The Power of One in Call Center Staffing

Whether manually created or developed through workforce management systems, once a set of workforce schedules has been carefully devised, it's critical that your staff sticks to the plan. But one of the hardest things to manage in many call centers is getting agents to adhere to their daily work schedules. Most think, "*Hey, there are dozens of other people on the phones now. What possible difference could it make if I just log off a few minutes early for my break? Just one person can't possibly make that much difference.*" Sound familiar?

Schedule adherence can be improved in many cases with a little education. Helping your staff understand what impact one individual agent has on service can go a long way in getting them to stick to their planned schedule.

So just what is the impact of a person or two on service? Well, it depends. The impact on service depends largely on two factors: the size of the call center, and what the current level of service delivery. Obviously, the smaller the call center, the greater the percentage share of workload handled by each person, and therefore the bigger the impact of his/her participation. For example, if we look at call centers with 10, 25, and 50 agents, with all a 30-second average speed of answer (ASA), and then take one agent away, there is obviously a bigger impact on the smaller operations.

57calls/half hour	163 calls/half hour	346 calls/half hour
10 agents	25 agents	50 agents
30 sec ASA	30 sec ASA	30 sec ASA
minus one agent:		
9 agents	24 agents	49 agents
83 sec ASA	58 sec ASA	50 sec ASA

Because of the economies of scale of the larger centers, there is greater efficiency in the call handling process, and therefore the impact of one person is not as significant.

The other factor that determines the impact on service of any one single person is the level of service currently being provided. The better the existing level of service, the less the impact of one person, as illustrated below (using the example above of 346 calls per half hour, 240 second average handle time or 46 erlangs)

Number of Staff	Average Speed of Answer
54	6 sec
53	8 sec
52	12 sec
51	19 sec
50	30 sec
49	50 sec
48	91 sec
47	236 sec



Obviously, as staff numbers increase, service improves. As staff numbers decrease, service worsens. Depending on where the call center currently falls in the staffing/service curve, the impact of one person could be minimal (for example, going from 54 to 53 staff worsens ASA by only 2 seconds). On the other end of the spectrum, decreasing staff from 48 to 47 staff handling the same calls would deteriorate service from a 91-second average wait to nearly 4 minutes!

The good news about the impact of one person on service is that if your center is in a service slump, adding just one more person on the phones can make a tremendous improvement. On the other hand, losing one person in what is already a mediocre or poor service situation can really ruin service for that period of the day.

Knowledge is Power

Hopefully, a few charts and graphs illustrating the above staffing/service relationship in your next staff meeting will help enlighten those agents that think their impact on service is insignificant. We've found this to be the case in many call centers. Simply educating agents about the effect on service one or two bodies can have will help them understand the importance of schedule adherence and increase their cooperation with the schedule process.

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. For more information, see www.thecallcenterschool.com or call 615-812-8400