



Five R's for Raising the Performance Bar

Refresh, Restore, Revitalize, Remind, Renew

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Ongoing training for experienced contact center agents is a disciplined process practiced by industry leaders. Nearly all companies put forth dedicated time and resources to prepare new hires for their responsibilities and heavily focus the training content on policies, rules, compliance, systems and lightly touch on soft skills training for interacting with customers. But in Best Practices, agent training is not a one-time event. Our research shows that continuous soft skills development for experienced personnel is often neglected, especially for customer-facing representatives, because managers are reluctant to take their staff “off the phones” or “away from the branch.” Seasoned professionals benefit from continuing soft skills review and development of techniques they use on a daily basis such as defusing an irate customer, early termination of a call or chat, handling challenging customer issues, controlling a conversation to manage call duration, etc.

Many organizations view agent development as a costly expense, but it makes more sense to view training opportunities as long-term investments to raise the performance bar. So how do you know your seasoned professionals would benefit from additional training? What tools are best to identify which skills sets would benefit from learning experiences?

Begin your evaluation with a Training Needs Analysis that includes customer contact monitoring via calls, chats, and emails. Not only listen to what your agents are saying and how they are communicating but listen closely to your customers. What are their needs and concerns? Next, invite your team to participate in focus groups to identify processes, issues or concerns that are they have identified that are preventing them from reaching their productivity, effectiveness and quality targets. Follow-up by assigning an annual budget, delivering ongoing training and implementing regular surveys and needs assessments to determine future training content for your seasoned agents. For roles requiring customer interaction there are many training options in the marketplace: instructor-led, virtual instructor-led, E-learning and webinars, to name a few.

The 5 R's for raising the performance bar through ongoing are training are:

1. **Refresh** your agents on your company's mission and business objectives.

2. **Restore** the focus of your team on your customers, not just internal policies, processes and systems.
3. **Revitalize** your team: training is a proven motivational tool that increases agent retention.
4. **Renew** enthusiasm in your department's goals and demonstrate using tangible measurements how your agents contribute to your company's success.
5. **Remind** your team of "tips and tricks" to increase productivity, effectiveness, and quality that they may have forgotten or seldom use.

Viewing ongoing training as a tool to enhance performance results is a win-win. To determine if your efforts have been successful you will need to set goals to measure an appropriate and acceptable rate of return. Measurable results are required to justify the cost/benefit of training resources and the time agents spend off the floor. Select metrics that will demonstrate the results of your investment. You'll have an easier time budgeting for future training when you demonstrate concrete performance improvements as a result of ongoing training.

Astrid Rial is President and Founder of Arial International, a multicultural, multilingual consulting, training, and services firm. Our domestic and international clients count on our 25 years of expertise in evaluating and improving the communication skills of business professionals. Over 35,000 learners in more than 30 countries have participated in our training programs in English and Spanish.

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