



10 Ways to Hire Better Call Center Agents



How to Choose The Right Candidate

In an age where call centers are growing exponentially, there seems to be a ton of focus on training call center agents. While proper training is absolutely useful and effective, one of the biggest budget savers for call center agents is actually hiring the right call center agent to begin with. With hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in call center technology, training and overhead, it would seem to make sense not to skimp on resources for proper hiring.

Here are 10 steps you can take when hiring call center agents to get it right the first time, and thus save time and money down the road:

“ When hiring any position, it is crucial to think long and hard about the actual duties of the position. While there are many things that will go into recruiting and training call center agents, it is important to prioritize the main ingredients that will set your agents up for long-term success. While no call center agent is meant to be perfect, you will find over the long haul that some possess innate qualities that suggest they will be more successful than others ”

1. Determine the Job Function

Determine whether the primary job function of the call center agent will be inbound or outbound marketing. First and foremost, recognize that these jobs are NOT the same. While both jobs will require savviness when dealing with people and some other similar skillsets, an inbound marketer does not necessarily have to be as much of a self-starter as an outbound dialer.

2. Test your agents

Test your agents with a script and or sample problem or presentation. Most call center agents will be required at some point to give a presentation or read from a script. Testing applicants on either or both will give you a good idea of whether or not the agent can follow directions, speak clearly and effectively, and engage your interest.

3. Look for Personality Traits

Look for evidence on the applicant's résumé of the predominant personality traits needed to do the job, not necessarily the exact job experience. One of the main differences between inbound and outbound call center agent is the need for the latter to be able to handle rejection. While an inbound agent will strive to keep their customers as happy as possible, an outbound call center agent may frequently have the proverbial "door" slammed in their face. When hiring for either job type, consider the difference in the personality traits needed to do the job and look for evidence of experience that requires those traits. A great example of a person who can handle rejection well be a former bill collector or door-to-door salesman, even if that person does not have direct telemarketing or call center experience.

4. Test for Windows Literacy

Test your agents with basic typing, audio and Windows literacy tests. Remember that part of being an effective call center agent comes back to the ability to record important information. Both reading and writing without excessive typos are important to accurate call center data entry, and the ability to navigate in the Windows operating system is essential to succeeding in a fast-paced call center environment.

5. Listen to Applicant's Voice

Close your eyes and listen to the applicant's voice. Let's face it, certain call center voices are just more pleasant to listen to than others. If you have ever heard the expression, "a voice for radio," remember that that is exactly what you are hoping to hear from your call center agents. The best prospects will not only have an easy voice to listen to, they will also know how to vary their pitch and use emotion to get a point across.

6. The Confident Demeanor

Close your eyes and listen for a friendly, confident demeanor. Have you ever heard the expression, "You will get further with honey than with vinegar"? This is absolutely true in the call center. People naturally follow and listen to call

center agents who sound confident in what they are saying and who sound "like they are smiling." Try saying something out loud while you are frowning, and say the same thing again while you are smiling. Your listeners can hear the difference.

7. Evidence of competitiveness

Look for evidence of competitiveness. Whether your call center employee is an inbound or an outbound agent, part of the job is being held accountable for the numbers associated with their results. A great call center agent is competitive, and that competitiveness will reveal itself in some part in their life, whether in the form of an award for good grades, a history as an athlete or the fact that they simply like a good race.

8. Look for Sociable Candidates

Look for evidence that your candidate is a "people person." If I could highlight one point on this page, it would be this one. When you are in the business of dealing with people, you should be people-centric. Whether or not your call center candidate has a résumé that reflects sales or customer service, chances are that they don't have a background in more technical subjects like math and science. It is hard to study math and science if you just like to chat, but enjoying a good chat may be an ideal trait for a call center agent.

9. Ability to Focus

When you check references, ask questions about the candidate's presence and ability to focus. While most potential bosses like to ask questions about performance, the more telling questions for a call center agent are going to revolve around attendance, discipline and focus. The job may require hours of sitting and punching a clock, and an agent cannot do it successfully without seriously and purposefully "checking into" to the work consistently, every day. Be persistent: Your line of questioning may catch the candidate's old boss off-guard just enough for you to get an honest answer.

10. Handling Conflicts

Intentionally push your candidate's buttons a little to see if they can handle conflict. I had a boss once tell me that he would never hire people who wouldn't stick up for themselves in an interview. Make sure that your call center agent—as the front-line representative for your company or product—is cool, calm, collected and confident when under pressure.

When hiring any position, it is crucial to think long and hard about the actual duties of the position. While there are many things that will go into recruiting and training call center agents, it is important to prioritize the main ingredients that will set your agents up for long-term success. While no call center agent is meant to be perfect, you will find over the long haul that some possess innate qualities that suggest they will be more successful than others. Using the 10 steps above, you will start to see hiring trends that will launch your call center agents to success.



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