



Beyond Ability To Suitability

You can improve bottom-line performance and reduce turnover by recruiting and hiring the kind of front-line representatives who can make a positive long-term contribution to your organization. Here's how.





Like so many other aspects of the call center business, recruiting and hiring tend to be somewhat cyclical activities. Sure, there's always some ongoing attrition, and as an industry we are not too proud to boast that annual turnover rates for call center agents average anywhere from 20-40%. But there are also huge swings in supply and demand that are tied to a host of broader economic factors.

From Boom To Bust And Back

Think back for a moment to the high tech boom of the late 1990s. Many of our call center clients simply could not hire and train new customer service representatives fast enough. No sooner did these new CSRs complete their initial training than they were hired away by competitors – at salaries that were often 30-40% higher!

During these heady times, some of our clients just gave up on hiring assessments and fell back on the tried and true “fog a mirror” test. As call centers faced a desperate need to fill head count, anyone with a pulse quickly became an acceptable new hire.

Fast forward to just a few years later. The dot-com boom had turned to bust. With the entire global economy in an extended downturn, most of our clients found that turnover plummeted. Every representative who had a job was staying put, holding on for dear life. And the representatives most committed to their jobs were – not surprisingly – the ones that managers would have loved to replace!

You may not have much control over the fortunes of the global economy. But it turns out that there's a lot you can do to reduce turnover by recruiting and hiring the kind of representatives who can make a positive long-term contribution to your organization!



With challenges like these, what's a call center manager to do?

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Costs And Benefits

First of all, it's important to recognize that recruiting and hiring play a vital role in contact center performance. Consider for a moment the cost of a poor hiring decision. Industry experts estimate that cost at a whopping 100% of a CSR's annual salary when you take into account the cost of advertising, screening, interviewing, hiring, training, coaching, managing, and terminating that poor performer. And these "hard costs" don't even take into account the other very real negative consequences of a hiring mistake – the negative impact on the morale and performance of other representatives, the poor service and missed opportunities with your own customers.

On the other side, though, hiring the **right** agents can pay huge rewards. Industry studies show that having the right CSRs in place can improve revenue by an average of \$500,000 per year for every 100 agents.



Testing For Skill Is A Great Way To Start

So it's not surprising that so many call centers have made some form of skill assessment an integral part of their hiring process. Increasingly sophisticated simulations now enable most centers to make sure that their new hires have the verbal communication skills, the computer and keyboarding skills, and the overlapping ability they need to succeed on the job.

Testing for skill is a great start. But is it enough?

We've said it before and we'll say it again. It's not difficult to provide service that meets a customer's needs. It's not even difficult to provide service that goes above and beyond, that exceeds the customer's expectations. That is, it's not difficult to do it on one call. But it's very difficult to do it on 50 or more calls a day, for five days a week, for 12 months a year.

To put it simply, a call center representative has a very tough job. And that job is not for everyone. In many call centers the job of the CSR has evolved from an entry level, back office function, into a highly skilled "knowledge worker" who is in great demand in today's job market. It takes a special kind of person to show up for work on time every day, to adhere to a relatively rigid schedule, to effectively balance sales and service with efficiency and accuracy, and to maintain a consistently positive attitude call after call, day after day, week after week. Those requirements go far beyond simple assessments of skill or knowledge.

How then, do you really assess whether a potential new hire has what it takes to succeed in your call center? How do you get beyond ability to *suitability*?

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Beyond Ability To Suitability With The Birkman Method®

In recent years we have begun to utilize a powerful assessment tool called The Birkman Method® to help our call center clients answer this critical question. The Birkman enables call centers to obtain valuable information about their most successful employees, use that information to determine a success profile, and find talent that best matches that profile – quickly and easily.

The Birkman does not replace simulations or skills assessments. In fact, the Birkman does not measure skill or aptitude, and it does not indicate whether an applicant is capable of *doing* the service representative job. Instead, the Birkman indicates whether the call center environment will be a source of motivation for that individual. In other words, is the individual a good fit for this specific call center environment?

Designed to accurately measure and understand individual performance potential, this proven methodology effectively clarifies an individual's personal strengths, effective behaviors, interests and goals, coaching requirements, thinking styles, underlying needs, and stress behaviors. It is the only system we have found that effectively combines behavioral, motivational, and interest measurements in a single assessment.

The Birkman is easy to use, secure, and completely confidential. An applicant completes an on-line questionnaire which is scored instantly and automatically. The resulting reports are then accessed over the Internet for interpretation.

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Drawing on the information in these reports, we can provide our clients with critical insights and information regarding the *motivation* and *suitability* of perspective service representatives.

Call center clients have found that The Birkman Method® saves them time and money. Information that the Birkman provides about suitability and fit complements data they receive from applications, interviews, recommendations, and skill assessments. In this way, the Birkman Method allows managers to verify information and gain a more complete picture of the potential hire. And this enables them to avoid costly mistakes and hire candidates with a much greater probability of success and satisfaction on the job.

If you're interested in more information about determining the suitability of potential hires, please contact kerry@elkindgroup.com.

About The Elkind Group

The Elkind Group is dedicated to improving the performance of front-line sales and service teams. We help clients solve their most important performance problems, resulting in increased revenue, customer loyalty, and customer lifetime value.

The Elkind Group's approach integrates performance consulting, customized training, and executive coaching. We work with all levels of the organization to change mind sets, build skill sets, and create a culture committed to sustained performance improvement. For more information, visit www.elkindgroup.com.



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