OBSERVE·AI

THE 7 MOST CRITICAL SOFT SKILLS FOR CONTACT CENTER AGENTS

TRANSFORM YOUR COACHING PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE KPIS AND DELIVER BETTER CX

WHAT ARE SOFT SKILLS FOR CONTACT CENTER AGENTS?

Despite rapid growth across a number of customer service channels - live chat, chatbots, email, and social media being the most prominent - **phone is still the most used (48%) and most preferred (80%) method for resolving queries**. That's because at the end of the day, if you want to get help, you call in.

Soft skills are traits that enable agents to relate to and connect with customers. They're made up of a variety of intangible characteristics and attributes, and are critical to driving a positive agent and customer experience.

While hard skills, things like technical proficiency and product knowledge for example, vary from industry to industry, soft skills are universal across all industries.

At the end of the day, providing a quality CX is about establishing and building a relationship with the customer.

WHAT ARE THE **7 MOST CRITICAL SOFT SKILLS** FOR AN AGENT?

Empathy

Positivity

Collaboration

Patience

Problem-solving Skills

Adaptability

Active Listening

Empathy

The agent's ability to understand the feelings of the customer and recognize their point of view.

Active Listening

There's a difference between hearing the caller and truly listening to the customer. Active listening is the key to understanding the customer query and more effectively resolving the issue.

Positivity

The agent's ability to approach every conversation with a positive attitude. This contributes to a better experience for customers, agents, and managers.

Patience

Agents are often tasked with handling calls from frustrated or confused customer. Patience is key for an agent to take the time to understand the customer's needs and help them solve their query.

Problem Solving Skills

The agent's ability to think critically and find answers to complex queries, and more skillfully resolve the customer's issue.

Adaptability

The more complex the industry or product, the more complex the queries the agent will receive. In an ever-evolving world, agents must be able to adapt to frequent changes, whether it be coaching programs, new compliance legislation, or environmental changes out of their control (like the rapid shift to remote work as a result of COVID-19).

Collaboration

With coaching programs becoming smaller and more targeted, small group, peer, and 1:1 training sessions rely on a collaborative mindset to yield more impactful results.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COACHING AGENTS ON SOFT SKILLS?

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE KPIS.

COACHING SOFT SKILLS MEANS LOOKING AT (AND UNDERSTANDING) YOUR KPIS

Soft skills directly impact the <u>most mission-critical call center KPIs</u> across an organization.

Whether you're trying to improve customer experience, make your agents more efficient in their day-to-day, or mitigate compliance risk, agent soft skills are a powerful way to achieve your KPIs.

We'll first start with the benefits. Then, we'll walk through a couple ways to coach agents to improve their soft skills.

LET'S LOOK AT BENEFITS!

Agent empathy = a better CX

When agents approach a conversation with empathy, they're acknowledging the customer's thoughts and feelings. They're connecting by putting themselves in the customer's shoes which in turn shows the customer that they truly care. And as a result, **when an agent uses empathy statements throughout a call, the caller finishes the conversation with a more positive customer experience.**

Problem-solving skills = higher FCR rate

First call resolution (FCR) is the rate in which an agent resolves the caller's issue on the first attempt. The better the agent's problem-solving skills, whether it be applying prior coaching, efficiently navigating their internal knowledge base (IKB), or having deeper domain knowledge, the **better their rate of first call resolution**.

MORE BENEFITS!

Positivity = better CSAT

Sentiment detection was traditionally black and white. Was the call overall positive or negative? With tonality-based sentiment detection, you can understand the myriad of caller emotions beyond what was said, to how it was said. This incorporates **tone, intent, silence, and volume, and maps it to specific interactions across the call**. When an agent approaches the call with positive intent (and empathy), they're influencing that call to stay positive. The result is higher sentiment scores from start to end.

Active listening = lower average handle time
Active listening is key to understanding the root of the issue on every call and the details required to more quickly and seamlessly resolve the issue. That'll directly correlate with average handle time (AHT), because the agent is more effective in handling their calls. Active listening is at the core of applying other coachable techniques, like empathy statements and product/industry knowledge, but it all begins with understanding what the caller truly needs.

EVEN MORE BENEFITS!

Adaptability = lower supervisor escalation rate

It's estimated that 85% of escalations could have been resolved with the initial agent. However, supervisor escalations are a common fallback for frustrated callers, and any number of causes drive them, from lack of agent confidence to the complexity of the query. **The agents' ability to adapt to a variety of situations is a key soft skill for de-escalating a situation, whether it be laying out multiple options, using empathy statements, or utilizing tools and permissions available to them.**

Coachability = mitigate compliance risk

Specifically for highly regulated industries like insurance, healthcare, and collections, an agent's coachability to understand and adhere to compliance guidelines is crucial to the business. A single violation can lead to stiff penalties or even a ban on operating. **Having agents who understand when to follow complex compliance processes begins with their ability to be coached.**

YOU UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS.

NOW HOW DO YOU COACH FOR THEM?

HOW TO **COACH TO IMPROVE AGENT SOFT SKILLS**

With an understanding of the most important call center agent soft skills and the impact they can have on your organization, let's next look at a couple ways you can coach agents on them.

Keep in mind, to effectively create coaching programs around soft skills, you need comprehensive intelligence on every interaction taking place on the call, as well as a way to deliver contextual, data-backed feedback to the agents.

That's where Voice AI comes into play.

HOW VOICE AI WORKS WITH SOFT SKILLS

Voice AI is what bridges the gap between measurable KPIs and interactions, and the intangible agent soft skills.

Once impossible to measure at scale, teams can now see exactly how agent soft skills are progressing, how impactful coaching programs are, and identify new opportunities for improvement.

What is Voice AI?
A Visual Representation

100% OF CALLS	SPEECH-TO-TEXT & NLP	INSIGHTS	QUALITY MANAGEMENT	WORKFORCE MGMT
monitored	sentiment analysis	performance metrics	targeted coaching	up-skilling
analyzed	transcription	compliance & quality monitoring	evaluations/scorecards	re-skilling
interpreted	redaction	CX insights	agent enablement	l&d requirements
	silence analysis		agent augmentation	

HOW VOICE AI WORKS WITH SOFT SKILLS: THE 3 PILLARS

Analyze

It starts with **call analysis**, which is the monitoring and analysis of 100% of voice calls taking place. The call is transcribed, and the AI service looks at a broad group of interaction types keywords and phrases, caller sentiment, silence analysis and volume.

The result is deep insights on performance metrics, compliance and quality monitoring, and CX reporting. But data is only as good as how you use it.

Evaluate

Next is **QA evaluations**. To reinforce winning behaviors on calls and improve agent performance and soft skills, quality feedback must include context. Data-driven QA evaluations, with examples and scenarios side-by-side with transcripts, is what builds trust and transparency, and reduces bias and assumptions.

Coach

And last is **coaching**, the agent enablement programs built on top of comprehensive call analysis and data-backed QA evaluations. Whether it be peer-to-peer, on-spot, or detailed group coaching programs, having the data to drive more impactful coaching programs, and the ability to monitor progress over time, is the key to up-skilling and re-skilling agent soft skills.

4 WAYS TO COACH ON SOFT SKILLS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPACT

TACTIC 1: COACHING TO IMPROVE CSAT

MAGIC & TRAGIC MOMENTS

The most impactful way to increase agent empathy, and in turn, improve CSAT, is to coach agents on how to utilize empathy statements throughout a call. One of our customers, a large U.S.-based moving company, monitors their agent performance around empathy statements using a **MAGIC and Tragic moments methodology.**

MAGIC moments are interactions that "Make A Great Impression on the Customer," for example, "I understand your frustration" or "we'll get this fixed for you." On the other hand, Tragic moments do the opposite, delivering a negative experience for the caller and creating a sense of uncertainty, frustration, or doubt.

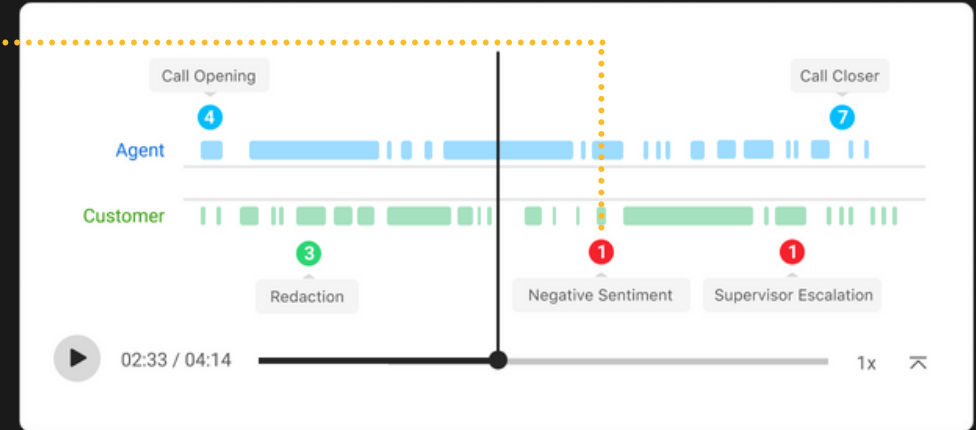| MAGIC Moments	Tragic Moments
HELPFUL "How can I help?"	**SLOPPY** "Hang on" "Just a sec" "Here's what I'm gonna do"
SET EXPECTATIONS "I'll keep you updated"	**UNCOMMITED** "We'll have to call you back" "I don't know"
EMPATHETIC "We're sorry for the inconvenience"	**AUTHORITATIVE** "You should have" "Calm down"
CONFIDENCE "I will personally take care of that for you"	**UNEMPATHETIC** "You're not supposed to do it that way" "Why did you do that?"

TACTIC 2: COACHING ON EMPATHY

A SIMPLE PROCESS FOR COACHING ON EMPATHY

Analyze

Monitor calls for areas of negative sentiment. **Identify the root cause** of the negative sentiment. Was it a word or phrase the agent used?

Knowing the root causes, you can then **monitor trends** in how often specific root causes drive negative sentiment.

Evaluate

When QA evaluations include time stamps or references to transcripts, agents can see the **exact interaction that led to negative sentiment**, and see how an empathy statement could've driven a better customer experience.

6.Did the SP actively listen to and manage time effectively on the call?
(10 points)   No

Team member did not prepare the customer for the hold or call transfer. Team member should ask/prepare caller before placing call on hold, including giving reason for hold and approximate hold time. This important for a good customer service experience.

Coach

Citing specific moments on a call, your supervisors are able to **coach agents on how to use empathy statements** when certain interactions take place. Additionally, monitor an agent's empathy scores overtime to **track both personal growth, as well as coaching program effectiveness**.

TACTIC 3: USE VARIATIONS OF COLLABORATIVE COACHING SESSIONS

Collaboration is a valuable soft skill that encourages agents to work together and with their supervisors to improve their own, and their peers' performance across a number of KPIs.

1:1, group, and peer-to-peer coaching sessions are three great options. **Peer-to-peer sessions, sometimes called peer calibration, in particular are powerful in that it gives agents a safe and collaborative environment to collaborate** - in many cases, making it easy for agents to openly share issues and work together to improve them.

Best Practices to Encourage Collaboration

FREQUENT CHECK INS
More frequent check-ins from supervisors to see how agents are improving. **It's important that supervisors sandwich negative feedback with positive feedback.**

INFORMAL BREAKOUTS
Informal break-out discussions to apply new information with peers. These can be done 1:1 or in small groups.

SHADOWING
Setting up new agents to shadow more seasoned agents gives them a hands on look into the day-to-day, and gives the experienced agent an opportunity to mentor a peer.

TARGETED MICRO-COACHING
Curating targeted micro-coaching sessions for seasoned agents keeps them up to date on current compliance and messaging standards.

TACTIC 4: USE QA EVALUATIONS TO COACH ON ACTIVE LISTENING AND PATIENCE

This is where **coaching with context** comes into play. By using specific call snippets or in-transcript comments in every QA evaluation, agents can look at not only what they need to improve, but understand why they need to as well.

This is particularly important when it comes to coaching on active listening and patience, which go hand in hand. **When an agent is able to review their own call and look at what the caller was saying, understanding their true intent, supervisors can more effectively coach them on how actively listening could have better resolved the call.**

9.Did the agent offer the most appropriate solution? (3 points) — No ❌

We should always try to ask follow up questions, were the boxes damaged? anything else missing, did we check larger boxes for smaller packed items? After, yes, do a re-order of course - but we should TRY troubleshooting steps first.

"It's so much clearer for agents when they can hear themselves. They make the connection as to how they are sounding. They consistently have aha! Moments. They think: 'I need to change the way I'm deflecting and practice that.' Now the agent can monitor her progress. Using data and examples, it's less personal, more impactful."

Tammi Zelm, VP of CX at ASSA ABLOY

SO WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

HERE'S HOW CONTACT CENTER LEADERS ARE DOING IT TODAY.

Going Beyond What Was Said, to How It Was Said

Armed with Contact Center AI, EmployBridge lies on objective data to improve their top KPI, which is **helping land more candidates jobs**. To do this EmployBridge digs into what was said on every call.

- What are top performing agents saying to get people showing up to more interviews?
- Why are some candidates unable to follow through?

From there, EmployBridge is able to fix their process and make it more efficient.

Uncovering sentiment from 100% of calls helps teams at EmployBridge understand what's working or breaking down in the candidate experience.

This is especially important when identifying opportunities to improve agents' soft skills and productivity, such as **patience and empathy.**

Dale Sturgill
VP Call Center Operations

"We want to make sure we're passionate about the conversations we're having. People are stressed out. We need to be the person that offers a way for them to eliminate some of that stress by offering them the opportunity to go to work. For example, are we using a good tone? If we're passionate and emotional, they're more open to attending that phone interview."

CARE SHERPA

Turning Transactions Into Authentic Interactions

For Care Sherpa, personalizing the customer experience is key to driving more conversion for its healthcare clients.

By monitoring 100% of customer interactions, Care Sherpa is able to map specific interactions to desired outcomes, such as impacts on positive and negative customer sentiment.

These sentiment insights can then be turned into more impactful agent training and talk tracks, specifically around **soft skills to drive that positive sentiment, including positivity and active listen**

By looking at what keywords are used at key times on calls, **Care Sherpa can A/B test messaging and quickly quantify results, such as the impact of opening or closing calls with different phrases.**

Jessica Walker
CEO and Founder

"We get quantifiable information on what is most valuable to customers who in our world are often patients. We can flag moments with the agent said X, then see if they were able to resolve fears and drive confidence, and thus, move the customer experience forward."

WRAPPING UP

From hiring new agents to developing them, soft skills should be at the forefront of your coaching strategy. Though they can be hard to pinpoint in every agent, utilizing Contact Center AI allows you to monitor the interactions and KPIs connected to each essential soft skill.

All in all, they'll give you the baseline for coaching your agents on the human side of the call center - connecting with callers, empathizing with them, and delivering a great customer experience 100% of the time.

OBSERVE·AI

Observe.AI, a leader in Contact Center AI, transforms customer experiences and improves agent performance by helping top brands analyze 100% of interactions, extract actionable sentiment and interaction insights, and streamline workflows. With Observe.AI, businesses transcribe every interaction with high accuracy and coach agents while gaining full visibility into their customer service operations. Observe.AI brings the power of agent assistance, automatic speech recognition, and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to modern contact centers and their frontline teams.

Observe.AI is trusted by more than 160 customers and partners, including National Debt Relief, Root Insurance, Alcon Laboratories, and Pearson.

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