

# In the Contact Center, Strong EX Equals Strong CX

Change is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be destabilizing. People-centered organizations are 11 times more likely to experience successful change than the average enterprise.



**ICMI**<sup>™</sup>

# Arrive, survive, thrive

Agents are the lifeblood of the customer experience (CX) mission. Without their support and motivation to do great work, your CX agenda will suffer – each day bringing new fires that divert critical resources away from the mission.

That's why employee engagement or employee experience (EX) is an essential ingredient of powerful CX. But for many contact centers, it's a challenge that seems insurmountable. Relative to other industries, contact centers have some of the [highest rates](#) of turnover and attrition among agents.

We recently caught up with two industry veterans to get their take on the challenges in managing CX and EX as a connected effort:

**Brad Cleveland**, founder of ICMI and author of *Contact Center Management on Fast Forward*; and **Josh Streets**, Sr. ICMI Business Associate and CEO of QX Now.

“It costs about a third of an agent's fully loaded salary to replace an agent, on top of the new agent's compensation,” says Streets. “Now multiply that cost by all the agents leaving in a given year, and in a mid-sized center you're left with millions of dollars lost annually due to backfilling alone.”

However, Streets believes it's a problem that can be solved – and it comes down to proactive leadership during an agent's first 90 days.

## The Bottom Line

- Proactive leadership and engagement are critical, especially in the agent's first 90 days
- Arrive, survive, thrive: Map out your agent engagement strategy in structured phases
- Develop prescriptive approaches for frontline leaders to train staff
- Create consistent experience where possible
- Identify intelligent routing and automation opportunities to ease burden on agents
- Celebrate people-centered culture that values employee contributions and rewards change

"I like to use the arrive-survive-thrive model to explain this," says Streets. "It's about training and nesting, then production, then hopefully promotion. It has to be very prescriptive for frontline leaders to make sure they keep their people and provide a consistent experience."

Consistency is hard, though. Put a bunch of new employees in a room and you might see wildly different experiences in how they handle calls in their first 90 days. Just as contact centers strive to create a consistent experience for their customers, so too must they try to pull from that playbook in managing their own new hires.

Cleveland agrees, citing [Gallup's global workforce engagement survey](#) that finds 79% of employees are either unengaged or actively disengaged from their work.

"Anything less than a hundred percent engagement is something I want on my radar as a leader. We know engaged employees bring so many benefits – better service, better productivity, lower costs and lower turnover," says Cleveland.



**"It costs about a third of an agent's fully loaded salary to replace an agent, on top of the new agent's compensation."**

**JOSH STREETS**



## Design people-centric systems

Today's agents inherit a customer experience ecosystem that's more complex and demanding than the industry's ever seen. The constant need to learn new systems and technologies while juggling competing demands from a multitude of channels can be overwhelming to those in frontline roles. Change is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be destabilizing.

We should be celebrating people-centered organizations, Cleveland says. He references [data from OC Tanner](#) that finds people-centered organizations are 11 times more likely to experience successful change than the average enterprise.

"We need to say to our teams, 'We need you. We need your insight. We need your oversight. We need the humanity you bring to our customers as you work alongside these new tools.'"

It's the kind of lesson leaders need to ingrain in their agents from day one – but agents can't be the only ones carrying the

load. Organizations should be taking every opportunity to design intelligent systems that alleviate the heavy demands on agents. For example, a contact center might try routing easier calls to new hires as a way to gradually get them up to speed, while routing more important or complex cases to the highest-performing agents. They might try automating customer onboarding, such as proactively communicating helpful billing details to the customer before they even feel the need to reach out.

"Look for your intelligent automation moments," says Streets. "It can be as simple as reaching out to say, 'Hey, here's a quick video or link on what you can do now that you're at this point in the customer journey.'"

Consistent experiences "aren't just the agent's responsibility," he adds. "They need to be intelligently designed by us, but right now I see a lot of brands that aren't even taking time to ask how they can make it a better experience every time."



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**BRAD CLEVELAND**

## Recommended Reading

This article was adapted from a webinar produced by ICMI.

To view the full webinar, visit:

<https://www.brighttalk.com/webcast/20775/640803>

**Gallup state of the global workforce report:**

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

**O.C. Tanner, People-Centered Change Management:**

<https://www.octanner.com/articles/people-centered-change-management>

The logo for ICMI (International Customer Management Institute) is displayed in a large, white, sans-serif font. The letters 'i' and 'm' are lowercase, while 'C' and 'I' are uppercase. A small trademark symbol (TM) is located to the upper right of the 'i'. The logo is set against a dark blue background that features a pattern of lighter blue circles of varying sizes, arranged in a grid-like pattern that tapers off to the right.

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## ABOUT ICMI

The International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) is the leading global provider of comprehensive resources for customer management professionals — from frontline agents to executives — who wish to improve customer experiences and increase efficiencies at every level of the contact center. Since 1985, ICMI has helped more than 50,000 organizations in 167 countries through training, events, consulting and informational resources. ICMI's experienced and dedicated team of industry insiders, trainers and consultants are committed to helping you raise the strategic value of your contact center, optimize your operations and improve your customer service. ICMI is brought to you by Informa PLC and Informa TechTarget. Learn more at [www.icmi.com](http://www.icmi.com).