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Becoming a Transformational Contact Center Leader

I walked into the meeting alongside the contact center director. She was concerned that the company's senior level leaders would see all the wrong things in the numbers.

And at first glance, they sure didn't look good. Average handle time was up. Cost per contact was up. Contacts handled per employee were lower. First-contact resolution was down.

Uh oh. Was she in trouble. Were they on the wrong path?

She and her contact center team had been working hard on improvements. And those numbers were tangible *evidence of success*.

The contact center team was working with colleagues across the broader organization to understand why customers needed help in the first place, and to prevent unnecessary contacts before they happened. Processes improved. Communications became clearer. Self-service and AI-powered tools handled more straightforward, predictable needs. Contact volume fell.

What remained was the work that truly required a person: complex problems, unusual circumstances, emotionally charged situations, and issues demanding judgment and collaboration. Those interactions took longer, and were harder to resolve on the first try. And since they were getting relatively fewer contacts, cost per contact went up. That's a good thing, because overall costs were going down.

Meanwhile, customer retention improved. Word of mouth became more positive. The business was growing. It was thriving!

Now that is transformational leadership. It requires understanding the difference between running the contact center efficiently and truly helping the organization become better. Often, those goals reinforce traditional measures. Sometimes, they challenge them.

As AI and self-service handle more of the routine work, the contacts left for people become harder and longer almost by design. If handle time rises because easy work has been automated away, is that necessarily a problem? If total costs decline and customers achieve better outcomes, which result matters most?

Many of the problems contact centers handle are not created in the contact center. A confusing invoice, a broken digital process, a product issue, an unclear policy, or a missed delivery can generate hundreds or thousands of interactions. Employees handle the consequences, but the cause may sit in finance, technology, operations, product, or marketing.



Transformational leaders don't simply ask, "How can we handle these contacts better?" They ask, "Why are these contacts happening?"

Leaders who act on those insights build relationships across departments, identify recurring sources of demand, and track whether the fixes work. They help the organization see the contact center not merely as a place where demand is managed, but as a source of intelligence about where the customer experience is breaking down.

In other words, preventing an unnecessary contact can be far more valuable than handling it efficiently.

Transformational leadership isn't about launching a transformation initiative. It's about seeing the contact center in the context of the larger organization, and being willing to challenge what success looks like as circumstances and capabilities change.

The best transformational leaders don't simply leave behind a better contact center. They leave behind a contact center that is better at becoming better.



Watch the video!

Did you know?

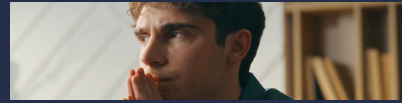
71% of leaders say customer experience is improving; only 67% of customers say service is easy or efficient.

Source: Northridge Group Index

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