



**CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES**  
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## **NEW YEAR, EVOLVED CHALLENGES, COMPELLING PRIORITIES**

**What is top of mind in your center?**

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## CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

# NEW YEAR, EVOLVED CHALLENGES, COMPELLING PRIORITIES WHAT IS TOP OF MIND IN YOUR CENTER?

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For seven years, we worked with Contact Center Pipeline to conduct an annual Challenges and Priorities survey. We loved exploring the results, and our readers found them insightful. (SEE SIDEBAR for a summary of findings from our last survey in 2022.) While a variety of factors conspired against continuing the practice, we believe there is still a desire to hear what's happening in the trenches.

Fortunately, through our project work and industry engagement, we dive into detailed discussions with contact centers, across industries and sizes, about what gives them headaches and what's on their drawing boards for the coming year. In addition, I delivered a State-of-the-Market webinar last September in concert with Contact Center Pipeline. Both points of reference inform the thoughts I'll share as you ponder *your* center's challenges and priorities. I hope you find them useful!



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## WHEN WE LAST EXPLORED THESE TOPICS...

Here's a quick look back at what our survey results showed in 2022.

### CHALLENGES:

- Participants reported the "triple whammy" of difficulty recruiting/hiring, increasing workload, and high attrition, with the first a strong winner across industries and center sizes.
- Those operational and organizational dynamics led to inability to meet service level and other performance targets. Absence and adherence were problematic as well.
- On the technology front, the desktop and omnichannel routing were the biggest pain points.

### PRIORITIES:

- Priorities varied but were led by improve employee engagement and empowerment, redesign/improve/automate processes, improve self-service, and staff properly to match workload.
- Addressing top challenges surfaced for many survey participants - i.e., implement changes to attract staff (e.g., higher pay, WFH) and increase focus on coaching and development.

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Work-from-home (WFH) had become commonplace and mature by 2022; however, many centers were hybrid or moving in that direction, exhibiting a "distinct longing to bring at least some agents back on-site."

# CONTRASTING THE CHALLENGES OF 2022 AND WHAT'S CHANGED BY 2025

FIGURE 1



## THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

... the more they stay the same. Or do they? Here's how things have changed – for better or for worse.

### CHALLENGES:

Staffing issues still ring true for many centers. While the labor pool may have increased, centers struggle to get employees who can become proficient relatively quickly and not leave too soon. Finding (and keeping) them can require significantly higher pay levels.

Bots and AI are more widely deployed with the intent of deflecting the easy contacts, yet centers still have agents handling the most basic questions – e.g., agents in financial services centers giving out balances and consumer goods centers updating people on their order status.

There seems to be a greater tolerance for longer waits, with more centers taking advantage of alternative channels and using callback effectively.

Desktop and omnichannel have made great strides over the last few years – more CRM, cloud-based solutions, integration of diverse tools into unified user interfaces. The best centers are using agent assist, Knowledge Management (KM), and guided answers.



**THERE REMAINS A TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN THE DESIRABILITY OF SUPPORTING WFH/HYBRID CENTERS AND THE CHALLENGE TO ACHIEVE ENGAGED, PRODUCTIVE STAFF.**

### PRIORITIES:

Given hiring and retention challenges coupled with remote (or hybrid) staff environments, employee engagement remains a high priority. Centers have gotten creative, leveraging tools and tactics such as internal chat, gamification tools, and online learning.

Self-service is all about bots – chat *and* voice. Many will bid “good riddance” to traditional IVRs; they were never loved. We can only hope deployments of bots aren’t saddled with the same disdain. Preventing that outcome should be top of mind for anyone on this path, tapping the right expertise and planning for implementation, tuning, and ongoing optimization.

# LORI'S PERSPECTIVE ON TOP CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES IN 2025

FIGURE 2

CATEGORY	TOP CHALLENGES	TOP PRIORITIES	NOTES ON THE CURRENT STATE
FRONTLINE STAFF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty hiring/recruiting</li> <li>• No budget for additional staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff properly to match workload</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attrition may be better, or centers are simply more used to it. <i>(Is it just a fact of life?)</i></li> </ul>
WORKLOAD AND PERFORMANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing workload (contact volume and/or handle time)</li> <li>• Difficulty prioritizing coaching/development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase focus on coaching and development</li> <li>• Redesign/improve/ automate processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centers are living with compromised service levels. <i>(Is this another fact of life?)</i></li> </ul>
TECHNOLOGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of and/or bad desktop tools, omnichannel, self-service, performance tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement/improve desktop tools (KM/agent assist), self-service (bots!), integrated analytics across channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This one has challenges across the board – but it's all about <i>integration and seamlessness!</i></li> </ul>
STRATEGIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding and respect for the center's role</li> <li>• Lack of support resources or know-how (e.g., analysts)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of the center's vital role and impact</li> <li>• Add support resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We beat these drums all the time. The center is central to the customer experience, so deserves respect and funding!</li> </ul>



## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

There remains a tug-of-war between the desirability of supporting WFH/Hybrid centers and the challenge to achieve engaged, productive staff. Recruiting and hiring is so much easier if you have WFH options, and a hybrid environment helps keep good local staff as well as ones that move away but still want to work in the center. Leadership wants people on site and may deem it pivotal for meeting operational objectives – e.g., elevating skill levels, improving productivity, meeting adherence, bolstering morale.

So, center leadership must fight for the strategy that makes the most sense for their culture, hiring demographics, etc.

I took a shot at outlining my view of the top challenges and priorities, using the same categories and choices we used in the past survey (with a little poetic license). See if you agree! (SEE FIGURE 2)

## MY HOT BUTTONS AND THE CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES THEY REVEAL

As I reflect on project work over the last few years, a few themes emerge that point to challenges and priorities.

**Hot Button:** Leadership wants efficiency and doesn't want to add headcount to the center. They often lack understanding of center dynamics.

- Challenge: We frequently discuss the "vicious cycle" (SEE FIGURE 3) that seems to occur as centers struggle with understaffing. Long wait times drive agent and customer behavior that makes things worse.
- Priority: We lobby hard for staffing up until efficiencies come from technology, better processes, and additional leadership and support staff to focus on improvements.

**“ A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE MATTERS BECAUSE EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED. ”**

## LORI'S DRUMBEATS

Here are the drumbeats that I routinely tap in "State-of-the-Market" (SOM) updates as well as project discussions. Contact me at [lori@strategiccontact.com](mailto:lori@strategiccontact.com) if you want to learn more.

### FUNCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- A strategic perspective matters because everything is connected. Think of "use cases" or scenarios from various user perspectives to envision the customer experience (end-to-end) and how you help agents and supervisors succeed.
- Omnichannel on a single platform simplifies...everything! Routing, skills, reporting, WFM, QM, VoC. If you don't have a single, unified omnichannel platform, plan carefully. *Don't make the supervisors and agents the integration point!*
- Consider a broad scope for WEM - recording/QM/VoC, performance management and development, workforce management, analytics, gamification, etc. (and make it integrated, omnichannel!)
- Apply a reality check when putting faith in technology (for things like self-service, analytics, etc.): You must have trained resources with a focus on analysis and optimization to achieve your goals.
- AI can impact... everything! Self-service (bots!), routing, workforce optimization, analytics and desktop tools (e.g., agent assist, KM) can all benefit from AI.

### SOURCING AND TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Top contact center technology vendors today offer a Hybrid/Ecosystem approach to deliver best-of-breed as well as suite solution benefits. Consider the full range of products and services of the CCaaS vendors on your list.
- Choose your "Partner" (Vendor and/or VAR) carefully and apply the right level of due diligence for the size and scope of the project. Build relationships, document critical requirements, trust but verify.
- Understand Service Level Agreements (SLAs), priority/severity levels, response time commitments, remediation, and how these important support elements work. Never assume these things don't matter (they do!) or all vendors are the same (they are not!).
- Don't just "lift and shift" your old world to the new platform. Take advantage of what new technology can do!
- Don't let speed be your #1 driver. Define a realistic implementation timeline, allowing adequate time for design, review, testing.
- Vendor Management is a two-way street. You must engage actively - manage performance, respond to issues, and keep advancing - to have a good outcome and relationship.

**Hot Button:** Small- and mid-sized centers lack support resources (Analysts!), and Supervisors and/or Managers struggle to fill the roles.

- Challenge: Lack of proper leadership and support resources leads to compromises every which way. Nobody models the actual staff levels needed for the workload. On-the-

job-training demands precious time from experienced resources and leaves new staff overwhelmed. Insufficient time for coaching and development impedes agent productivity and quality, while putting retention at risk. Limited reporting and little (or no) time for analysis thwarts the center's ability to form action plans that will lead to improvements.

## THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF LONG WAIT TIMES/UNDERSTAFFING

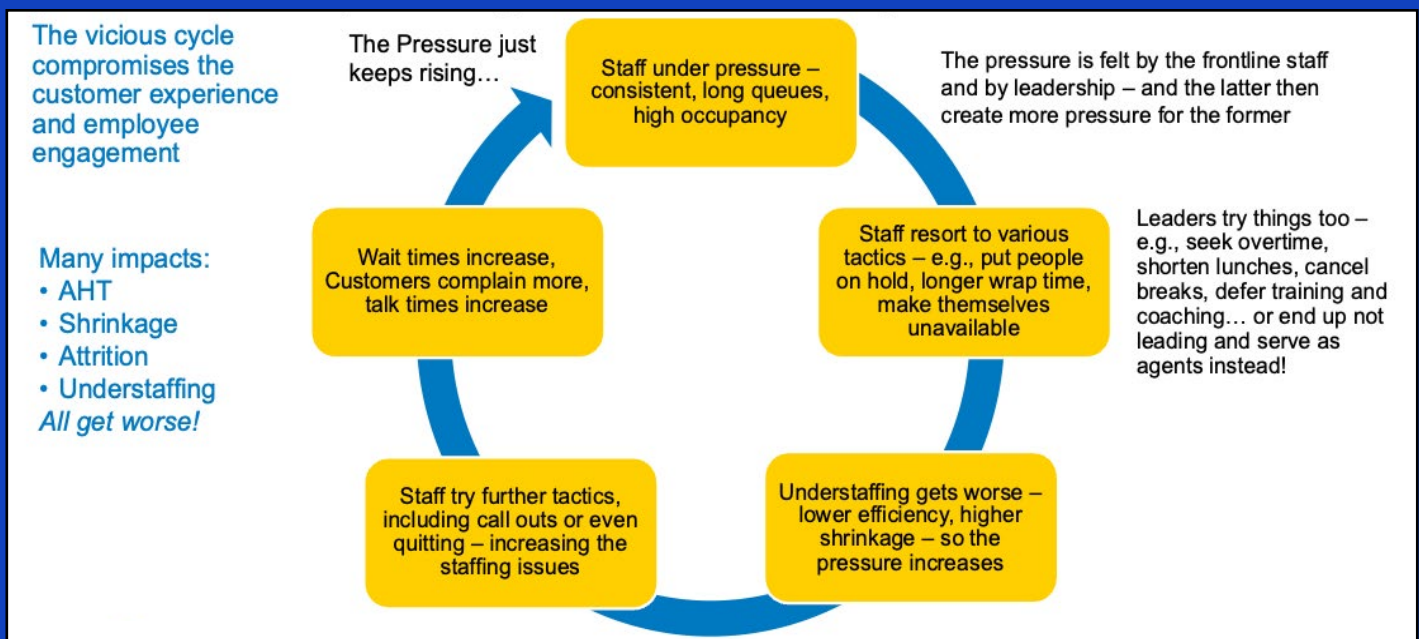


FIGURE 3

# CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

- Priority: Get the span of control right, add Team Leaders (if the role doesn't yet exist) as well as an Analyst (or two!). Let Supervisors/Managers focus their time where they should – e.g., coaching and developing staff!

**Hot Button:** There is so much exciting technology, shiny objects, opportunities just waiting to be tapped.

- Challenge: Too often we see people buy point solutions without the full vision of where they are going – e.g., omnichannel routing/reporting and all the associated things for quality, WFM, analytics, etc. Agents and Supervisors bear the brunt of the lack of planning in operational activities every day.

- Priority: Build a technology strategy that outlines the vision and how you will get there. Understand how the various pieces of your puzzle will fit together.

**Hot Button:** Metrics and performance management really need more attention.

- Challenge: Centers lack Workforce Engagement Management (WEM) tools and processes, integrated analytics/Business Intelligence tools, and resources to use them effectively. As a result, they don't meet performance goals, don't staff to workload, and views on how to fix things are misaligned.

- Priority: Build a metrics strategy that balances performance and assigns accountability where it belongs. Execute the strategy across all channels with integration, using analyst resources – ideally in the center itself, or tapping shared resources across the organization if necessary. Share a rolled up scorecard with other departments showing the interdependencies to help build respect for the center.

**Hot Button:** Self-service, bots, agent assist, AI need strategic attention, not just enthusiasm.

- Challenge: There's no shortage of technology, but a dearth of clarity on how best to use it.

- Priority: It's time to tie these elements into a clearly articulated technology strategy and build out projects with the right resources and ongoing support to reap the benefits. 🕒



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