

GTACC – IN THIS TOGETHER SERIES
Webinar 3 – Stories from the Field
April 3, 2020

1. What are some stressors that you see as you move the agents to work remotely?

Keith MacKinnon

- Public Transit.....big concern....We provided taxi chits to the last few Medtronic last few agents that were working in the office waiting for their Work from Home kits. This made it easier and less stressful for our agents to come to the office.
- We also added scripting to the IVR to let our customers know that our agents are working from home and to expect that they may hear a child or pet in the background. This has helped set the expectations with our customers and relieved any stress from our agents that might be concerned that customers would complain.

Lisa Running

- Moving from 0 to 100% of our agents working from home in two weeks was a challenge. As the news about the pandemic intensified, the agents we had not yet been able to transition to working from home became increasingly stressed about coming in to the office. If I could personally rewind and approach this again, something I would do differently is communicate more frequently to the entire team on the status of the agent transition and the realities we were dealing with as leaders through that time. I believe that level of transparency would have helped to reduce fear and build the trust of the team.
- Working on personal laptops also caused some stress for our teams. That included both difficulties connecting to corporate systems and unexpected dropped calls while serving clients. We ensured the team used processes to report these issues in real time so they could be shared with our IT team in order to determine patterns and root cause.
- Feelings of stress in the Workforce Management Team as the team tries to maintain service level achievement while also dealing with higher volumes and staff unable to logon. This stress comes from a noble place as our teams worry about not being able to achieve performance goals and meet client expectations. To respond, our leadership team got more involved than usual in the intra-day work force management activities in order to be there to support staffing decisions, remove obstacles and reassure the team that their work is appreciated. Encouraging the team to take each day and sometimes each hour as it comes rather than being overwhelmed by the bigger picture of what we were facing. To do this we created a Microsoft Teams chat that included our WFM team as well as leadership from our Supervisors up to our SVP and that platform enabled real-time collaboration around the decisions, high fives of a job well done and some humour at times.

2. What are some lessons leaders can be mindful of as we move more of our teams to work remotely?

Lisa Running

- Be careful not to make assumptions. Not everyone wants to work from home or even can work from home. They may not have a workspace available or perhaps they are sharing that workspace with others which can make their work more challenging and less enjoyable than being in the office.
- Remember that agents may not have an additional monitor/screen at home. The second screen is often critical to a contact centre agent if they need to juggle multiple platforms such as telephony, CRM, Knowledge, Core Systems etc while servicing the caller.
- Less than ideal working conditions at home can increase the mental and physical stress we and our team members may be dealing with. Some of the examples we found included living in a small condo space, not having a proper desk or chair, juggling small children as well as work
- The mental and physical stress is just as real for leaders - in addition to all the factors our individual contributors are experiencing, leaders have the added burden of worrying about and caring for their teams --- don't assume everyone in this leadership group is 'doing fine' - keep asking and watching and reinforcing their self-care is a priority
- Provide ongoing reassurance that 'we are all learning together' as well as make a point of providing ongoing recognition of everyone's efforts, their creativity and their support of one another in these extraordinary times, it is going a long way in building positive feelings across the team
- Strategies to maintain engagement will need to change as the weeks pass as the stress may continue to rise for those who are not enjoying the work from home environment – stay in tune with how your teams are doing each week

3. How do you keep your remote and your on-site teams engaged and motivated?

Chi Wen Liang

- Reach out on an individual basis vs. mass email to the team, the more senior the leadership the better as team members really appreciate the added effort. I leveraged emails from my Leadership team to their teams as opportunities to reach out to individual agents.
 - Recognition is more important than ever with the lack of physical presence. Recognition not only for individual or team accomplishments but also for “surviving” all the changes of adjusting to work from home and being flexible in the process.
 - Regular communication on what's being done and sharing success stories. By sharing the progress of our work from home game plan, the team knew what to expect and it helped alleviate anxiety as the COVID-19 concerns heightened. It also gave us an opportunity to share the behind the scenes work done by the various departments (e.g. our technology team) in helping get to 100% work from home.
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Lisa Running

- Think about non-work-related opportunities to connect and have fun together. We held a 'Virtual Management Happy Hour' at the end of the work day- we used Microsoft Teams video functionality and Kahoot to bring everyone together to play some trivia games - it was a fun way to de-stress
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4. What are some successes that you can share?

Keith MacKinnon

- Once we were up and running our Avg Wait Times reduced dramatically as the team seems very happy and calls seem to be coming in evenly throughout the day....no lunch time/dinner time peaks.
- Still early days but it appears that for most working from home has been a benefit for our CSRs and therefore a benefit for our customers with better service levels.

Chi Wen Liang

- We found the team was much more willing to do overtime before and after their shift with the time saved from commuting. This was a big win for everyone especially our clients given the higher volumes.
 - As an organization, it showed how quickly everyone collaborated to meet deadlines. Some tasks that would have taken weeks to complete in the past were accomplished in days.
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5. Have you had any days where you were hit with a tsunami of calls in queue? How did your team handle it?

Chi Wen Liang

- Turn off the noise. We had changed the channel on our TV screens in the office months ago away from KPIs to serene landscape videos. We found it helped create a calmer mindset with the team and this was especially helpful in the weeks leading up to being 100% work from home.
 - Reframe what the queue stats represent. Every number represents a client – a person that needs our help. We need to do our best to help that client in that interaction.
 - Refocus on what's within your control vs. what's not. We have ability to choose how we interact with our clients and how much patience and care we impart.
 - We have found embedding these reminders regularly in our messages and conversations has helped the team better manage the volumes and related stress.
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6. What steps are you taking to ensure good mental health for your team or for yourself?

Chi Wen Liang

For my team:

- Regularly check in -- both on a scheduled and unscheduled basis. Spend some time to talk about them and how they're doing mentally and not just about the business. Make use of high five messages via instant messaging or a video chat with a team member who's really stepped it up. I also find emojis very effective!
- Share resources on a regular basis. Our HR department and my Leadership team have been really good about sharing useful links like online yoga videos, work from home tips to resources like EAP that are available for the team.
- Share tips on how to build resiliency. Reminding everyone this is temporary, that we're in this together and finding the silver lining amidst the challenges helps everyone stay positive.
- One silver lining to working from home is we're learning to communicate differently than before and that's a good thing as we've found creative ways to stay connected. I believe it's going to strengthen our relationships for when it's 'back to normal', especially since we're getting to know our colleagues more personally in their home environment and with their pets!

Keith MacKinnon

For myself:

- I am not a good work from home person. I have done it before in my career and find it does not work for me.
- After my first week I found I was not moving from my desk and was working from 8-8pm without any breaks.
- In my second week I started taking our leadership daily recap calls at 5pm while I walked the dog. These would be 1hr calls, so a good walk....these has really seemed to help....I come back from the call send follow up emails and check in with the team and then I am usually done by 6:30-7pm....My dog likes it too 😊

Lisa Running

For my team:

- Intentionally creating 'space' at the beginning of our huddles and meetings to ask how people are feeling in their working from home situation and asking if they need anything to help/support them

- Reach out daily 1:1 to your immediate team and encourage that to happen by every leader on your team so each person in the Contact Centre gets that special attention 1:1 and discuss how they are feeling more openly
- Don't be afraid to be vulnerable - as leaders we can open up the conversation by authentically sharing any personal challenges we are experiencing so that others can feel comfortable sharing the same
- Reminding our teams of existing resources such as our Employee Assistance Program, or sharing external resources such as last week's GTACC webinar on 'Resiliency in Stressful Times'
- Making a point to watch for 'overworking' in our teams and encourage people to unplug and get an appropriate work-life balance
- We are now moving towards thinking creatively around scheduling such as split shifts with longer breaks in order to accommodate caring for children or for families sharing workspaces
- Finally we are encouraging the use of vacation days during these next few weeks and months to help people get the breaks they need

Thank you for sharing your insights:

Chi Wen Liang, Questtrade Financial Group

Keith MacKinnon, Medtronic

Lisa Running, CI Investments