

Service Agent Retention: How Contact Centers Can Keep Retain Their Agents

Episode 2

Transcript

Vanessa Gates 0:12

Hey everyone, welcome to Masters of Support. I am Vanessa Gates and today we are going to be talking about how your company can set itself up for success by creating a better strategy for employee retention with our guest, my wonderful co worker, fellow Playvoxer Jennifer Waite, VP of Product Marketing here at Playvox. Hey, Jen,

Jennifer Waite 0:35

Hey Ness, how are you?

Vanessa Gates 0:37

Good! How are you doing?

Jennifer Waite 0:38

Fantastic, thanks.

Vanessa Gates 0:39

Awesome. So let's get started. We have a quick quick stat here that I want to go ahead and get started with. So the Great Resignation, we also know it as the great reshuffle, the great attrition, or even the big quit. It's continuing really, really strong still, in 2022, we had 48 million people who quit their job in 2021. And as of March of 2022 8.6 million people have quit their job this year. Why do you think that's happening?

Jennifer Waite 1:12

I think it was an output of the pandemic. It was the first time that employees saw that they had choice over their workplace over their work schedules. It really gave them so much empowerment. And as we're kind of leaning back towards you know, resettling in a more normal state, they are now deciding does that match how they want to continue working with your organization? So I just think that it's probably something that we're going to be seeing for quite some time going forward until we find balance in workplace and work style and work schedules.

Vanessa Gates 1:55

Absolutely, absolutely. Um, fun fact, I'm part of the great resignation. And this is why I'm here today at Playvox. And I think all of this is resonating with me right now. So with that being said, Can you kind of give examples as to why employers or not why but more so what employers are doing to keep their employees happy, and staying versus them leaving and looking for opportunities outside of their current employers?

Jennifer Waite 2:24

Yeah, so I think a lot of companies are looking at what can they do from the workplace. So, you know, the pandemic hit the world shut down, basically overnight on all of us. And many companies had to figure out how do they do work when they don't have an office and they can't see their teams. So it meant sending everyone to work from home and figuring out what that meant. And now is we're coming back to this moment of rebalancing. Some companies are wanting to bring people back into the office, they have, you know, a lot of people have a lot of real estate that they're paying rent on, or you know, or that they own and want to be able to take advantage of those, you know, workplaces, but that doesn't mean that their teams are as excited to move back into those offices. So I think that working in creative ways on how you meet your company goals, as well as your employee goals is going to be something that we're all going to have to consider as we continue to move forward.

Vanessa Gates 3:25

Are you seeing any career pathing happening with a lot of these employers in their strategic models that they're doing to keep these employees happy from what you're seeing? And what research says?

Jennifer Waite 3:40

Yeah, so you know, some companies have made an all in decision to be there back in the office completely or remote completely. And those make things a little bit easier because it's 100% fit for the entire company. But for companies that are looking at giving balance and having some people in the office and some people at home, or even split work schedules where you get so many days from home and so many days in the office, I think as you're looking at what does, what does the workstyle mean? It's really important, I think that it also changes the way that you hire as you move forward. I think that before we looked at who is a right fit for the job, and now we have to look at who is the right fit for our company culture. And I think that part is becoming even more important as we move forward. We want to make sure that you know that we're picking the people who make best sense for the company long term who can grow within the company and continue to maximize that one hire and keep them on board and keep all of that knowledge that we build within them to benefit the company long term. One of the things I always like to say is that you know, we can teach people how to do the job, but we can't teach them how to be the right person to do the job. And I think that's what's really starting to change is finding those right people for the jobs.

Vanessa Gates 5:06

What I want to know is, what are companies doing to invest in their team and make, I guess, changes necessarily with the people, the processes, just the environment, the culture in general, to keep them happy, and to keep them wanting to stay with their current employee.

Jennifer Waite 5:28

Yeah, I think that that takes us down a few different paths. Vanessa, I think that there are some investments that the company needs to be able to make that, you know, change the supportive technology that that they're using with their employees. But I also think there's some probably smaller tweaks that can be made that don't necessarily carry the same impact or cost to the organization that just set up creating that environment that people want to show up for every day, whether that's showing up by logging in from home or showing up by getting to an office in the morning. But I think that at first, it starts all with the technology, we always want to make sure that there's fairness across the tools and the technology that's extended to, to the teams, you know, regardless of where they work. You know, I think that they all have to have access to those same tools in order to be able to do well, their jobs. You know, one of the stats that I saw in a recent study was that 81% of customer service agents say that they do not have no new or advanced technologies or tools to do their job, well, that's a problem. We can't rely on old technology and you know, using his as we would say, Can't MacGyver it to work anymore in the industry the way that it might have before. So outdated tools really only lead to burning out your team, because they're working harder to do the job instead of working smarter to do the job. So I would recommend looking at any of those friction points that you have, within your organization that are causing some of that discontent or that feeling of burnout. So, you know, do you have the tools to support your team that are working remotely? How are you engaging with your team when they're working remotely? You know, many companies during the pandemic, were forced to really step up their game when they are looking for cloud or SaaS solutions. So are you positioned across all of your technology points to have that type of environment where you can support them, regardless of where they're sitting? While they're working for you? You know, and that can be looking at even processes like how are you coaching your team? What development opportunities are you giving them based upon the quality of their of their interactions when you evaluate them? So look at all of those different points, as you're moving through to see, where are we becoming the most difficult to overcome obstacles? And what can we do to maybe implement new technology to really make that more frictionless? So let's

Vanessa Gates 8:22

kind of shift that a little bit. And let's talk about what, you know, what can a company gain by maintaining these long term employees?

Jennifer Waite 8:32

Yeah, so kind of the investment in the team. So if we're thinking about this from an investment strategy, which, you know, always will speak well, to the leaders in your organization, what's the what's the investment in? What's the return that we get on that investment? You know, everyone's gonna go to the tools. So the technology, but what can we do from a people perspective to really change how they view their job and to make them feel more supported? Like I just mentioned, we have a recognitions channel. And it's nothing more than giving daily ongoing shout outs to the amazing things that our team members are doing. It has cost Playvox nothing. But when I, you know, I have a moment where I'm either like, I'm really working on a tough problem, or, you know, you just need that, like, pick me up, I look at that channel, and just reading about all of us bragging

about each other, I think always picks my day up a little bit. So that's a free tool. Anyone can do that.

Vanessa Gates 9:29

I mean, we like to brag about ourselves, we like it. And I mean that it just isn't even inside, inside it outside of Playvox. I mean, who doesn't like to talk about themselves? Let's be real. As much as we want to be modest. We'd like to talk about ourselves and we like to talk about our teammates.

Being a good value.

Jennifer Waite 9:48

Yeah. 100%. And, but I think that we also circle that back with doing employee surveys. I think that the ability to have an honest and an unbiased view of how your employees view your organization, through a survey is definitely important. So anybody that can put out, you know, even if it's just a Google form, that you're not collecting email addresses, you're asking a couple of questions, and you're getting feedback from your team, that investment in asking them what's important to them. Asking them what they struggle with most in their day, can really lead to some amazing ideas and suggestions that the company can take advantage of. Plus, it makes your employees know that you're listening to them, and you care about what they have to say. I think that you do a study on the cost of what it is to hire, you know, agents and onboarding new agents, you look at the investment based upon not only that cost of bringing them in, but what does it cost when they churn and you have to backfill that person, I mean, contact centers are known to have, at some point in times, you know, really high turnover rates. And that in itself creates this atmosphere of always, always having to spend to bring in new when you know, anything that we can do to that leads to retention is a benefit not only to the organization from a cost perspective, but it builds such knowledge within your team. And consistency within how your processes are, you know, handled, I think that's really important. But last but not least, like look at what your compensation package looks like. And look at what your competitors are offering. I mean that first and foremost, employees are shopping around, they're not, I need a job, I see a job posting, I'm applying for the job, I'm taking that job that was always you know, when especially when I look at it as the difference between a job and a career, when I started working in a call center, because it was the 80s when I looked when I start working in a call center, it was you know, you were looking for a job, you were looking for a moment in time of how do I get a paycheck to cover my needs. And you saw a job, they were hiring you applied you work there, I didn't shop around, I didn't go looking for a better job at that point in time. But that's what employees are doing. Now they're shopping around, they're educated on what your competition will give them. So if you can't either have similar offerings, or have differentiators that overcome some of maybe where you're not able to give the same types of benefits to your employees, but you can give them other things that really mean a lot in the long run. I think you're gonna lose right then and there. So, you know, one of the organizations that I love in our industry is the quality assurance and training, connection, QA, etc. And they have put out a stat that turnover in the call center industry average is between 30 and 45%. You know, net, you've seen how much we've grown in just the past, you know, six months, the year, since I've joined, we've more than doubled in size. And I could not imagine if we weren't going to be able to maintain that kind of growth while also losing a third of our employees all the time that we are constantly backfilling, you would never be able to get ahead and that just as a manager would make me feel

so defeated before I could even get started building my team. So anything that you can do to really try to bridge that gap of turnover, and really change the mindset of what are our retention strategies, then I think that you can be seen as a winning organization. For sure.

Vanessa Gates 13:38

I saw this that from I think it was the Society of Human Resources Management, they said like the average cost per hire for each recruit is about \$4,425. Like, just think about that in perspective times that turn over, we would have some really unhappy finance departments. And yeah,

Jennifer Waite 14:01

I mean, if we're thinking that, let's say, you know, we're trying to pay \$4,400 to bring someone in, get them trained before they're even really like fully doing their job. How long do they have to work for you before you regain those costs? And if you're never regaining them, because you're constantly churning and losing people, you're always working from a deficit, not only from a people perspective, but from a monetary perspective. So, again, I think that really reinforces why the retention strategies really need to change, and that you have to be able to see yourself in how do I become an employer of choice? How do I become the ones that even though X company is hiring and they have an ad out and they saw, you know, this this position open? Why do they not just take that position? And why do they maybe look elsewhere and see if there are better opportunities so that you can become the better opportunity but once They're in the door, you have to continue thinking, why am I still the better opportunity for them? What do they still get by staying with my company? Instead of Alright, I got them in the door like signing bonuses. How many times? Have we seen signing bonuses throughout the pandemic? Get people in the door? That's great. Get them in the door, what are you doing to keep them inside once you get them through the door. And I think that's really where you can be creative with how you're kind of having your team interact with each other. So that investment and team interactions and in building that community within your organization, I think is really awesome. So we all just got back. Not that long ago, from having a really great company Summit. We brought all playvoxers from around the world together. And I shared about it on my social media. And I said, Oh my gosh, I am so excited to see so many playvoxers in one place at one time. Because that's that's how we refer to ourselves as playvoxers. And one of my friends said whats a playvoxer, I Googled it, and I can't figure it out. And I thought, well, even if I wrote what it is, if I said a playvoxer is an employee of playvox that does not sum up what a playvoxer is. So you have to be able to add that secret sauce behind the scenes of what it means to be proud of saying that I'm an employee of this company. And, we do that every day. I mean, partially because it's our job to talk about it. But also because I'm proud to talk about it. I love sharing, you know why I think that being here, it was one of the best decisions that I made and why I wanted to be able to grow with the company and grow the company. So I think that you have to figure out the things that your company can do to create that environment. Because that's, that's really special. And that could mean being really creative that if you have dispersed teams, you have some in the office, you have some remote, you know multiple offices that they're across have like there's a bunch of different ways to have a dispersed team. But how do you get creative at making them feel like one team? How do you create the opportunities for team building within those, you know, those obstacles that you're facing? How do you give your teams the opportunity to meet and share successes and challenges. I think that you know, I recognition channel is great. Like I said,

we're sharing our successes, we're bragging about each other. But I also think that the really special moments come when we get together as groups across the company. And we share our challenges because everyone will brainstorm and offer suggestions on either how they can help, how they can find someone that will help or how they can just be an ear and give you suggestions on other things you can try that doesn't you know, have a monetary value assigned to it, it also doesn't have a cost assigned to it. But that creativity that come in those moments really is what ties us together as employees even more strongly. And don't just focus on your agents in a call center, you know, that's your first line of defense. They're the ones that are the face of your company, or the voice of your company, or the words that someone is reading about your company. And that's important like that you we have to support them. I'm not at all saying that. But there are teams behind them that hold them up on their shoulders to make them successful. And we have to focus on those people too. So what are you doing to extend those kinds of opportunities for sharing within other levels in your contact center, your supervisors, your team leaders, your coaches, your trainers, your scheduling teams? How are you looking at making sure that all aspects of your organization feel just as supported it as the ones who are day in and day out interacting with your customers.

Vanessa Gates 18:57

Making them happy, you know, having a team culture, etc. But that only lasts for so long. I'm going to keep it real. You can only have so many Slack channels so many rah rah was, What about like career pathing in the sense of advancements and stuff like that, like I saw one of the top five reasons why people are leaving in the contact space in the contact center space is because there is no job advancements. I think the exact example in the word was just access to career development opportunities.

Jennifer Waite 19:33

It's probably the same Gallup poll that I read.

Vanessa Gates 19:37

Yeah, yes.

Jennifer Waite 19:38

Yeah. So what are we doing? So I said, get them in the door, keep them but keeping them is thinking about them as an asset to your organization rather than filling a role within your organization. And I mentioned that when I started working in a call center, it was a job. But that for me transitioned into a really great for You're so far, I have been able to capitalize on all of the knowledge that I built by being a frontline person and what that means to now helping organizations do that for their own team members. So I think that first and foremost, it comes from open communication, I think every manager needs to be able to have a very meaningful conversation with your team, about what their desires are for their future. And sometimes that means a departure from your organization. And that's okay. But it doesn't mean that that's today or tomorrow, but I think in uncovering their desires, not what job they want to have Next, a lot of times as you're working through your career opportunities and making your advancement selections, it's because there's an open position posted. And that's great. If that really fits where you want to be in an organization go for it. But sometimes, it's understanding what direction they want to go in so that your manager can also be on the lookout for upcoming opportunities, we sometimes know when there's going to be expansion in other areas. So if I understand that, that's a desire of yours, I can help set you up for

success. So at playvox we extend access to Coursera, to all of our employees, we give them the opportunity to learn and become stronger and better teammates. That could be if I know that one of my team members has a desire to do something new and different in the organization, I can work with them to find a course that really gives them a strong, you know, basis of being prepared for that next step in their journey within the organization. Because I always say that, you know, as a manager, the best that I can do is to create someone who's the next best opportunity for the growth within our organization. And that, you know, I think that's our job. So I take it very seriously. And those conversations are really important to me. And I've seen team members blossom because they've just never been asked before. What do they want to do? What makes them happy? What excites them. But another easy thing that a company can do is just publish all of the job descriptions across your organization, on your intranet? Let people read about them. What, does it take to be seen as a strong, strong competitor for a new opportunity. So let's say I, I wanted to, I want it to be the next new Ashley. Ashley is our Senior Event Manager, she does all of our trade shows and all that kind of stuff. That's super awesome, really hard, I have super respect for her. But if I wanted to do that job, just because I'm a playoxer doesn't mean that I'd be good for that. And I see a small window into what she does every day. But if I read the job description, and really understood everything it takes to be successful in her role, I may look and go, Okay, well, I kind of want to do that, it really excites me, it scares me a little bit. But I don't have the following four skills. So then I can look at how can I make myself grow and learn more so that I can be ready, if that becomes an opportunity. But I think the last part is use time within the availability for coaching within your team to develop those skills with them. If they are putting themselves out there, then you have to be there to help guide them through the process. You know, as a manager, we're kind of the Sherpas, we get our teams to execute on their goals, we get them to complete their tasks, but we also have to set them up to be prepared for their next steps. So I think that from a career growth standpoint, that, you know, those are just a few things that we can do that don't really aren't hard and don't require a lot of time or effort. But it's more about just creating the option and the opening in the conversation for this could be a possibility for you.

Vanessa Gates 24:11

Yes, I think it's also to add to that it's just creating an environment where they can feel heard, and feel supportive. I feel like a lot of times, speaking specifically on the on the contact center space, you have an agent that may be a little bit timid or unsure of of what these career paths look like and what is the quote unquote hard work to get to that next step. And I think it's just providing them a reassurance that they have the right tools and the right team to help them succeed. And I think Jen, you do a wonderful job with your team on that. And I see it all the time. You know, as both of our departments you know, collaborate where you encourage your team and you tell them like, Hey, I have these challenges for you and I am fully supporting you and encouraging you that you can succeed XYZ this quarter. So I commend you as a leader that you do a wonderful job like that. And I hope that there are more Jen's like you and other companies, because it is such a great asset to have you on our team. Well, we'll go ahead again, myself and Jen will be talking more and more Jen. than myself, We'll be talking more about this topic. And just going into a little bit more details and statistics on this great retention.

Jennifer Waite 25:31

Anyone that's joined our webinars before know that even though our attendees can't speak to us live, we make them really interactive, we take a lot of questions from our audience and weave that into the storytelling. So please come, please come with your suggestions, your ideas, what's worked for you what hasn't, and I would love to continue this conversation then.

Vanessa Gates 25:54

For sure, and we'll go ahead and have the registration for that webinar in the bottom of the description of the podcast. So if you have any questions to our contact information will be in that description. We hope that you'll join us. Jen, this was really great talking to you. Hopefully we can see you at another episode. Um, other than that, everyone, it's been great. Thanks for tuning in to the Masters of Support. I'm Vanessa gates. I'm your host and I'll see you in our next episode. Have a great day. Bye Bye