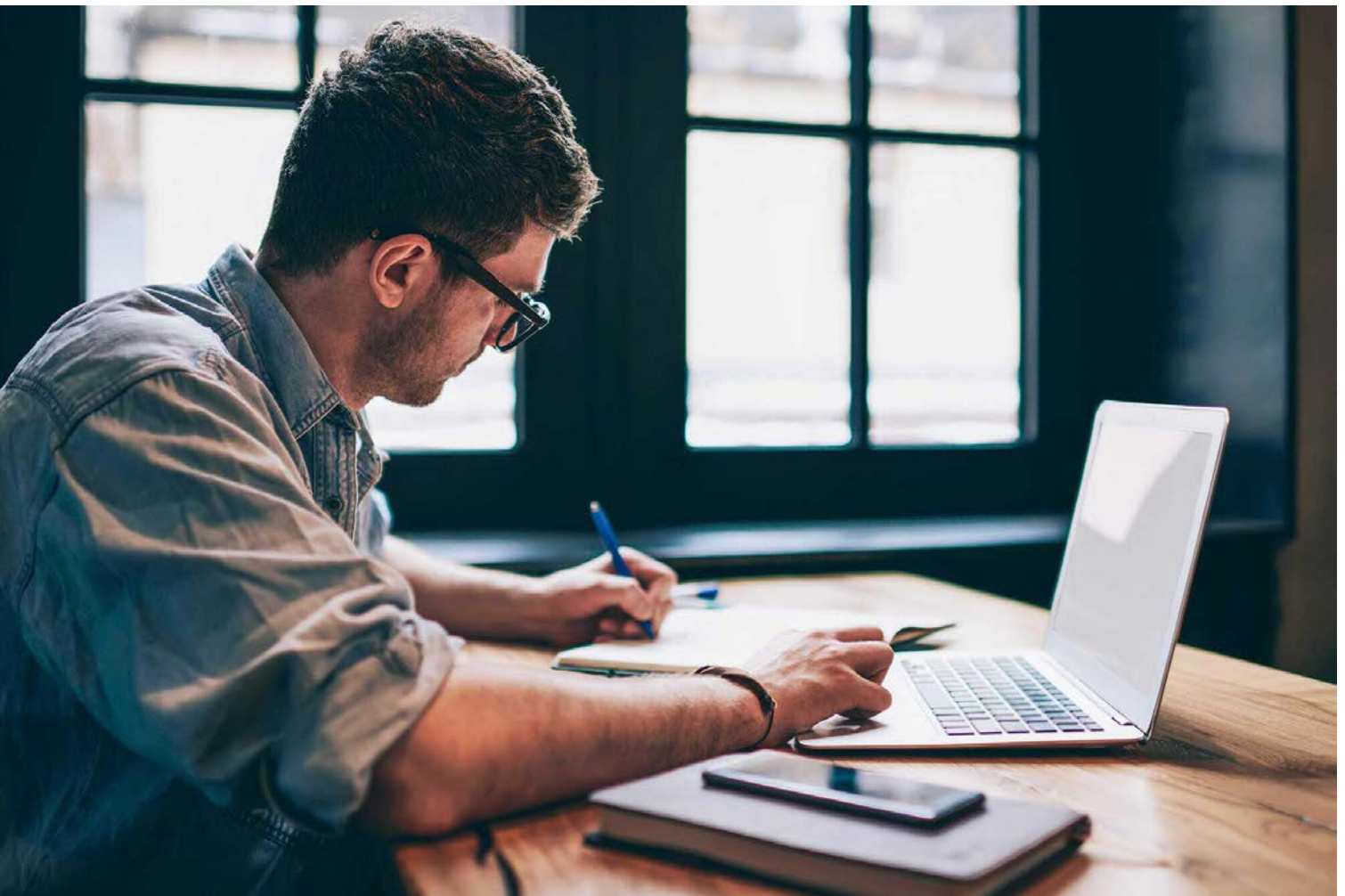

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Workforce learning closes the distance



Want to improve your company's customer service? Start by providing a better learning experience for your workforce.

It's no secret that happier team members mean happier customers. The more engaged, supported, and empowered people feel in their jobs, the more capably they can serve others. Satisfied customer service professionals bring their whole selves to work, using their passion and individuality to create unforgettable interactions—the kinds that drive lasting loyalty and word-of-mouth.

And yet countless organizations fall short in ensuring positive, meaningful work experiences for their teams. There are many components to consider, especially in a remote or hybrid work environment that many businesses find themselves in today. One component that has been often overlooked in the 2020 pandemic-fueled rush to remote work is to optimize workforce learning.

Fortunately, this is a manageable fix for many enterprises, even in a remote environment. And it starts by recognizing the need for productive learning from day one.

Practical Training Starts with Onboarding

Onboarding is a pivotal component of workforce learning and development, and ultimately, customer satisfaction. Good onboarding accelerates new hires' time to productivity, minimizes room for errors and risks, promotes engagement, and drives positive business outcomes. And onboarding is particularly crucial in a tight economy when organizations can't afford to invest in team members who won't be performing at their best or sticking around for long.

However, in too many workplaces—especially call centers— onboarding is too brief, lackluster, or even absent entirely. Instead, learning only happens on the job, typically in an impromptu and chaotic fashion. In other words, people learn what to do by learning what not to do—through painful and often demoralizing experiences. Perhaps the business has left essential elements out of their onboarding program, or figures that the only way for new hires to get the hang of things is to jump right in.

In remote call centers, new agents may have a powerpoint to click through, or a monotonous video to watch. In many situations, the classroom-style curriculum is the same, with agents sitting in front of a computer watching instead of sitting at a desk in a brick-and-mortar classroom.

This laissez-faire approach to education has detrimental effects on worker morale, particularly in the early days of a position. A 2018 BambooHR¹ study found that roughly one-third (31%) of workers depart their new positions within the first six months.

Their top complaint? Poor preparation. Approximately 76% of employees surveyed cited a lack of proper onboarding as their reason for leaving, saying they felt overwhelmed, under-qualified, and under-appreciated.

Don't Discount Soft Skills

When people do make it through the first six months, they frequently aren't any better-equipped than they were when they started. They may not possess critical skills their supervisors and customers expect them to have—including so-called “soft skills,” such as collaboration and active listening, that can make or break customer relationships.

Consider how many of your team members are competent in the following:

- #1 complex problem-solving**
- #2 critical thinking**
- #3 creativity**
- #4 people management**
- #5 coordinating with others**
- #6 emotional intelligence**
- #7 judgment and decision-making**
- #8 service orientation**
- #9 negotiation**
- #10 cognitive flexibility**

¹ <https://www.bamboohr.com/blog/onboarding-infographic/>

The World Economic Forum² ranks these as the top 10 most important skills for workers to have in our modern economy. But many people haven't developed them due to "outdated models of education, which over-index on cognitive learning and do not develop the social and emotional skills required for the future," as a recent Deloitte³ article states.

Businesses can—and should—educate workers on soft skills, but most don't. The assumption is that soft skills can't be taught or that they have no demonstrable impact on real-world performance.

According to Deloitte:

"Most organizations ... lack a focused approach to building essential human skills in-house. One reason for this may be that these types of skills are commonly thought to be innate—but research suggests just the opposite. According to research conducted by Harvard University, social-emotional and noncognitive skills—often considered to be part of the 'soft' skills repertoire—are malleable into adulthood and can be developed with the right resources, environment, and incentives."

To prove the return on investment of learning soft skills, Deloitte points to a recent Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) study⁴ in which employees underwent a 12-month workforce learning program focused on improving competencies such as communication and problem-solving. The program resulted in a 250% ROI within eight months.

Whether it centers on soft skills or not, any ongoing workforce development initiative is better than none. Professional growth is a crucial motivator in the workplace, especially for millennials and younger employees. A lack of growth and learning opportunities is one of the most common reasons employees leave. Moreover, continuous learning ensures workers stay up-to-date with evolving jobs, technologies, and expectations in our rapidly changing world.

² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-10-skills-you-need-to-thrive-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/>

³ <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/technology-and-the-future-of-work/closing-the-employability-skills-gap.html>

⁴ <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/soft-skills-training-brings-substantial-returns-investment>

The Rise of Distance Learning



Learning is essential for workers in any team or environment, but it doesn't need to slow down or get in the way of work. More and more organizations are abandoning the whiteboards, classrooms, and clunky learning management systems for distance learning solutions.

Distance learning is nothing new—universities have been offering it for years. But its application in the workplace is relatively recent. Even amid a pandemic that required many businesses to send their teams to work remotely, virtual learning hasn't made the priority list. However, organizations that implement it correctly have witnessed that it can be as effective—if not more—than-in person education.

Unlike conventional development, distance learning can be conducted at any time, from anywhere. Participants learn at their own pace and on their own schedule. This allows employers to better meet the needs of flexible, remote workers.

Many distance learning solutions incorporate blended learning, which combines instructor-led lessons, discussions, videos, simulations, and other forms of training into a single curriculum. Blended learning is designed for different kinds of learners and learning styles.

We use this approach at Liveops and can attest to its success. Not only is our blended, distance learning-based platform faster than a typical training program, but it also produces more capable agents.

Another key to success in adult learning is gamification. The blended model is supported through ongoing assessments and tracking knowledge transfer and retention.

If your business is struggling with attrition and underperformance within your workforce, take a look at your learning solution. Especially with a largely remote workforce, providing meaningful work and opportunities continues to be a driver for a productive team. Liveops has more than 20 years of experience in creating, executing, and innovating distance learning programs. Our dynamic network of agents can attest that a complete and efficient learning program can close the gaps between product knowledge and fantastic customer experience.

