

An excerpt from Centerserve's Motivating Agents eToolkit.  
For more information about this eToolkit visit:  
<http://www.call-center.net/motivating-agents.htm>

## Another “Top Five” list:

We then asked call center agents to list the most *de*-motivating things about their jobs. We also asked managers and supervisors to tell us what *they* consider most de-motivating for their agents.

Here's what they said:

### Agents' Top Five:

1. **Poor leadership skills of supervisors**
2. **Inadequate tools and equipment**
3. **Poor work environment**
4. **Inadequate or no benefits**
5. **Irrelevant incentives**

### Managers' & Supervisors' Top Five:

1. **Inflexible scheduling**
2. **Irregular or no feedback to agents**
3. **Poor work environment**
4. **Minimal or absent workplace culture**
5. **No incentives**

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## In comparing *these* two “Top Five” lists...

### *Most De-motivating Job Factors*

<u>Agents' Top Five:</u>	<u>Managers' &amp; Supervisors' Top Five:</u>
1. Poor leadership skills of supervisors	1. Inflexible scheduling
2. Inadequate tools and equipment	2. Irregular or no feedback to agents
3. Poor work environment	3. Poor work environment
4. Inadequate or no benefits	4. Minimal or absent workplace culture
5. Irrelevant incentives	5. No incentives

In comparing the lists for the biggest de-motivators, we see again that agents have *different priorities* than what their managers and supervisors *think* they have.

For example, agents cited “poor leadership skills of supervisors” to be their Number One *de*-motivator. Remember that “positive leadership skills” are agents’ Number One *motivator*. Managers and supervisors didn’t cite this factor *at all* in their list of de-motivators.

Agents also listed “irrelevant incentives” as a de-motivator. This is different from the managers’ and supervisors’ answer of “no incentives.” (Remember that managers and supervisors cited “incentives” first in their list of motivators.) This means that while managers and supervisors think that agents find it de-motivating to have “no incentives” offered to them, agents actually find “irrelevant incentives” to be *more de-motivating*. “Irrelevant incentives” can include donuts for dieters, hockey tickets for opera fans, or an “Employee of the Year” plaque in a call center where the average length of service is nine months. “Irrelevant incentives” can be any incentives that don’t match the recipient’s personal goals or preferences. *Agents consider “irrelevant incentives” more de-motivating than no incentives at all.*

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## The effects of the disconnect

What conclusions can we draw from the "Top Five" lists of motivating and de-motivating job factors?

**First, we've observed that agents value different things than what their managers and supervisors believe they do.**

Many of the agents' "Top Five" motivating job factors include basic considerations, such as "benefits," "work tools and equipment" and "competitive pay."

But *none* of these job factors appeared on the managers' and supervisors' lists of motivating job factors. Perhaps managers and supervisors believe that attempting to modify such general job factors is beyond the limits of their positions, so they do not evaluate them when deciding how they *can* motivate their employees. But we've discovered that these things are actually *very* important to agents.

What we can conclude is that if these job factors are not designed adequately, such as competitive pay for the job and location, properly-functioning equipment, and reasonable benefits packages, these factors can quickly turn into job *de*-motivators.

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## A chain-reaction of confusion

**We can also conclude that the most motivating factors for agents have to do with their relationships with people on their jobs.**

When describing their ideal supervisor, agents used terms such as “approachable,” “helpful” and “knowledgeable.” These are all “positive leadership skills.” When discussing “co-workers,” they used terms such as “fun” and “teams.” When managers and supervisors described the “culture” and “friendly atmosphere” of their call centers, they cited contests, prizes and gifts.

The consequence of this growing gap in communication can be a de-motivated workforce. The average employee is often treated as a potential flight-risk. And the concept of loyalty, in some cases, has been rendered into something that can be purchased, rather than earned and valued.

These effects are eventually felt at all levels of a company. It's a situation that has spawned an industry of quick fixes. Many incentive programs are designed for their scatter-shot effect: they'll manage to hit a lot of people, but often with incentives that agents do not value.

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## How can you reconnect?

This toolkit will *not* provide you with the latest menu of the “top 100 incentives.” Your goal is not another “program of the month.” One size does *not* fit all.

This toolkit *will* help you discover what really works to inspire and motivate *your* call center agents.

To do that, we need a better model to break down and analyze the true motivating factors for your agents. To do that we need to get back to basics.

Let's start with some fundamentals.

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## Principles of motivation

### Introduction

In this section, you will learn some fundamental terms and concepts which will help shift your attitude and point of view regarding motivating agents.

You will learn the difference between things that *can* be done for your call center agents, and the things that *should* be done, as well as the potential consequences for neglecting them.

You will be introduced to some terms that will help you clarify the reasons that agents value certain activities and behaviors that managers and supervisors normally take for granted.

Finally, you will learn that some important motivators for your agents are the least expensive. The bonus is that the benefits can be experienced throughout your call center, and among all levels of employees, many times at very low cost!

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## Back to basics

To discover what you can do to motivate your agents in your call center, you first need to understand what motivates them as people!

We will *not* include an exhaustive background of the psychology of human motivation, but a brief overview covering some well-known theories will help provide a starting point.

We will then move rapidly into a general model that you can use in *your* call center.