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Reducing Ramp Time & Agent Attrition In Contact Centers

How AI-Driven Real-Time Coaching Stops the Revolving Door of Agent Attrition, Increases Productivity, and Improves CX

The Revolving Door Dilemma

High agent turnover comes part and parcel with contact centers. While contact centers have historically had 30 - 45% average annual agent attrition, our data shows that attrition has jumped to as high as ~80% since the pandemic. In fact, Indeed included multiple contact center roles in its list of 12 High Turnover Jobs in 2021. In addition to the high costs of hiring and training new agents, agent attrition impacts customer experience, brand perception, and becomes one of the most substantial costs for all contact centers.

While obvious to contact center executives and managers, reducing agent attrition is notoriously hard to tackle. In fact, it seems that agents go out the door almost as soon as they finish ramping and getting up to speed. The near-perpetual resource hole that has to be constantly backfilled barely allows contact centers to maintain the status quo, not to mention grow. At Cresta, we call this the "Revolving Door Dilemma," and it's become the norm for the contact center industry.

In the post-pandemic world, customers are choosing to connect with humans over chatbots and voicebots. Analysts report that live voice interactions have increased from roughly 40% to 60% since COVID started. As the dust is starting to settle and the picture of post-pandemic new normals is becoming clearer, live agent interaction continues to grow, which makes agent retention a critical issue for contact centers to address.

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More importantly, new hybrid / fully remote work dynamics have intensified competition to hire and retain contact center agents. In fact, 89% of CX and contact center leaders say that remote or hybrid will be a permanent option for at least some employees. Going forward, regional contact centers will have to compete with other brands that have remote contact centers for agents. With more potential employers to choose from, agents may find better compensation packages or shift times, intensifying competition and worsening the Revolving Door Dilemma. As the employment experts from Indeed report, abundant work opportunities and high demand for job positions result in higher employee turnover.

The impact of the pandemic and permanent remote work dynamics is that the capability to backfill and ramp new agents will be even more crucial for contact centers.

The impact of the pandemic and permanent remote work dynamics is that the capability to backfill and ramp new agents will be even more crucial for contact centers. The task becomes more challenging in the face of new remote work models; it's simply more difficult to train, coach, supervise, and enable peer-to-peer learning for agents in remote settings.

Using proprietary Cresta data, this report benchmarks the current state of agent attrition and ramp in contact centers. We will also present Cresta's "Agent Lifecycle Framework," which divides the agent experience into distinct phases and needs. In looking for clues on how to stop the Revolving Door, contact center leaders need to take a comprehensive look at the agent experience using a framework like this. It is time for contact centers to view agent attrition as the result of all of an agent's negative experiences starting from day 1. Only then can they take meaningful steps to reduce agent attrition and stop the Revolving Door.

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This report benchmarks the current dynamics of agent attrition and ramp and looks at the Agent Lifecycle. It then introduces strategies that reduce attrition and accelerate ramp and employee engagement through real-time coaching and AI.

To do so, we analyzed proprietary data from more than

6 thousand agents

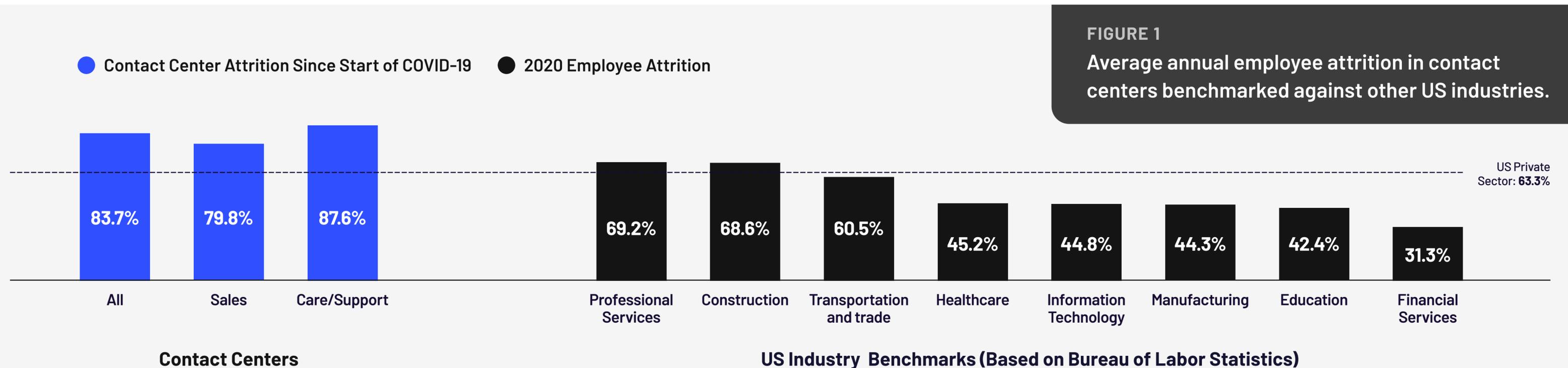**3.8 million conversations**

The report is laid out in 5 sections:

1 CURRENT STATE OF AGENT ATTRITION
Benchmarking the metrics, associated cost, and reasons of agent attrition in modern contact centers.

2 CURRENT STATE OF AGENT RAMP
Benchmarking the length and other parameters of agent ramp in modern contact centers.

3 THE AGENT LIFECYCLE
Introducing a framework that divides an agent's time in a contact center into distinct phases and helps contact center leaders identify the root causes of the Revolving Door Dilemma.

4 TRANSFORMING THE AGENT LIFECYCLE
Reducing agent attrition by increasing agent performance and satisfaction in all phases of the Agent Lifecycle.

5 RESOLVING THE REVOLVING DOOR DILEMMA
Detailing the path forward for contact centers to stop the Revolving Door.

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Employee Attrition is a Uniquely Difficult Problem in the Contact Center

The Revolving Door Dilemma is a challenge that is unique to contact centers. Employee attrition is extremely high, particularly within centers focused on customer care & support. Compared to the US private sector average based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics, contact centers have up to ~1.3x average annual attrition from employees.

Why? New hires are typically entry level. As such, they're willing to move for small changes in salary or upskilling opportunities that allow them to progress their careers. Furthermore, COVID and remote work dynamics have increased employee attrition not only in contact centers, but across all industries as attrition rates jumped across the board in 2020.

FIGURE 1
Average annual employee attrition in contact centers benchmarked against other US industries.

● Contact Center Attrition Since Start of COVID-19   ● 2020 Employee Attrition

83.7%	79.8%	87.6%		69.2%	68.6%	60.5%	45.2%	44.8%	44.3%	42.4%	31.3%

All | Sales | Care/Support | | Professional Services | Construction | Transportation and trade | Healthcare | Information Technology | Manufacturing | Education | Financial Services

US Private Sector: **63.3%**

Contact Centers

US Industry Benchmarks (Based on Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Backfilling Agent Attrition is a Major Operational Expense

The Revolving Door Dilemma is not only hard on morale, but it's also expensive. The cost of agent attrition includes productivity costs (from empty seats and new hire ramping) and operational costs (from finding, interviewing, and hiring a new agent to backfill a vacant role).

Using average annual attrition rates in contact centers implies the following average agent tenures:
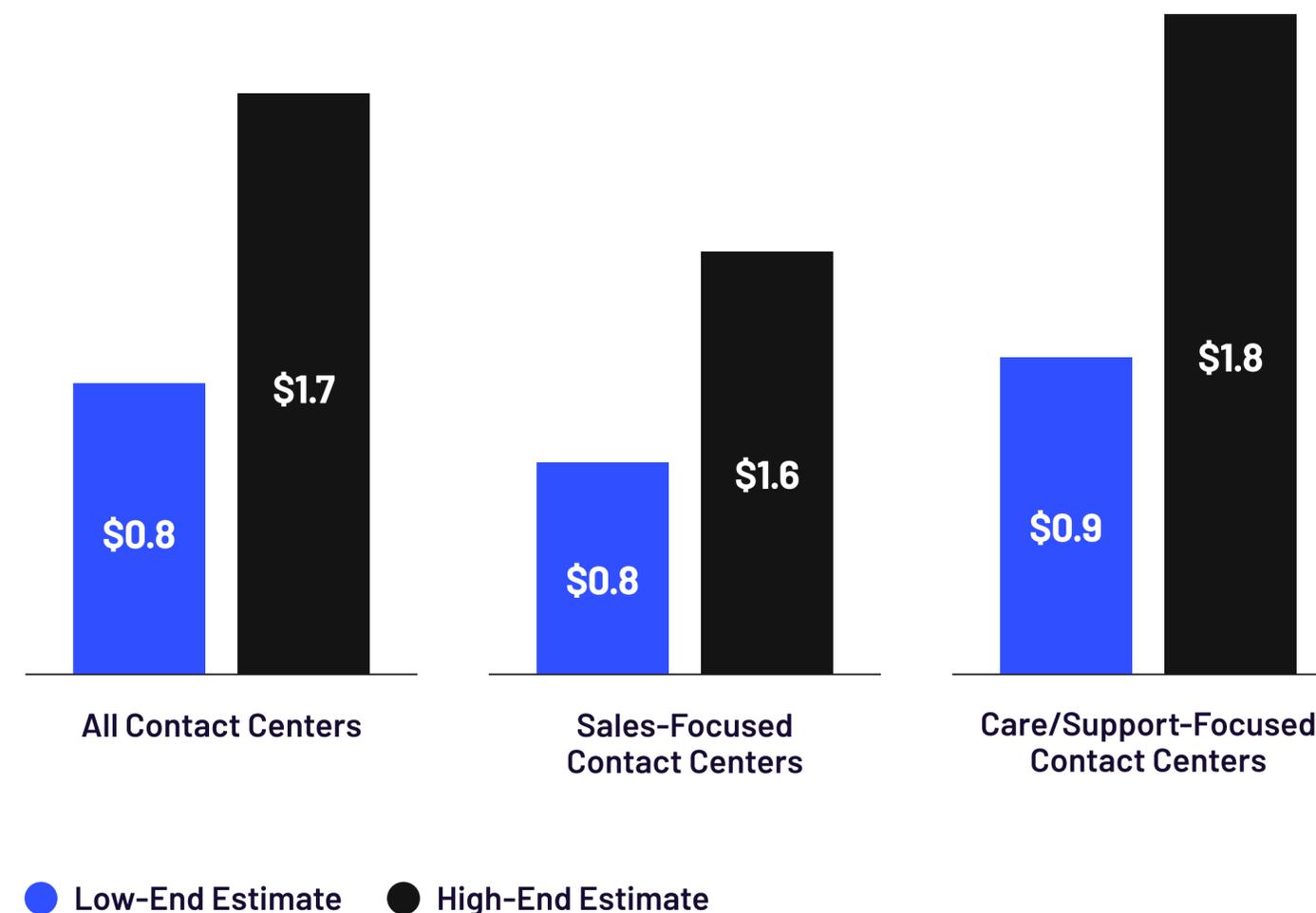
15 months in sales roles

13.7 months in care / support roles

14.3 months for contact centers overall

Based on these average agent tenures and estimated operational costs of $10 - $20k to replace an agent, we see that just the administrative costs to fill an empty seat is significant.

FIGURE 2

Annual operational costs to backfill for a contact center team of 100 agents.

($ in Millions)

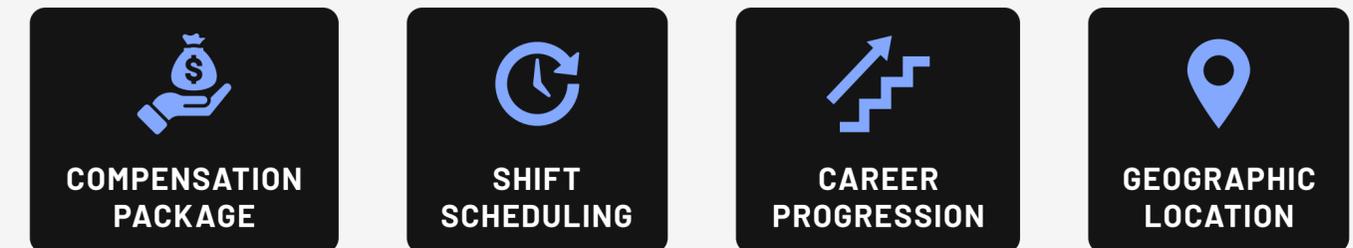|	All Contact Centers	Sales-Focused Contact Centers	Care/Support-Focused Contact Centers
Low-End Estimate	$0.8	$0.8	$0.9
High-End Estimate	$1.7	$1.6	$1.8

● Low-End Estimate ● High-End Estimate

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Remote Work Dynamics Have Intensified Competition for Agents

Based on feedback from Cresta's customers, the top 5 reasons for agent attrition are:

1. **Compensation package** - total dollar value of the compensation package as well as the compensation structure (base salary, performance bonuses, commission, etc.)

2. **Career progression / upskilling** - the opportunity for promotions or the ability to upskill for better career progression in the future

3. **Job fit** - the agents' perception of how successful they can be in their role and how well they interact with their peers and managers

4. **Shift scheduling** - the shifts agents are required to work (weekday vs. weekends and daytime vs. nighttime)

5. **Health** - personal and family health issues or health concerns around in-person work, which has been brought on by COVID and is expected to remain post-COVID

The remote contact center dynamic has placed a focus on career progression and job fit

Traditionally, contact centers primarily competed for agents under these dimensions:

COMPENSATION PACKAGE	SHIFT SCHEDULING	CAREER PROGRESSION	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

According to Customer Contact Week Digital, remote dynamics are here to stay. **89% of CX and contact center leaders say a remote or hybrid workplace location will be a permanent option for at least some employees.** For these leaders, geographic location will no longer be a constraint for hiring new agents, increasing demand for agents across previously regional markets.

With location out of the mix, competition around compensation packages and shift times will intensify, making it harder to differentiate in these areas. That leaves us with career progression. But, according to former executives from contact center BPOs, it's harder for team leaders to help agents feel confident about career progression, especially in remote settings where even great agents struggle to stand out from the crowd. Coaching simply becomes more difficult. So providing meaningful coaching and career development—and ensuring that agents feel a fit with their roles—become more important than ever for contact centers to differentiate and retain talent.

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Improve Training & Career Progression to Retain Agents

To reduce employee churn in today's location agnostic work environment, contact centers need to identify how to address the following:

1. **Empowering agents by providing concrete goals and milestones** that guarantee title bumps, pay raises, and promotion opportunities.

2. **Giving agents the training programs and tools to help them reach their goals and milestones.** These tools could include some aspect of gamification where agents can see where they rank across peers. Double bonus if agents get access to 3rd party certification or credentials that are recognized outside of their current organization (such as Six Sigma).

As Indeed reported during the COVID pandemic, roles in contact centers such as Technical Support Specialists and Customer Service Reps have high employee churn because employees desire more opportunities for career advancement.
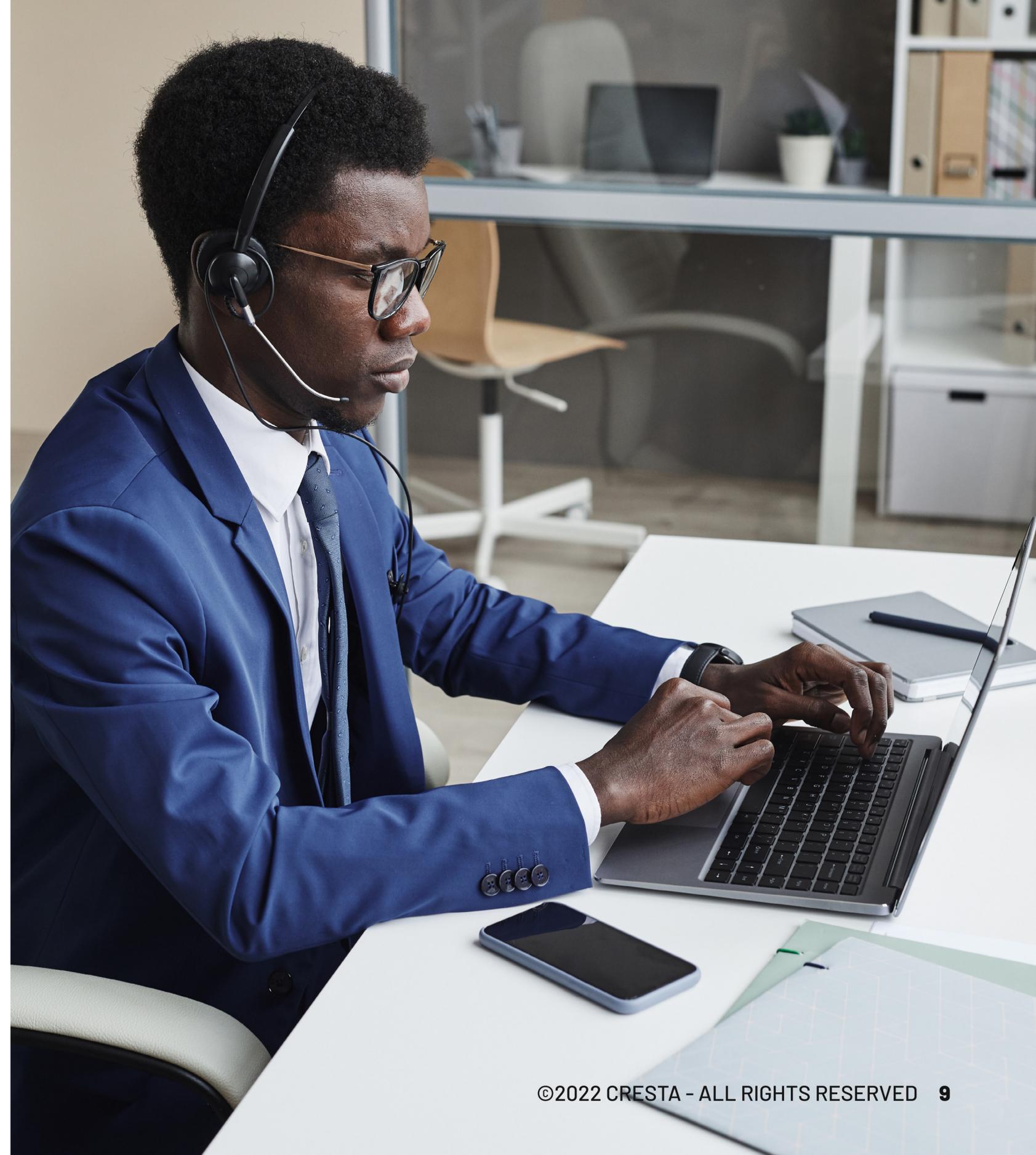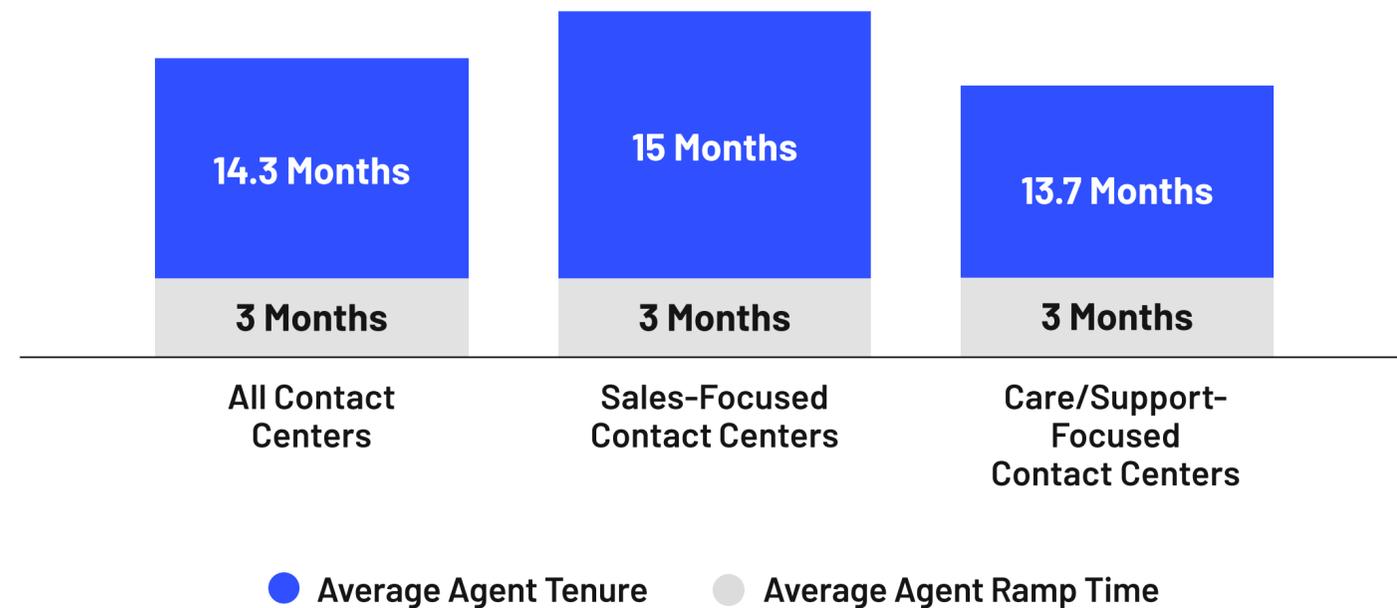
"We are developing a lot of engagement activities and an exciting career development program, which keep agents motivated and help them grow within the organization."

BPO OPERATIONS MANAGER

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A Multi-Month Process with Significant Upfront Investment

Based on our data, the average agent ramp time is three months, which is fairly constant across contact centers regardless of function (sales or care / support). This is a significant time investment with low ROI for employers, especially considering the short tenure of the average contact center agent.

FIGURE 3

Average agent ramp time compared to average contact center agent tenure.

All Contact Centers	Sales-Focused Contact Centers	Care/Support-Focused Contact Centers
14.3 Months	15 Months	13.7 Months
3 Months	3 Months	3 Months

● Average Agent Tenure   ○ Average Agent Ramp Time

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Average Performance and Consistency are Both Important During Agent Ramp

In examining new agent ramp, contact centers should consider improving both the level and the consistency of performance. In a world where every customer has social platforms to share their experiences and reviews, even a handful of bad experiences can affect a company's brand. Therefore, new agents need to be trained to provide high-quality experiences for every customer interaction. While agent performance is typically measured using the average of a particular KPI, consistency can be measured in the form of standard deviation for that KPI.

*As our analysis of **over six thousand agents** and **over 3.8 million conversations** show, it is significantly harder to improve consistency of performance compared to improving average performance.*

Month over month new agent improvement during ramp.

12.5% Improvement — Performance (KPI Average)

6.4% Improvement — Consistency (KPI Std Dev)
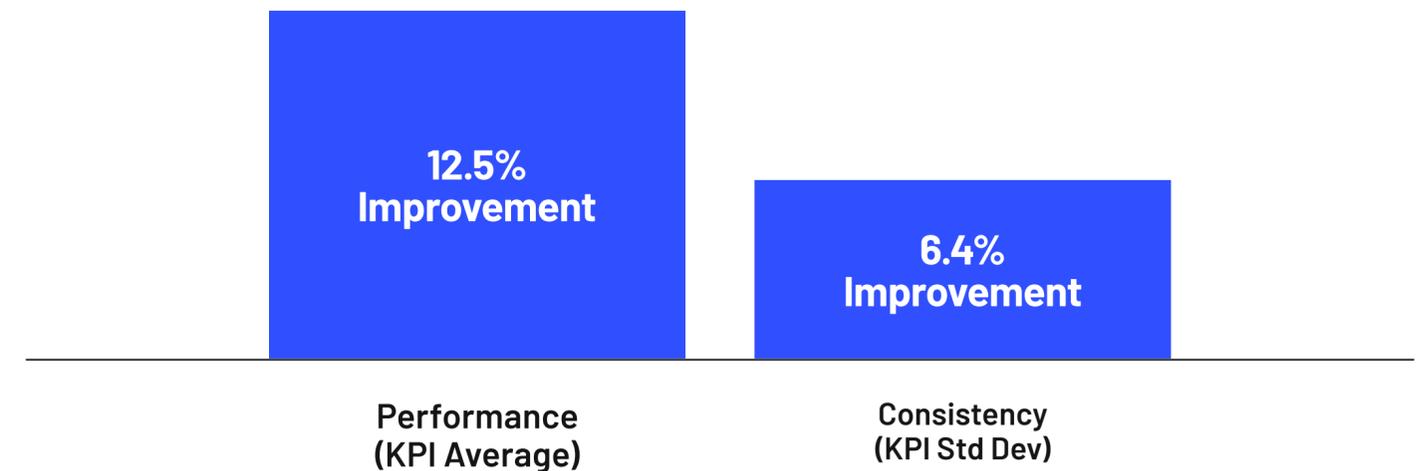
"I have a QA team that reviews calls and chats, but they can't review everyone."

SVP SALES & SUPPORT

"When you depend on human agents to exhibit the right behaviors, you're dealing with their day, their emotions, and the issues that they've had for the day, which may be good or bad. It's not consistent."

VP OF CONTACT CENTER

Remote Work Dynamics are Here to Stay

Since the beginning of the pandemic, businesses have experienced unprecedented levels of customer service and support calls. In 2020, Aragon Research predicted that 40% or more of the workforce will continue to work remotely permanently, long after the pandemic has disappeared. This means that many contact center agents will continue to be remote, which presents challenges for managers and supervisors—who must ensure that customer, employee, and partner satisfaction is not compromised.

"Going forward, contact center managers will need to adapt to the new reality that not all agents will be in the same center at the same time."
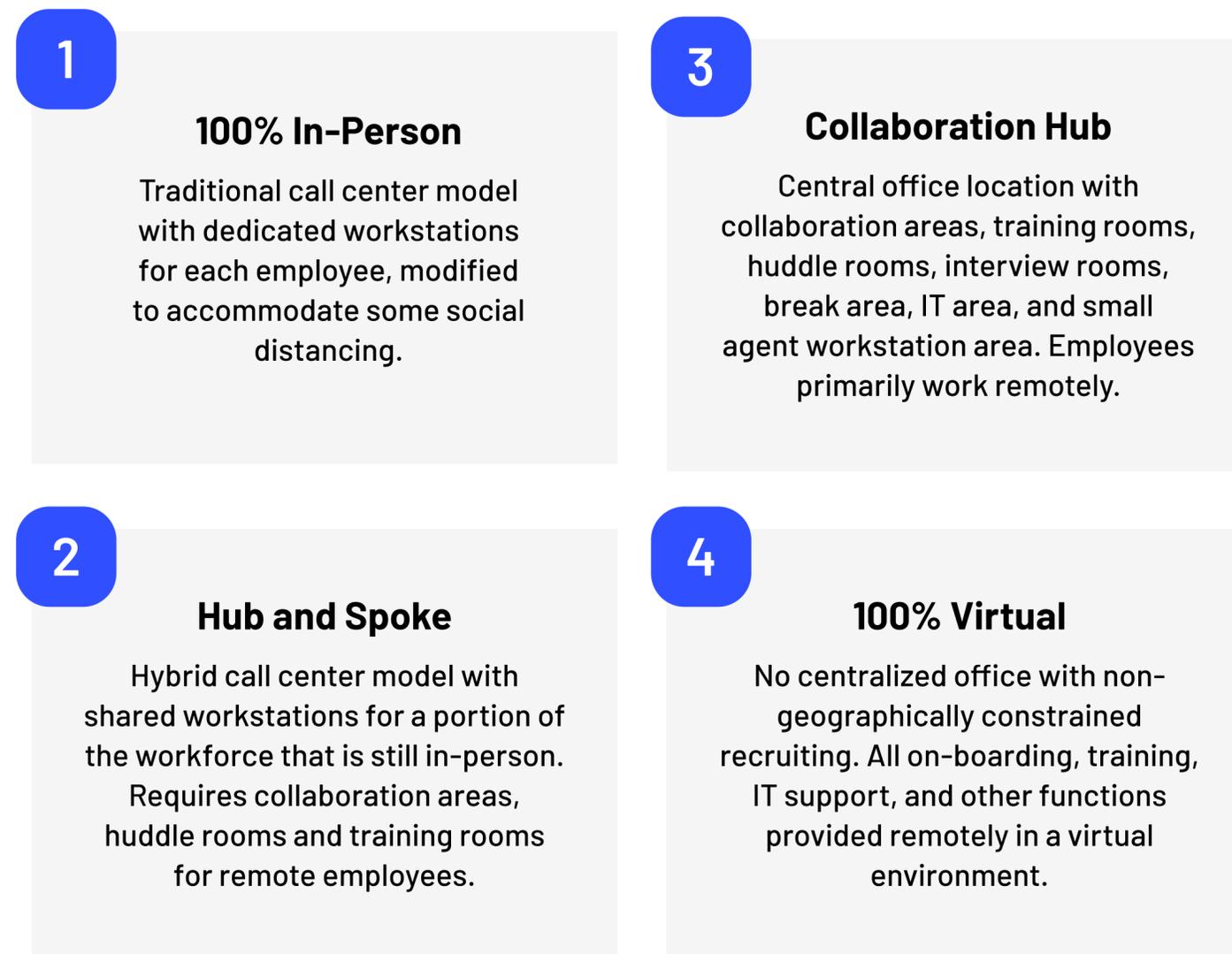
ARAGON RESEARCH

"I'm not going into the office anytime soon... where I live right now is a super far commute from the office."

SR. MANAGER, INSIDE SALES

FIGURE 5

Four Primary Workforce Models Post-COVID

Contact Centers have normalized around four primary workforce models ranging from completely remote to completely in person.

1

100% In-Person

Traditional call center model with dedicated workstations for each employee, modified to accommodate some social distancing.

3

Collaboration Hub

Central office location with collaboration areas, training rooms, huddle rooms, interview rooms, break area, IT area, and small agent workstation area. Employees primarily work remotely.

2

Hub and Spoke

Hybrid call center model with shared workstations for a portion of the workforce that is still in-person. Requires collaboration areas, huddle rooms and training rooms for remote employees.

4

100% Virtual

No centralized office with non-geographically constrained recruiting. All on-boarding, training, IT support, and other functions provided remotely in a virtual environment.

The Challenges with Remote Work Dynamics

Although remote work models bring many benefits for both contact center employers and agents...

Agent centric
- Work-life balance
- Carbon footprint / transportation costs
- Scheduling flexibility
- Fewer health risks

Employer centric
- Access to larger labor pool
- Reduced real estate expense
- Employee retention
- Headcount scalability

...They also introduce new challenges that make training, ramp, and knowledge sharing more difficult

Factors that negatively impact ramp
- Difficult onboarding logistics
- Distractions in home
- Lacks frequent & impactful team building opportunities
- Harder to manage and coach agents

Other factors
- Security risks
- Bandwidth reliability
- Equipment repair downtime

"Our contact center is fully remote now and we're still trying to figure out how do we train and coach our agents? How do we keep them engaged? How do we keep them focused?"

DIRECTOR, INSIDE SALES

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Introducing the Agent Lifecycle

What is the Agent Lifecycle?

Based on our benchmarking statistics, the current state of agent attrition and ramp is caught in a negative cycle as the Revolving Door Dilemma is exacerbated by remote work dynamics. Contact center leaders need an effective, systematic way to tackle this challenge. Enter the Agent Lifecycle, an intuitive framework contact center leaders can use to help to reduce agent attrition and stop the Revolving Door.

The Agent Lifecycle framework separates the experience of a contact center agent into three phases: Ramp, Performance, and Progression.

FIGURE 6

The Agent Lifecycle

AGENT RAMP
New agents onboard and ramp to reach the performance and targets of veteran agents
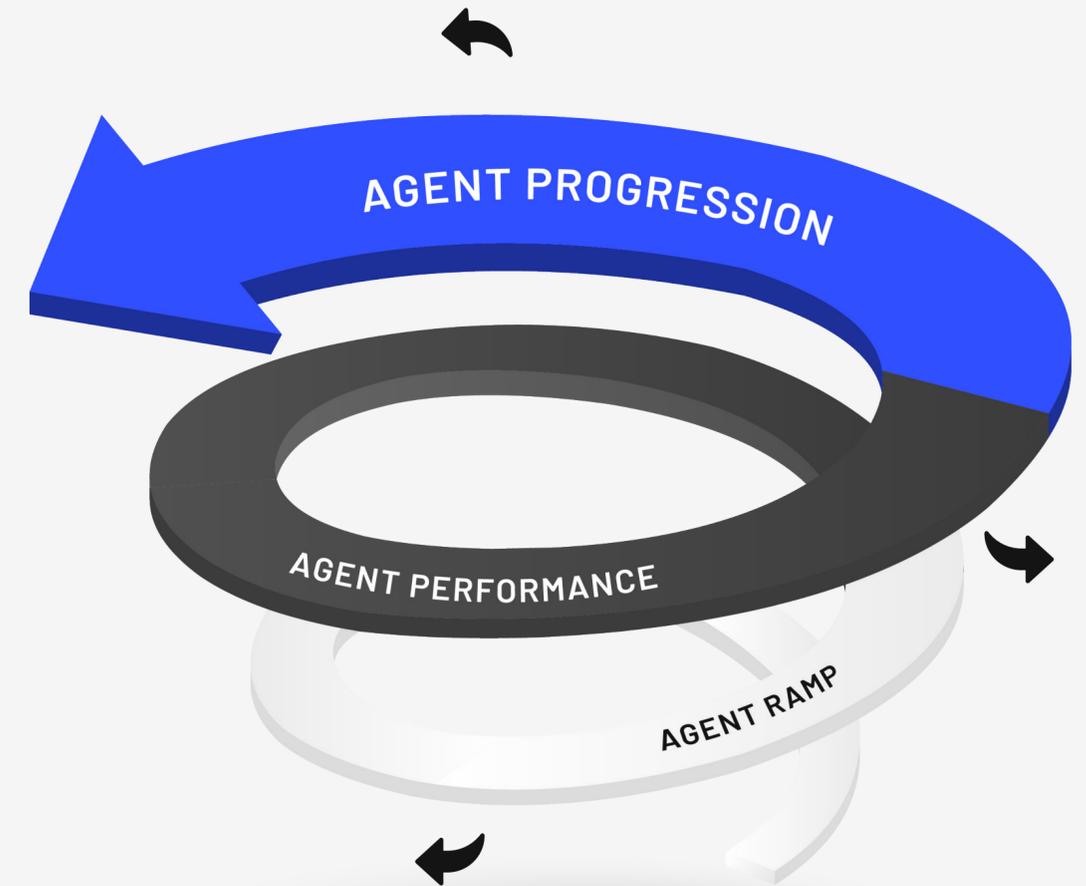
AGENT PERFORMANCE
Veteran agents continually improve and optimize their performance to become top performing agents

AGENT PROGRESSION
Top performing veteran agents progress in their careers on to managerial roles

AGENT CHURN
The causes of agent churn are distinct for each phase of the agent lifecycle

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Phases of the Agent Lifecycle

It is important to understand that each phase of Agent Lifecycle has different metrics for success and agent satisfaction and requires different forms of agent support from employers to minimize attrition.

1 Agent Ramp

Key contributors to agent satisfaction. A sense of job fit, both from a skills and cultural perspective. From a skills perspective, agents want to know they will have the proper training and tools to be successful in their new role. That they are able to ramp quickly, service customers, and hit the KPIs against which they are being measured.

Support required from employers to minimize attrition. Help new agents achieve early wins through personalized, in-the-moment coaching so that they can see themselves being successful in the role. Being good at the job increases agent confidence and satisfaction, and enables new agents to feel a sense of job fit in their role.

2 Agent Performance

Key contributors to agent satisfaction. Agents need to feel like they are continuously upskilling and are able to hit their targets so that they can maximize their total compensation and get more preferable shift schedules.

Support required from employers to minimize attrition. Effective tools and coaching are required to help agents consistently improve their KPIs and hit targets. Tools with some aspect of gamification where agents can see where they rank across peers are effective at boosting motivation and improving performance.

3 Agent Progression

Key contributors to agent satisfaction. Agent perception that they have a concrete and feasible path to progress in their careers.

Support required from employers to minimize attrition. Agents who feel they are not moving forward or unable to move forward from their current role are more likely to pursue jobs elsewhere. Companies need to help these agents see a clear career path, become interested in promotion opportunities, and feel their career path is achievable.

To do this, contact center managers must:

1. Have concrete achievement milestones that guarantee increases in compensation, title, and / or application opportunities for managerial roles.

2. Give agents the tools and support to help them reach these milestones. Bonus if agents get access to certification or credentials recognized outside of their current organization (e.g. Six Sigma).

Productive Agents Churn Less

We like doing what we're good at - it's in our human nature. This has always been intuitively obvious but now we have the data to back it up. Our analysis shows that top performing contact center agents have 12% lower attrition than bottom performing agents. So one of the ways to stop the Revolving Door is to turn every agent into a top performer. Thankfully, new technologies in contact center AI are coaching agents in real-time and improving agent performance, leading to reduced agent attrition. These new technologies assist in agent performance across all stages of the agent lifecycle, particularly in contact centers that are becoming increasingly remote.

*Top performing contact center agents have **12% lower monthly attrition** than bottom performing agents*

AI-Driven Real-Time Coaching solutions identify the best practices of top performers and share these best practices to all agents. They also offer visibility into 100% of conversations, surface insights, accelerate contact center QA & coaching, and most importantly, assist agents & impact conversations in real-time as customer interactions occur.

AI-Driven Real-Time Coaching that Increases Agent Performance

Real-Time Agent Assist:

AI suggested responses and knowledge base articles for agents based on the unique semantics (meaning) and flow (context) of each conversation

Dynamic Behavioral Coaching:

Personalized AI-generated behavioral coaching dynamically presented to agents at the right moments of every call based on the unique semantics (meaning) and flow (context) of each conversation

Agent Behavior Progression Monitoring:

Track and monitor agent adherence to desired behaviors over time across 100% of conversations

Live Conversation Monitoring & Alerts:

Live conversation feeds and dashboards to enable managers to coach and assist agents in-the-moment during customer conversations

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FIGURE 7

How real-time coaching impacts each phase of the agent lifecycle

	Agent Ramp	Agent Performance	Agent Progression
Real-Time Agent Assist	Suggestions for new hires based on responses and knowledge base searches of top performers	Improves agent efficiency by decreasing the time required to craft responses and search for knowledge base articles	
Dynamic Behavioral Coaching	Introduces desirable behaviors that companies look to drive with new hires	Reinforces desirable behaviors with repetition to improve consistency and KPI outcomes	Help agents reach KPI targets milestones for career progression
Agent Behavior Progression Monitoring	Gives managers a comprehensive view into behaviors of new agents	Simplifies QA and allows managers to focus on coaching for behaviors w/low adherence	Allows managers to identify top agents in terms of behaviors in all customer conversations
Live Conversation Monitoring & Review	Give new hires extra support in their new role	Agents engage with and retain information from real-time coaching more often than post-call coaching	Help agents reach KPI targets milestones for career progression

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Impacts of Real-Time Coaching on Attrition

After deploying AI-enabled real-time coaching agent assist tools such as Cresta, companies have seen reductions in average agent attrition of:

13%

22%

18%

SALES CONTACT CENTERS

CARE CONTACT CENTERS

OVERALL
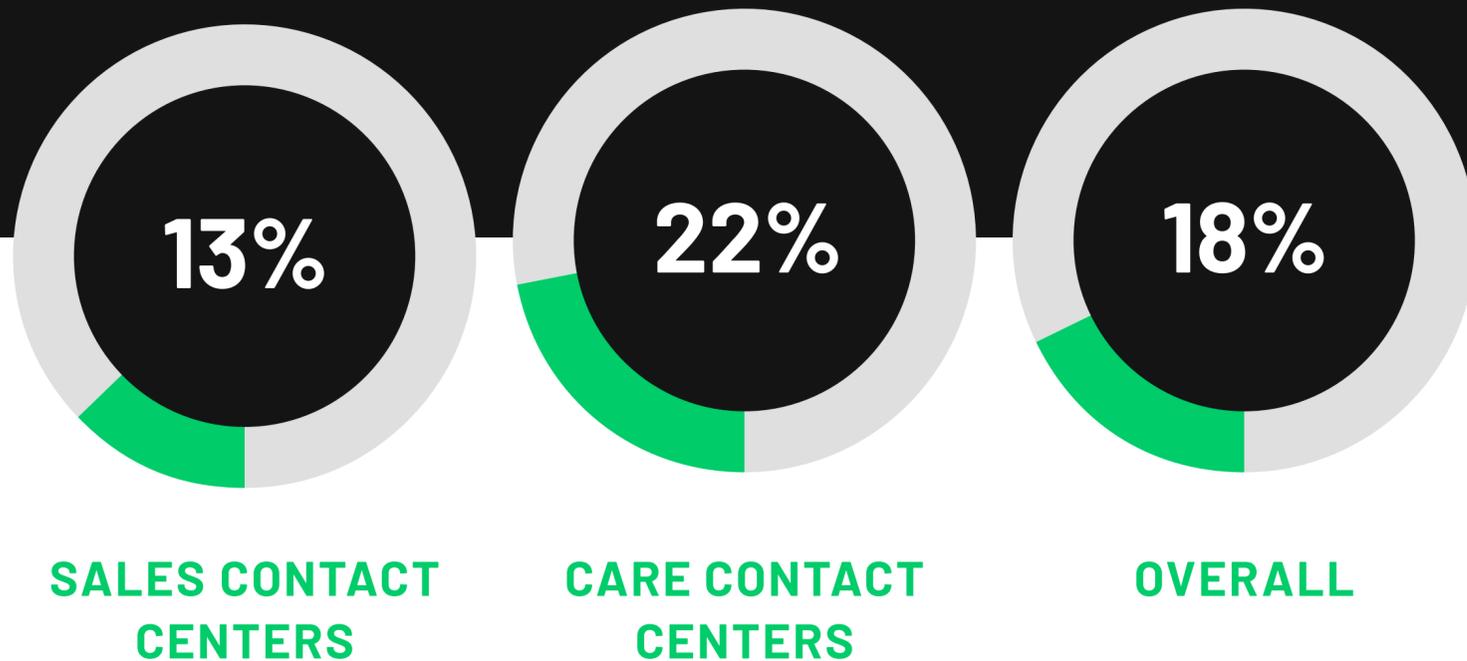
"My manager reminds me all the time to say things to customers and I never remember. But when Cresta reminds me during a customer conversation, I actually say it!"

SALES AGENT, INSIDE SALES

"Cut my onboarding time by 1/3... I get through chats 30% faster... Overall, it's been a really positive experience. It helps keep you on track and takes you through the four-step sales process that we use."

INBOUND SALES REP

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AI-Driven Coaching Reduces Ramp Time & Drives Productivity

Looking just at agent ramp, contact center AI solutions reduce agent ramp time and improve performance level and consistency.

In terms of ramp time, Cresta customers have been able to reduce the time it takes new agents to become fully productive from 3 months to 1 month. That's a 67% reduction in average ramp time.

Further A/B testing also revealed that new agents with **AI-driven coaching performed more than 30% better than their counterparts that weren't assisted**. This increase in performance (measured through AHT) was observed both in the level of performance (measured using the mean of AHT) and the consistency of performance (measured using standard deviation of AHT).

As new agents ramp more efficiently and consistently reach their targets, they'll feel more successful in their roles, which in turn will reduce agent attrition.

AI-driven lift in new agent performance during ramp period

(In Minutes)

- ● Agent Performance w/o AI
- ● Agent Performance w/ AI
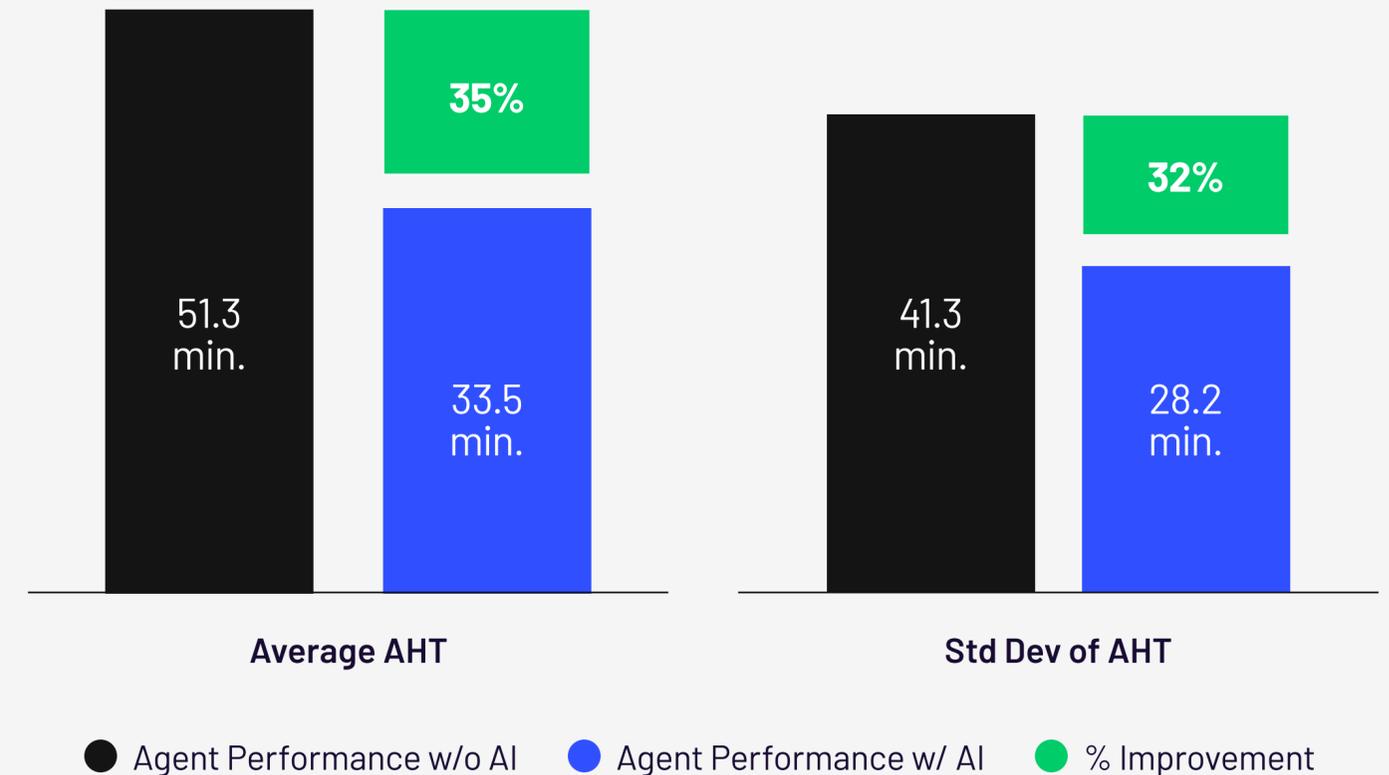- ● % Improvement

"Cresta enabled us to help our new team members get up to speed quicker. They ramped up more quickly and were higher performing quicker than we expected."

MICHAEL HOPKINS, SVP OF SALES AND SERVICE AT BLUE NILE

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Improve Agent Retention With a Holistic Lens Across the Agent Lifecycle

As competition for contact agents becomes more fierce in a post-covid world, agent attrition will continue to be a primary cost driver and focus for contact centers. So how do contact center executives and managers resolve the Revolving Door Dilemma?

It starts on Day 1 with each new agent. Agent enablement (ramp) and attrition are inextricably linked. As new agents are hired, employers must equip these agents with the tools to succeed in their role. This is especially important in remote working environments, where new hires can't learn as effectively from peers and don't experience as many benefits of community. Agents who ramp faster, and are properly enabled, feel in charge of their own growth and are less likely to churn.

Looking ahead, contact center leaders need to become more proactive in supporting their agents in each phase of the Agent Lifecycle.

Ramp

Starting with the day they are hired, set agents up for success by enabling faster and more efficient ramp

Performance

Upskill agents to meet their full potential and improve performance

Progression

Identify exceptional agents for career progression within the company, and set out a concrete plan with achievable milestones for promotion opportunities

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Increase Agent Satisfaction with AI-Driven Real-Time Coaching

Contact center leaders and agents agree that real-time coaching and agent progression monitoring achieve the three areas of support needed during the Agent Lifecycle and help with agent retention and ramp. In Cresta's latest round of customer surveys, over 90% of agents responded that they'd be disappointed if they could no longer use Cresta and 100% of supervisors responded that they'd be disappointed if their agents could no longer receive Cresta's real-time coaching.

100% of managers would be disappointed if they could no longer use Cresta Director (Cresta's agent behavior and progression monitoring tool), citing that Cresta Director helps managers provide live coaching to agents, identify coaching opportunities, and compile coaching opportunities.

Now more than ever, contact center leaders must look to real-time AI that complements agents rather than replace them in order to build an organization with industry leading agent attrition and ramp metrics.

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90% of agents responded that they'd be disappointed if they could no longer use Cresta.

100% of supervisors responded that they'd be disappointed if their agents could no longer receive Cresta's real-time coaching.

"Best invention ever, the bones in my fingers thank you."
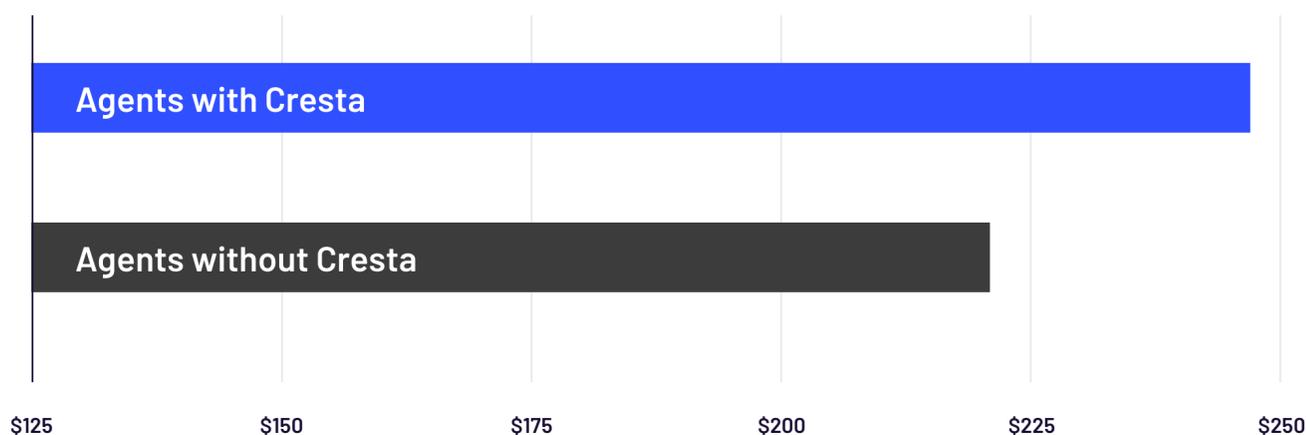
SALES CHAT AGENT

Leading Telecom Company

A leading telecom company turned to Cresta to meet growing demand, improve retention, and optimize its chat channel.

40 Sales Reps

12% Add'l Revenue per Conversation

Revenue per conversation

Agents with Cresta

Agents without Cresta

$125 $150 $175 $200 $225 $250

SALES
14%
Increase in conversion

RETENTION
22%
Reduction in cancellations

Fortune 500 SaaS Provider

This software provider sought to improve AHT, response time, and call volume.

KPI	One Month Performance Improvement
Average Handle Time	13.9%
Average Response Time	17.1%
Chats per Sales Rep	13%
Transactional Net Promoter Score	19.1%

Improved business performance:
Optimized and accelerated customer care operations in the first month

Happier and more engaged sales reps:
Real-time coaching and automation upskilled team and saved each seller 5 hours of typing per week.

5 hrs
TYPING SAVED PER WEEK

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Real-Time Coaching.
Real-Time Results.

No matter how your agents connect with your customers—by live chat or voice—Cresta's Expertise AI powers the Real-Time Coaching to provide a better overall customer experience. We track every customer interaction, learn the best practices of top performers, and amplify these behaviors using real-time assistance and coaching to all agents during every customer interaction.

By putting insights into action, Cresta reduces ramp time, reduces agent attrition, all while improving customer experience and delivering measurable ROI in weeks.

Request a demo

Contact Centers are challenged to deliver strong customer experience in the face of high attrition, poor training, and managers who can only review less than 3% of interactions. Cresta lets you drive better CX, ensure compliance, and unlock revenue opportunities with our AI-driven, real-time coaching platform. We provide dynamic, live guidance to every agent based on the best practices of your top performers, let managers see and track every conversation and agent progress, all while driving better business results. Cresta was born out of the Stanford AI Lab and is backed by Greylock Partners, Sequoia, and Andreessen Horowitz. We are proud to be working with companies like Intuit, Cox Communications, Adobe, Blue Nile and Dropbox.

Cresta Real-Time Agent Assist:

Provides AI-driven real-time coaching and guidance to help agents expertly navigate customer conversations for chat or voice. Taking the best practices of top performers and amplifying that across the team, agents get the support they need to deliver business outcomes and a world-class customer experience for sales, support, and retention scenarios.

Cresta Director:

Provides real-time visibility of 100% of conversations, so managers can quickly monitor individual and team performance against key behaviors. Managers can review and send feedback directly to agents. Reduces QA time, and drives immediate impact to agent performance.

Analytics:

Cresta ties team behavior to business metrics such as revenue and conversion performance. Understand the economics of adherence and where to focus efforts.

Cresta Chatbot:

Cresta's Real-time Expertise AI engine powers chatbots, saving your teams from having to deal with simple and routine customer inquiries and issues.

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