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Welcome to the May 2019 issue of the NACC In Queue newsletter!

Emotions @ Work: The Impact Of Emotional Labor In Call Centers

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Imagine these two scenarios:

Ricardo, a cable TV call center rep, struggles to remain calm while a customer explains that she "hates" the company and wants to cancel her service. Ricardo takes the full brunt of her frustration, enduring yelling and swearing.

Rachelle, a call center manager, receives final signatures for a major contract just minutes before she has to deliver news of a demotion to a member of her team.

At first glance, these situations reflect the common belief that we can "check our emotions at the door" in the workplace. While the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has been around for nearly 25 years, many professionals believe that emotions can be shut off like a faucet when we walk into the office or log into email. Many people would even say this is desirable, given the perception that emotions are a hindrance to our performance. Business is better served cold.

Here's the reality: the pursuit of an "emotion-free workplace" is a mirage, one that can undermine our performance every day. Each of us, consciously or not, experiences hundreds of emotions each day. Imagining that success in the workplace requires denying the existence of emotions is no more realistic than imagining that a driver can reach her destination by ignoring the weather, traffic, and time of day.

Call center managers and customer service reps aren't successful because they eliminate or ignore their emotions. Instead, they use their emotions wisely. Specifically, they employ the skills of EI: they **recognize** the reality of their emotional state and then **regulate** those feelings to achieve their goals. These individuals view their emotions as a tool for optimizing performance, not as a liability to be neutralized.

While customer service organizations can benefit from many EI skills, the notion of "emotional labor" – a term coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild – is particularly relevant. Emotional labor is "the work for which you are paid, which centrally involves trying to feel the right feelings for the job. This involves evoking and suppressing feelings." Put simply, when you express something different than what you actually feel, you are experiencing emotional labor.

When you work in a customer-facing role, you'll likely perform emotional labor throughout the day. Those in customer support roles will often need to express more pleasant emotions than what they actually feel in order to improve customer retention. Meanwhile, someone working in collections might 'put on' aggressive emotions to meet their receivables goals.

In these fields, emotional labor is part of the job. Enduring prolonged periods of emotional labor, however, creates the potential for disengagement and an environment where stress, anxiety and depression become overwhelming. Chronic stress has very real mental and physical consequences.

For example, over 70% of U.S. workers are now disengaged in their work. Research conducted at the Yale Center of Emotional Intelligence shows that the top negative emotions experienced by employees are frustration, stress, and overwhelmed. As of 2014, 75 to 90% of doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments. And, 1 in 20 adult Americans reported current depression symptoms. So, if we want to perform in the workplace, we need to grapple with our emotions.

One way to combat the stress that's endemic today is to identify the emotional labor your team is exerting, reducing it where possible and improving coping techniques where it's not. It all starts with **recognizing** your emotions, which includes the ability to recognize what you're feeling, label it accurately and determine its root cause.

To address emotional labor more fully (and to improve your EI overall), you also need to apply a second skill: **regulation**. This skill is focused on identifying what emotion best fits your objectives and then using techniques – that you can learn – to regulate your current emotion to reach the intended one. Notice how Rachelle, the call center manager, shifts from one positive emotion (excitement) to another (quietly supportive). Here, we see that regulation isn't just about going from unpleasant to pleasant, but is more generally about optimizing your emotional state for the situation.

Consider the emotional labor that Ricardo, the cable TV customer service rep, must expend each day, as he keeps his cool in the face of customer complaints and abuse. Without EI skills, Ricardo could be at risk for depression and/or substance abuse. According to Rajita Sinha, Ph.D. at the Yale University School of Medicine, "stress is a well-known risk factor in the development of addiction and in addiction relapse vulnerability."

As Ricardo develops his EI skills, he gets accustomed to recognizing his anger and frustration and using regulation strategies to make it easier to perform the emotional labor necessary to provide excellent service. He learns deep breathing techniques. He reframes customer complaints to better empathize with their difficulties. And he imagines his "best self" so that he can be the type of professional that he aspires to be.

Taken together, these skills reduce the amount of emotional labor that Ricardo experiences, reducing his stress, improving his health, and making him a better rep. As is typically the case when acquiring new skillsets, the real work for Ricardo is all about practice (and more practice). The Mood Meter app, downloadable from an app store, is a perfect first step to support your efforts at identifying emotions. And, if you're interested in a complete EI learning program, you can consider the Emotion Life Lab we offer, targeted specifically at the busy professional (see www.ojilifelab.com).

It's no exaggeration to say that nearly everything we have been taught – mostly implicitly – about emotions is wrong. Life is saturated with emotion, not just when you're stuck in traffic. Emotional intelligence can be the decisive skillset when helping colleagues settle a dispute or satisfy customers. It turns out that emotions and EI may be your most potent tools.

The Maturing Work-At-Home Model: Bright Spots & Challenges

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Pearls Of Wisdom

"You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough."

~ Mae West

Reports From NACC

NACC has been burning the midnight oil and typing until our fingers are sore to bring out reports to our members. Each is listed below. If you are interested to see what we are writing about, click on the links below and download the executive summary of each. If you like what you see, join the NACC so that you can view these reports and others that will be coming out soon on our website. These reports will ensure that you know the latest trends in the industry.

- [Research Note: Aspect Software Enters Merger Agreement with Vector Capital: January 2019](#)
- [U.S. Contact Center 2019 Four Important Trends To Watch: December 2018](#)
- [Research Note: Verint Announces Intelligent Virtual Assistant and Chatbot-Driven Self-Service Capabilities: March 2018](#)
- [Research Note: The Return of Industry Employment Data Third Quarter 2017 Reveals Strong Industry Growth: February 2018](#)
- [Research Note: NICE Introduces CXone - Fully Integrated Open Cloud Contact Center Platform: August 2017](#)
- [Research Note: Verint Introduces Knowledge Management Professional Knowledge Management for the Masses: July 2017](#)
- [NICE Introduces Nexidia Analytics: Omni-Channel Analytics For The Contact Center: January 2017](#)
- [Text Analytics Market Update: April 2016](#)
- [HireIQ Candidate Optimizer Disrupts The Status Quo, Powers Revolution In Customer Service Human Capital Management: May 2015](#)
- [Verint Jumps Into The Gamification Game: April 2015](#)
- [Research Update - Strong 4th Quarter Tops Year Of Growth For The 2014 U.S. Contact Center Industry Employment: March 2015](#)
- [Geo-Fencing: Expanding The Contact Center Boundaries? November 2014](#)
- [Neural Phonetic Speech Analytics: The Brains behind Nexidia Interactions Analytics 11.0: July 2014](#)
- [Nexidia Pushes Speech Analytics Envelope with Nexidia Interaction Analytics 11.0: July 2014](#)
- [The Time is Now: Workforce Optimization Becomes Reality for the Small-to-Medium-Sized Contact Center: July 2013](#)
- [Finding the Silver Lining in the Contact Center Cloud: May 2013](#)
- [The At-Home Agent Movement - A Benchmark Quantitative Analysis: January 2013](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2012 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2012 Data](#)
- [Contact Center Mobility Study: May 2012](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2011 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 3rd Quarter 2011 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2011 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2011 Data](#)



The work at home model is mature in the contact center world, with a solid 10 years of significant utilization under our belts. It is considered low lying fruit for ROI, in that businesses have the same clear visibility of output regardless of where people sit (in house or at home) and it appeals to so many people. This is not the case with many other enterprise roles, but for highly transactional jobs like many contact center experiences, working from home is - for the most part - a big, easy win.

The 2019 Remote Working Benchmarking Survey shows that the average mix of in house vs. at home reps is 70% in house and 30% at home, with some companies deploying 100% of their reps at home, others just 5%. So, there's a wide span of mix at home, driven predominantly by business objectives.

With the maturity of the business model, here are shifting trends we are seeing from our hundreds of customers who pass through our doors (via work at home conferences and custom consulting):

- 1. Business objectives for work at home have changed.** Up until just a few years ago, real estate cost savings/reduction of facility footprint with the primary driver for most companies in deploying the work at home model. Today, with 3% unemployment, the key objective is to offer rich benefit packages to attract and retain people, and this includes working from home. This is a big shift.
- 2. Deployment strategies have changed.** The model is mature, the technology works. Companies can get more creative now with deployment strategies. They now include large part-time work forces that office at their homes, people that work some days in office and some at home, pop-up satellite offices in desirable hiring markets for purpose of new hire training/early day culture building.
- 3. More support functions and managers have moved home.** For years, many companies asked managers to remain in office, along with support functions, while customer experience reps went home. Why? For most, there was no good reason, except to avoid additional change. Today, after many trials and tribulations, many managers/supervisors and support functions work from home for at least part of their schedule, to effectively experience what their reps are experiencing.
- 4. Performance results remain higher than in house for most.** Top of the list is employee satisfaction, which is higher than in house for 98% of companies utilizing the model. That's directly connected to retention, and attendance, along with high value metrics (production, customer satisfaction, selling).

Below are a few areas where a small percentage of companies experience challenges, and questions I would and do pose to get to root cause:

- 1.10% of companies report that medical leave (FMLA predominantly) is higher with home-based reps than in office.** Relevant questions to ask to get to root cause on this include: a) what is your rep occupancy level running? Are you burning people out, and they are reaching for medical time off? b) Are you moving people home that slack off in office? In other words, are you choosing people to work from home who don't have the discipline to work from home?
- 2. 5% of companies report higher turnover vs. in house.** a) Are you using temporary workers or a staffing agency for placement? b) Is your new hire training ineffective, causing people to exit early? c) Do your remote people connect to the company as easily and as often as in-house employees, in all respects, including socializing, knowledge sharing, supervisor interactions?

If you want to learn more about what others are doing with their work at home models, join Michele Rowan and Customer Contact strategies at an upcoming work at home conference: <https://www.customercontactstrategies.com/2019-advanced-remote-working-strategies-workshops/>

- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2010 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 3rd Quarter 2010 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2010 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2010 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2009 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 3rd Quarter 2009 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2009 Data](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2009 Data](#)
- [North American Contact Center Industry 2008-2009: The Year in Review and a Look Ahead](#)
- [State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2008 Data](#)



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