

The Right Leadership Style for a Call Center to Achieve High Customer Satisfaction and Agent Engagement

The right leadership style for a call center or team depends on the needs and situation of the business.

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Many leaders believe what leadership style that works for one call center, line of business, team, or situation may not work for another. In other words, the right leadership style for a call center or team depends on the needs and situation of the business. Furthermore, many suggest the right leadership style also depends on the goals of the call center and the strengths of its employees, processes, policies, and technologies.



Good leadership is not only about senior managers or the vice president of a call center. Effective leaders can be found at all levels and use different leadership styles. While there are many leadership styles used in call centers, some of the most common styles that leaders use are servant, transformational, participative, transactional, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles. Furthermore, it is common for a manager to have a dominant leadership style that they apply in most situations.

At SQM, we have analyzed the dominant leadership styles used based on benchmarking FCR, Csats, and agent engagement performance with over 500 leading North American call centers. The most interesting finding is that the dominant leadership styles in call centers with the highest CX delivery and agent engagement are servant, participative and transformational. However, it should be mentioned that any leadership style can be effective, although in most cases, only in the short term. Obviously, no one leadership style is appropriate for all situations. However, the best leaders understand their employees and know which leadership style or element of a style is right for different agent personalities and situations.

1. Servant Leader

Likely to be Effective

The servant leadership style is about serving agents who report to them. Put differently, servant leadership relies on the concept that leaders exist to serve agents instead of the other way

around. As a result, servant leaders show empathy, are followers, value agents' input, and encourage collective decision-making.

Also, a servant leader focuses on meeting agent needs and their development. Furthermore, unlike traditional hierarchical structures, servant leaders use a power-sharing business model that encourages collaboration and trust among the employees on the team. Servant leadership style is likely to be effective for either a 1st or 2nd quartile Csat performing call centers. However, for this style to be effective, it requires a long-term commitment and low agent and management turnover.

2. Participative Leader

Likely to be Effective

The participative leadership style (sometimes called democratic leadership) is when a leader asks for input from their agents and considers feedback from their team members before making a decision. The participative leadership style is one of the most prevalent style used by our call center client managers. The participative leadership style works best when agents are skilled, engaged, and above average Csat performers. The participative style is known to help increase agent engagement, job satisfaction, and Csat and is likely to be effective for any level of call center Csat performance.

3. Transformational Leader

Sometimes Effective

The transformational leadership style leader is recognized as a change agent with effective strategic and critical thinking ability. In addition, they have strong communication skills and can create and articulate a clear call center vision, mission, and CX goals. A transformational leader is a manager who motivates and inspires (transforms) agents to achieve extraordinary Csat outcomes and ensures they have the necessary resources to be successful. Furthermore, managers who exhibit transformational leadership often have solid values and ideals. Also, this leadership style motivates agents to act in ways that support the greater good rather than the agent's self-interest.

Unfortunately, most call center transformation efforts do not meet expectations or fail. Therefore, the transformational style is only sometimes effective for consistently improving Csat due to the difficulty of transforming a low CX performing call center.

4. Transactional Leader

Sometimes Effective

The transactional leadership style is where a leader relies on rewards and punishments to achieve optimal agent performance. These leaders focus on results, efficiency, and performance rather than agent relationships. They also tend to be directive and action orientated. The leader establishes goals, and agents know how they will be rewarded for achievement. The transactional leadership style is often seen in average or lower-performing call centers for CX delivery and agent engagement. However, the transactional leadership style is sometimes

effective and the right style for 3rd or 4th quartile Csat performing call centers that want to improve CX delivery quickly.

5. Autocratic Leader

Mostly Ineffective

The autocratic leadership style (also known as authoritarian leaders) directs and controls most activities without much input from agents who report to them. The most effective autocratic leaders lead with a clear sense of purpose and direction. This style can be the right leadership style when there are time constraints to complete tasks or if agents require a great deal of supervision due to low Csat performance after being coached or trained. The autocratic leader can quickly take charge and dictate policies and procedures to agents.

Furthermore, in the long term, the autocratic leadership style is mostly ineffective for driving Csat improvement and sustaining high Csat performance.

6. Laissez-Faire Leader

Mostly Ineffective

The laissez-faire leadership style represents the absence of leadership. As the french phrase implies, a laissez-faire leader takes a hands-off approach to managing agents. For example, this leadership style is often unaware of what the agents who report to them on what they are doing. Furthermore, this leadership style believes its agents are trained and self-motivated to provide high Csat. Moreover, teamwork and agent empowerment is essential. Finally, this style gives agents the authority to make decisions. However, a laissez-faire leadership style leader must know when performance issues arise and when to step in.

Given the increasing agent turnover and call complexity, the laissez-faire leadership style is mostly ineffective at delivering long-term Csat and employee engagement. Where this style has worked in some situations, the call center is performing at the 1st or 2nd quartile Csat level has seasoned agents, and only on a short-term basis.

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