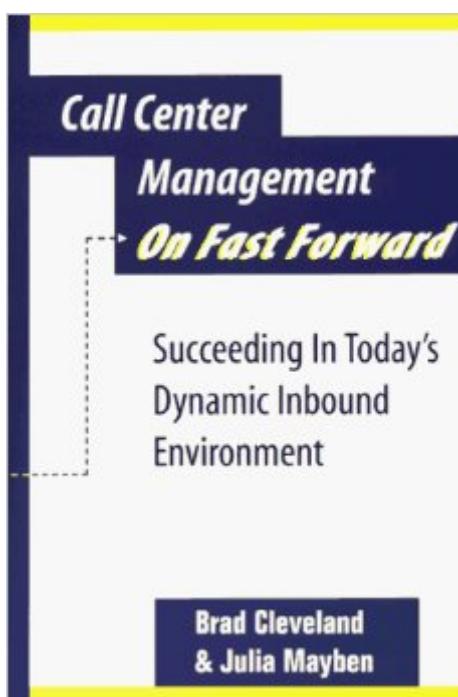


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Call Center Management On Fast Forward: Succeeding In Today's Dynamic Inbound Environment (1st Edition)



Synopsis

This is the only book available today that provides a very readable, step-by-step guide for managing an incoming call center. The book combines theory with practical advice and is filled with over 100 charts and graphs, several case studies and an extensive glossary and index.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've generally been an IT Director and Project Manager, so I read this book to get a better idea of my customers' needs. I was pretty excited to discover that there's at least one good summary of what call centers do and how they do it. For my own sake--and perhaps yours--here's my summary of Brad and Julia's summary:1. Incoming call center management is the art of having the right number of skilled people and supporting resources in place at the right times to handle an accurately forecasted workload, at service level and with quality.2. Though average call load may be predictable, calls arrive randomly--which means that they often bunch up.3. A service level is defined as "X percent of calls answered in Y seconds", not as "X percent answered" or "Average Speed of Answer". (The ASA is skewed by the bad times when calls bunch up.) Abandonment rates matter, too, but fixing abandonment problems usually means fixing service levels.4. Service level and quality don't conflict. If you try to fix service level with poor quality, it comes back to bite you with more calls and demoralized reps.5. A good forecasted call load--including talk time, after-call work, and volume--is critical for budgeting people and circuits. Often, a good forecast should predict load by the half hour, using previous data, knowledge of upcoming plans, and good judgment.6. To

determine staffing needs, use a variation of the Erlang C formula. Its input is the number of reps, number of callers forecasted, and the time to serve each caller; its output is a prediction of waiting time. (Even better, add an input for response time, and you'll get the percentage who'll wait longer than that!) If agents have different skills, you'll need forecasts and calculations for each set of agents.⁷ More staff, less waiting, fewer phone lines for people on hold. Less staff, more waiting, more phone lines. Formulas exist for phone lines, too.⁸ Not everyone scheduled is always working on customer service. Schedule accordingly. Be clever about work schedules to get the right number working at the right time. Service level results tell you whether you got it right.⁹ If you have too few reps on duty, queues get long (service level goes down), more circuits are needed, and customers get frustrated, sometimes abandoning the call. If you have too many reps on duty, you spend too much paying for them to wait.¹⁰ Give senior managers good reports, but make sure they understand the points above.¹¹ Monitor the number of calls in the queue and the longest current wait. Service level and other metrics tell more about the past than the present. Be ready with plans for unexpected load (reassigning, rerouting, delay announcements, busy signals).¹² There are lots of tools and graphs to measure aspects of quality. Use them to identify root causes, not beat your employees. Reps should adhere to schedules, and do good work. Use monitoring capabilities to coach. Measuring based on "calls per hour" is unreliable, and invites cheating.¹³ Customers are getting more demanding, automated systems are taking the easy calls, so reps have to be better trained and more skilled.¹⁴ Create a good environment that uses technology well. The book was written in 1997, and I don't know whether it's been updated. The authors have some commentary about email-based, web-based, and CTI-based systems, but the next edition might want to say more about the similarities and differences between those and the traditional call center. Overall, I'm happy to understand more about the math and science behind this discipline. As another reviewer commented, it's clear that IT Help Desks have something to learn from the Call Center experience.

I am writing this review from the perspective of an IT consultant who sets up processes and procedures for service delivery. A call center and an IT help desk are two very different animals. This book is written for call center managers, yet should be required reading for IT help desk managers and staff. As someone who has set up IT help desks and has also provided application support to call centers I often wondered why typical call centers were so well managed and IT help desks, for the most part, are not. This book goes a long way towards explaining the dichotomy by showing how call center professionals approach service. It contains a wealth of information that should be carefully read by IT help desk professionals who want to implement a world-class

operation. The planning and management framework section of this book starts on the right note: service levels. This is followed by clear explanations of quantitative factors such as call load forecasting, staffing and service level metrics. Some things that set this book apart are the sections on quality and productivity, and new technologies. The authors go well beyond how to effectively manage call centers by discussing how to integrate new technologies and exploit technology to provide the best possible service. I also liked the section on characteristics of best managed call centers - the information provides an effective roadmap to excellence and benchmarking tool. Although I am not familiar with the entire body of technical literature on call center management I have to believe that this is one of the most complete books on the subject. I am familiar with the body of literature on IT help desks and can attest that this book needs to be included in the libraries and required reading lists of all IT help desk professionals.

A great book for anyone who works in the inbound call center environment! It's takes the science of call center and transforms it into an easy to read guide. This book will help everyone from senior management to front line service reps gain a better understanding and appreciation of the dynamic call center environment. In the call center world, we often get caught up in the technology and lose site of the fundamentals - this book puts is all back in perspective. Good Luck.

First, a disclaimer -- I am Director of Incoming Calls Management Institute, which also employs the authors of the book, so I should be considered a biased reviewer. But I'm also in a unique place to know who's buying the book and how they're using it. The book provides a detailed, step-by-step plan for managing an incoming call center. Since it's debut last September, the book has become part of university, college and corporate training programs in over 15 countries. It is "required reading" for the management teams in numerous call centers, and is currently being translated into several other languages.

When call center managers ask me which book will give the most insight into forecasting, scheduling and inbound call management, I tell them to read this one before any other. This book is by far the best in its class.

I am a Sales Support Engineer and interface with many call center environments as part of my job. Call Center Management on Fast Forward works for three basic reasons. 1) The authors know what information is relevant to the discussion of call center management. 2) The authors know how to

communicate this information. 3) The authors approach the subject at a level of depth and detail that makes you feel like you have taken a good bite out of the subject - enough to chew on but not choke on. After you have swallowed the concepts they offer you can use the book as guide to point you in a dozen other areas of specialization or interest. But I bet you will still consistently come back to Call Center Management on Fast Forward for reference, overview, or just to remind yourself how a good book can be written.

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