



How do I operate effectively in a remote environment?

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*The 2020 pandemic imposed a new reality on contact centers turning its business model upside down. While initially thought to be a short-term solution to an unexpected crisis, remote work is here to stay. **Forrester research** [<https://go.forrester.com/blogs/business-trends-2021/>] revealed remote work is expected to spike by 300% by the end of 2021 while another survey [<https://www.customercontactweekdigital.com/customer-experience/whitepapers/november-market-study-future-of-the-contact-center-a-forecast>] found that only 7% of leaders anticipate returning to the traditional contact center model through 2025.*

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contact center pain points *Tim Schuh*
[<https://www.linkedin.com/in/tschuh/>] , *President-Digital Strategy, HGS Digital* [<https://hgs.cx//digital/>] and *Marco Colaiacovo*

[<https://www.linkedin.com/in/marcocolaiacovo/>] , *Senior Director-Work-at-Home* [<https://hgs.cx//work-at-home/>] , *North America, HGS*, share their insights on the need for contact centers to adapt to a new remote environment to support both employees and customers.

What is driving current contact center challenges in operating in a remote environment?

Marco Colaiacovo: The key to the challenge today is the word “environment”. The virtual environment we’re working in is different and requires a different attribute set. Most organizations were thrust into a virtual work environment in March of 2020 without actually understanding how to best manage and communicate in this new business model.

Tim Schuh: Today’s remote work environment *is* different which is resulting in changing expectations for our leaders. Those issues that leaders are facing are more complex with a more demanding labor force and accelerated technology-driven interactions.

What is the Impact of operating in a remote environment?

Schuh: Initially we experienced a honeymoon period in which attrition improved as employees soldiered on in a new and uncomfortable environment. But now 18 months on, we’re beginning to see a pretty significant movement back toward a more demanding workforce with


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with their feet in either supporting those organizations which operate well in a remote environment or moving on if they are not being valued in this new working model. For those organizations unable to successfully adapt to this remote environment, the long-term, downstream impacts will be that customer experience will suffer significantly which will ultimately drive brand erosion.

Colaiacovo: Over the past 18 months, we've experienced our best retention results. We had employees move from a sector that was COVID-impacted to a contact center sector that seemed to be COVID-proof where we were able to grow throughout the year. There was an ability for people to work in an environment that suited them. However, for those organizations that don't think the workforce has changed, think again. Workers are demanding some flexibility and the ability to work remotely on their own terms. This is a new concept and something that will resonate throughout the next few years and onward. Those organizations that will not be able to effectively provide work-life balance and a work environment that provides employees with flexibility are going to experience a lot of retention issues. Employees will move on to other organizations that can meet their needs. This is simply going to be the new normal, the way that the world will move.

What top three steps can contact centers take to more effectively operate in a remote environment?

Colaiacovo: First, place people in the environment they're supporting. Don't try and support someone  with someone working in a brick-and-mortar environment. They won't

on training, training, training! You can't provide enough training on how to manage remotely or run effective virtual meetings. We have to be very cognizant that the simple things have changed for remote employees. Third, promote from within the virtual environment. It's really difficult to parachute someone in who has no experience effectively managing people remotely. As organizations, our whole mindset needs to change, and we have to start doing these little things to really make an impact in the future.

Schuh: Everyone who operates in either a direct line management role or support role in a contact center has been operating in a completely foreign environment in the last 18 months. That's why the first and most important step contact centers can take is to deeply invest in training. To help make everyone more successful, you've got to teach people how to effectively interact and communicate with each other in a remote environment. Second, understand that you have a need for personal interaction which can serve to drive a positive

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mortar environment or via a virtual meeting, take steps to meet employees' needs for human interaction. Third, embrace digital technological disruption. For example, intelligent quality assurance

driven by artificial intelligence can improve the process of listening to, monitoring and evaluating staff performance. Analytics can identify and monitor how your contact center is performing in the aggregate.

The HGS Digital differentiator

Schuh: Our deep capabilities around BPM operational execution, coupled with our digital expertise and legacy heritage in effective work-at-home strategies are key differentiators. As a company, we didn't first think about getting into the work-at-home business in March of 2020. We already had more than 1,000 of our employees working successfully in different geographies in a work-at-home environment. When it came time to transition 35,000 employees to work-at-home in a four-week timeframe, all we did was grow the scale of what we'd already been doing. We leveraged the best practices that we had invested years in creating.

Colaiacovo: COVID didn't force us to create a program; it allowed us to expand our foundation. What we bring is a global presence in the work-at-home world. We can offer clients not only a brick-and-mortar solution in different geos but a home agent solution using a consistent approach. Our ability to ramp up quickly was due to the fact that we already had invested in training material and the right methodologies to transition to a work-at-home environment. It really is about having that maturity, that globalization, and the ability kind of approach at the beginning.

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Colaiacono: Organizations need to understand and accept the new reality of work. Where and how people are working has changed and

so have the expectations of workers and leaders. A traditional recruiting methodology won't work in the virtual world. Those organizations that don't embrace it will be left behind. The ability for us to grow, mature and evolve means we're going to have to do things differently. Whether it's work-at-home, brick-and-mortar or a hybrid model, organizations will need to embrace the changes to start planning for the future.

Schuh: We have very high adversity quotient which means we're able to deal with change very effectively and we keep going. We continue to adopt that mantra because if you're standing still, you're moving backwards. Acknowledge that the circumstances that led us to where we are today presents an opportunity. Embrace it, accelerate through it and use all the human and technology tools at your disposal to charge forward.

*Is your contact center remote work ready? Learn how you can optimize your work-at-home environment **Contact an HGS Digital expert** [<https://hgs.cx//digital/>] to learn how you can leverage digital solutions to ramp up your remote contact center operation.*

Tags: Contact center, contact center performance, work training

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