

TTI SUCCESS INSIGHTS®

Taking A Communications Company “Hire”

A US-Based Operations Director Uncovers a Predictable Method to Hire the Best Talent for the Business

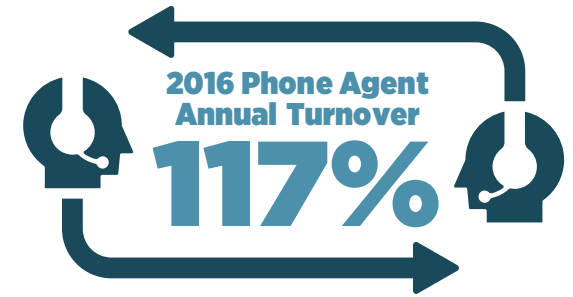
Christina had a lot on her plate.

She had been at a Communications company for four years and truly adored her job. And she brought a ton of value to the position. Christina is exceptionally people-oriented, she often brought fresh ideas for solving big business problems and brought along the whole team with her. And she did so while delivering results to the business.

This US-based communications company offers a 24x7 telephone answering service and a high-touch inbound call center service. The organization is well known and won awards for service and leadership in the industry. The key differentiator among their customers was this company's ability to create exceptionally positive human interactions. But due to market conditions and other factors, they were facing a challenge that threatened to slow their progress.

Christina's role as the Director of Operations was to efficiently and effectively staff the answering service. However, in 2016, phone agent annual turnover was at an astonishing 117%, with new team member loss at 70%. Since Christina's primary role is to adequately run this answering service, the high turnover meant that Christina and her

team had challenges ensuring there were enough front-line staff working at all times. To make it even worse, the hiring and training costs in 2016 were a staggering \$184,000 USD.



The Team Pitches In

Christina used her exceptional people skills and strong team abilities to work with long-term team members to pitch in and help cover the phones. Not only did other phone agents help, but members of the leadership team were filling in the gaps and answering the phones as well. While the team was eager to help, the long-term effects of working week after week were taking their toll. Team members were being taken away for other tasks, feeling exhausted, and becoming less productive. To compound the effort, the leadership team was not able to get to their own workload.

While the sense of comradery was high initially, as time wore on, employee morale and customer satisfaction took a steep down turn. Christina appreciated the efforts of the team, but needed to take swift action to solve the problem.

The First Step

Christina started hiring new people in a frenzy. “Beggars can’t be choosers,” she told the HR team as they prepared to bring in candidates. They posted ads on Monster, Indeed and Craigslist seeking out additional phone agents. Time was of the essence, so Christina lead the team to lower required score on the new hire test and began conducting 20-minute interviews to qualify more people than her usual 60-minute interviews. Christina was anxious to get people in and alleviate the pressure put on her and peers team.

Through her efforts, Christina was able to get people applying for the positions rapidly. She was pleased and felt that she was on the right path to solving the staff shortage, the customer dissatisfaction, and the productivity of the team. The leadership team agreed and applauded her progress. All of them assumed that once the new team members were trained, they would be back to business as usual.

The interviews progressed, tests were given, and very quickly, the company began hiring as many as five new team members in one day. Those new team members went through training and started working on the call floor.

Short Staffed, Again

After a few weeks of hiring and training, it became clear that the initial strategy to solve the business problem was not working. Hiring was easy. But Christina realized that keeping those new team members was the next major challenge.

After doing some initial analysis, Christina discovered that over 70% of the new team members stayed for an average of three weeks. These new team members would resign after they were fully trained on company procedures and protocols. To compound the issue, the initial problem had not been resolved. Christina became frustrated with the findings.



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As such, she pulled back and began to think through a new way to deliver the results.

After evaluating the problem, Christina uncovered that she was hiring people who were not the right fit for the job. These people were motivated, intelligent, and friendly, but simply missing the subtle characteristics and soft skills to be successful in the role. So she decided to stop thinking in the short-term and find a long-term solution to her problem.

Awareness of All Stars

Christina analyzed her approach and delivered a revised recommendation to the leadership team. She recommended that she source talent management consultants to help find the appropriate talent that would solve for the capacity and turnover problem in the call center. After reviewing a few companies, Christina decided to work with The Advancement Company.

The first step in the process was to figure out which characteristics and traits were found in the current successful phone agents. Christina arranged a half-day discussion with those all-star agents to discuss their perception of the job. She asked questions like “Why is the job enjoyable?” and “What characteristics do you think you need in order to be successful at this job?”



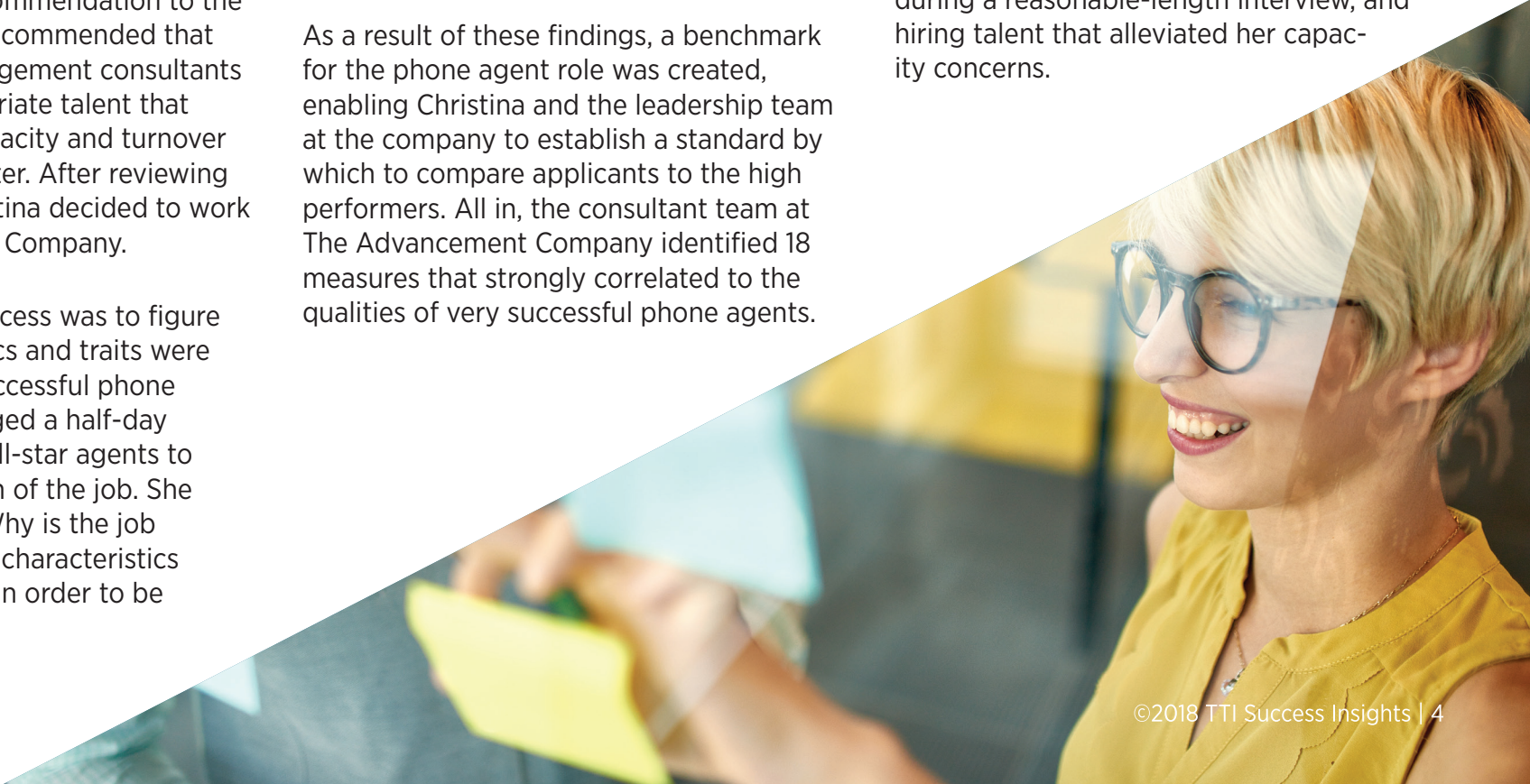
The Advancement Company identified 18 measures that strongly correlated to the qualities of VERY SUCCESSFUL phone agents.

Next, Christina and the team sought out meaningful ways to measure which applicants shared these all-star characteristics. To do so, the consultant sent out an assessment that measured the behaviors, driving forces, values, and soft skills of all phone agents. It became very clear that successful phone agents shared different qualities than the least successful phone agents. Although there were a few ah-ha moments, the correlations confirmed the takeaways from the half-day discussion.

As a result of these findings, a benchmark for the phone agent role was created, enabling Christina and the leadership team at the company to establish a standard by which to compare applicants to the high performers. All in, the consultant team at The Advancement Company identified 18 measures that strongly correlated to the qualities of very successful phone agents.

Christina decided to not take any more chances, and that all candidates must meet at least 10 of the 18 characteristics.

Christina, in working with The Advancement Company, invested in a system called Talent Management Plus (TMP) supplied by TTI Success Insights. This tool enabled the team at the company to screen all applicants against the benchmark for the role. Immediately, Christina started seeing candidates in a new light, asking critical questions during a reasonable-length interview, and hiring talent that alleviated her capacity concerns.





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Fine Tuning the Process

As time progressed and more people were hired, Christina gained additional insights and decided to make adjustments to the benchmark to become even more consistent with what she was seeking in phone agent candidates.

Christina’s next step was to create a detailed “person description” for the type of person who is right for the role by focusing on the key traits of the ideal candidates, including using specific words that resonate with a particular trait. Although this technique moved Christina out of her comfort zone, she found that more higher quality candidates came through the pipeline because they were attracted to the description. Simultaneously, the revised descriptions turned away people who were the wrong fit from the beginning.

Instead of relaxing her skills testing standards, Christina and the team at the company made the strategic decision to increase the test standards from where they were before they had the capacity issue. In doing so, they were confident they could hire right the first time.

To increase the efficiency of the interviewing process, Christina enabled a strict process where group interviews took place with candidates instead of one-on-one interviews; this enabled the team to interview several candidates together as a group.

Although the progress was going well, Christina recognized that she also had a business to run. To increase her capacity, Christina delegated the initial screening steps to a recruiting firm that executed the assessment analysis, skills testing, and phone screens.

The Outcome

The amount of changes made to the process the second time around were bearing incredible fruit. Turnover reduced from 117% in 2016 to 61% in 2017, and the percentage of team loss dropped drastically from 70% to 39%, respectively. Doing so allowed Christina's peers and direct reports to work regular hours and complete their own responsibilities.

In addition to the productivity increases, there were also cost savings. Christina's strategic choices lead to reductions in the cost of overtime and training by 57% in one year. Team Member Satisfaction Score increased 65 points in one year and client satisfaction and retention increased in the same time frame.

And the leadership team at the communications company is even more confident in Christina's ability to make good decisions for the business than they were before the problem arose. The company will continue to use the combination of evolved job descriptions, TMP analysis, recruiting resources and group interviewing.

One thing is certain: Christina's future at the communications company is bright.

This story is based on a real person at a real US-based company. The client has chosen to remain anonymous.

Turnover

2016 117%

2017 61%

Team Loss

2016 70%

2017 39%

