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Title: Colorado's Service Center Approach

Jurisdiction: Colorado

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DESCRIPTION OF THE INNOVATION

Within the last fifteen years the Colorado Secretary of State's office has migrated from a paper document filing model to a strictly electronic document filing model. Gone are the days when workloads can be measured by how high the stacks of paper were on each employee's desk. By leveraging technology we have made the filing process faster, easier, and cheaper for customers and staff. As a result of this transformation our customer needs changed too. Customers who traditionally visited our office in person or corresponded by mail now require more technical advice and direction via phone, email, and website. Speed became a more significant issue; because filings are now handled in real-time, our customers' expectations in terms of call resolution time have sped up as well. Finally, as budgets continue to dwindle and resources become scarce we needed to find a creative way to provide more service to our customers without adding operational cost. **To meet these and other needs we implemented an innovative solution by converting our traditional call center into a comprehensive Service Center model.**

The Colorado Secretary of State Service Center supports both internal and external customers weekdays from 8am to 5pm. Agents are trained to respond to a broad range of business and non-business related inquiries and regularly respond to over 500 calls per day. These calls cover filings for Agency programs including Business, Uniform Commercial Code, Notary, Charitable, Campaign Finance, Elections and Document Certification programs. Agents also respond to emails and letters, review previously filed documents for accuracy, assist with training, provide data maintenance and tracking, cross-train, and schedule and conduct notary training. Possibly the most important tasks added as a result of the evolution to a Service Center is the testing of new or improved Agency filing systems from both an external and internal perspective. All of these activities ensure best possible service to external and internal customers of the Service Center.   Agents are proficient in all online and paper-filed processes accepted by our agency and routinely provide both domestic and foreign customers with technical advice and instruction. When the customer question or concern is not related to our agency, agents use our web site, links and accumulated experience to quickly provide an answer or direction. We are always available and do our best to help our callers find answers to their questions, whether or not they pertain to this office, and our customers regularly tell us how much they appreciate it. For example, one recent customer relayed the following:

> "It so happens that I also work for a public sector organization (City & County of Denver). So I'm accustomed to the stereotypes about public sector employees that we hear regarding how slow and apathetic we are. I confess that I did not expect such prompt and helpful service from your office, simply because of the volume I know you deal with. I'm sure the State has its share of employees who fit the stereotype of 'public servants' - we do too. But maybe because of that, it's important that we acknowledge those who are dedicated to great, responsive, accurate, and thorough service such as what I experienced yesterday and today. Bravo! And thank you!"

Another customer shared:

> "Your office is awesome! No other government agency answers the phones like you guys. And you always have an answer for me. Thanks for being so helpful."

The Service Center implementation consisted of five components all working together to create efficiencies, broaden our service offerings and better serve our customers:

1. **Personnel Restructuring**

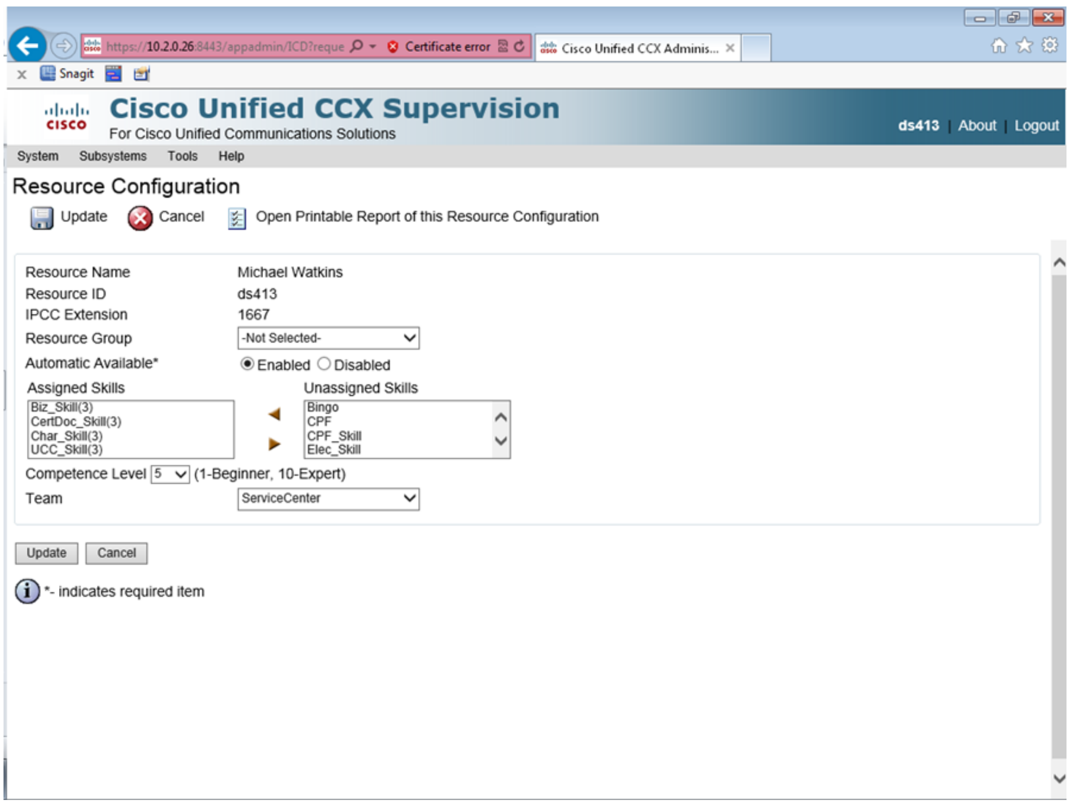
   Personnel restructuring was the first step. A new expanded structure was put in place with the Service Center growing from seven to ten agent-technicians and one manager. Also, within the ten agent structure, new expertise levels were established ranging from Technician I to Technician III. This allows for proper escalation practices and ensures adequate agent support is available.

2. **Queue Management (Cisco)**

   Implementing a queue management tool ensures proper call routing and allows us to match agent experience with the needs of the customer. By matching agent proficiencies to caller inquiry types we are able to manage volume by agent and decrease the time it takes to address customer inquiries. We also use the tool to free agents for other tasks such as training, return calls, email responses, and system testing.

   Customers are presented an opportunity to choose a queue that is likely to fit the topic of their call. The call is forwarded to a subject matter expert (SME).   The call queue can be adjusted by an administrator to ensure that the right resources are being assigned in the most efficient way. This adjustment is accomplished by changing, adding, or removing skill levels per agent. Our goal is for all agents to ultimately be rated at Skill Level 5. This level represents a high level of proficiency on a given topic or division. Skill level 3 usually represents a trainee, however, that level can also be used to channel certain call queues to the higher level agents, allowing an agent time to work on a project or train. In such a situation, the Level 3 agents would still answer calls, but only if the remaining Level 5 agents were all on a call. Callers are also offered the option to leave a voicemail. The voicemail goes to a common extension checked by all agents, who can then respond promptly.

Below is an example of how resources are configured by assigning skills and competence levels.



3. Wall Board Tool

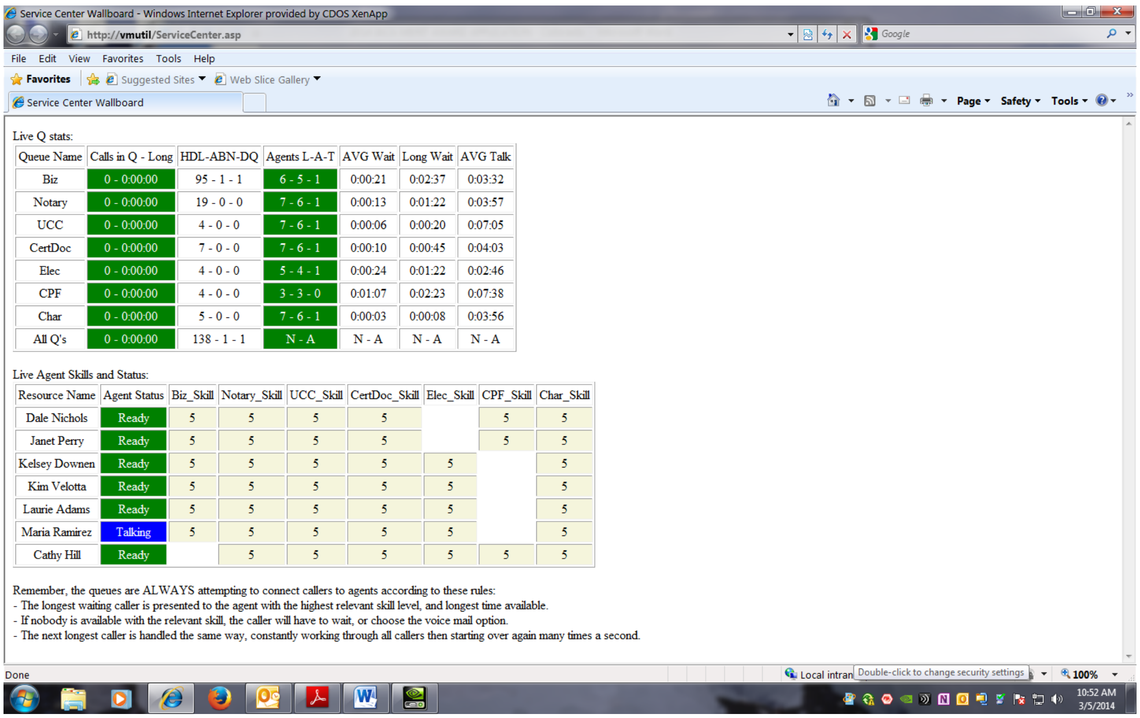
A collaborative effort with our agency IT Division delivered an innovative tool, the "information wall board", which is now used to provide important data to the agents, management, and supported programs. The wall board is a 60-inch LCD screen mounted on the service center wall and represents real time activity (updated every 5 seconds) in the call queue plus data regarding calls. The information is presented in columns.

Starting from left to right the columns provide the following information:

- **Queue Name**: Name showing in each row represents the choice made by the caller. The last row, All Q's, presents totals (or highest values as appropriate) of the columns and rows above.
- **Calls in Q-Long:** Numbers of calls and the wait time for the oldest call in that queue.
- **HDL-ABN-DQ:** Number of calls handled (HDL), abandoned/hung up (ABN) and calls that de-queued themselves (DQ) which means they opted to leave a voice mail.
- **Agents L-A-T:** Number of agents logged in to the phone system (L), the number available to take a call (A) and the number of agents talking (T).
- **AVG Wait:** This represents an average time a caller waited on hold today.
- **Long Wait:** This represents the most amount of time a caller waited on hold today.
- **AVG Talk:** This represents the average talk time of all phone calls today.

As the number of waiting calls in any particular queue increase, the color of that queue changes incrementally from green to yellow and then red. As calls decrease the queue colors return to yellow and then green. Queue colors are also determined by time intervals. For example, should customers remain on hold in queue for over two minutes, the color changes to yellow. Should a customer remain on hold over five minutes the queue cell turns to red. This provides a quick understanding of how well we are responding to customers and allows us to quickly adjust to changing volumes.

The same information is provided for all agency employees through an internal wall board that can be viewed on their monitors. See example below:


Service Center Wallboard - Windows Internet Explorer provided by CDOS XenApp

http://vmutil/ServiceCenter.asp

Live Q stats:

Queue Name	Calls in Q - Long	HDL-ABN-DQ	Agents L-A-T	AVG Wait	Long Wait	AVG Talk
Biz	0 - 0:00:00	95 - 1 - 1	6 - 5 - 1	0:00:21	0:02:37	0:03:32
Notary	0 - 0:00:00	19 - 0 - 0	7 - 6 - 1	0:00:13	0:01:22	0:03:57
UCC	0 - 0:00:00	4 - 0 - 0	7 - 6 - 1	0:00:06	0:00:20	0:07:05
CertDoc	0 - 0:00:00	7 - 0 - 0	7 - 6 - 1	0:00:10	0:00:45	0:04:03
Elec	0 - 0:00:00	4 - 0 - 0	5 - 4 - 1	0:00:24	0:01:22	0:02:46
CPF	0 - 0:00:00	4 - 0 - 0	3 - 3 - 0	0:01:07	0:02:23	0:07:38
Char	0 - 0:00:00	5 - 0 - 0	7 - 6 - 1	0:00:03	0:00:08	0:03:56
All Q's	0 - 0:00:00	138 - 1 - 1	N - A	N - A	N - A	N - A

Live Agent Skills and Status:

Resource Name	Agent Status	Biz_Skill	Notary_Skill	UCC_Skill	CertDoc_Skill	Elec_Skill	CPF_Skill	Char_Skill
Dale Nichols	Ready	5	5	5	5		5	5
Janet Perry	Ready	5	5	5	5		5	5
Kelsey Downen	Ready	5	5	5	5	5		5
Kim Velotta	Ready	5	5	5	5	5		5
Laurie Adams	Ready	5	5	5	5	5		5
Maria Ramirez	Talking	5	5	5	5	5		5
Cathy Hill	Ready		5	5	5	5	5	5

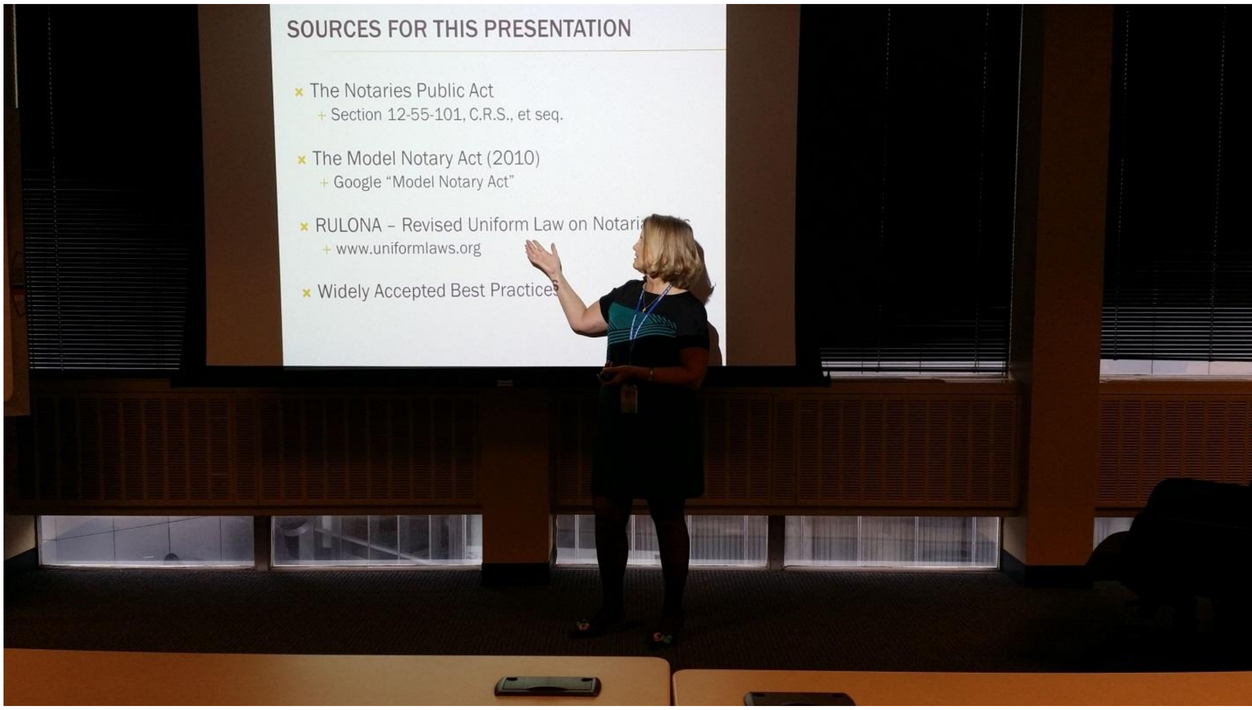
Remember, the queues are ALWAYS attempting to connect callers to agents according to these rules:
- The longest waiting caller is presented to the agent with the highest relevant skill level, and longest time available.
- If nobody is available with the relevant skill, the caller will have to wait, or choose the voice mail option.
- The next longest caller is handled the same way, constantly working through all callers then starting over again many times a second.

The wall board provides valuable information at a quick glance to service center agents, managers, and senior leadership and more importantly drives customer focused behaviors. In the example above you can also see the current status of agents in terms of skill level and specific program knowledge.

4. Cross-Training

Cross-training is a critical component of our Service Center model – and it is what sets our Service Center apart from other support organizations. Through cross-training, we provide opportunities to support internal and external customers by training personnel to perform tasks that are not traditionally part of a call center. We continuously train Service Center agents not only on the program specific knowledge necessary to answer basic questions, but also on program functions. This allows agents to greatly expand on the service concept by increasing the internal capacity of our programs to serve the customer. A great example of this is within the Notary Program. We have trained Service Center agents to conduct a four hour notary class monthly. This has freed up Notary Program employees to address higher level customer concerns, conduct strategic planning, and work on future projects thus improving the overall efficiencies within the division. And the knowledge that comes from conducting the training course makes our Service Center agents better equipped to handle customer inquiries by phone.

The picture below shows one of our Service Center agents conducting a monthly notary class:



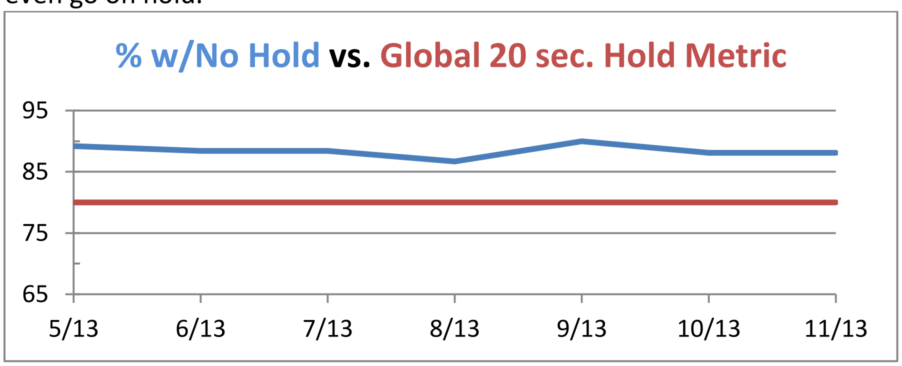
5. Program Support Transitions

The Colorado Secretary of State underwent a major departmental merger in November 2010. We applied experience gained from that merger to our current transition of internal customer support and employees to the Service Center. In an effort to ease employee transition, increase internal customer confidence and enhance communication, we hold weekly "Synch" meetings.   Meeting attendees include division supervisors and managers and applicable Service Center agents. These meetings have proven to be very successful and are ongoing. Another positive experiment in the transition process was employee immersion training. As the Service Center continues to take on new tasks and duties, we will create an Action Plan that applies lessons learned from the current transition experience. This includes speeding up the transition period in an effort to apply ongoing training and ease employee tension and the current use of Synch meetings.

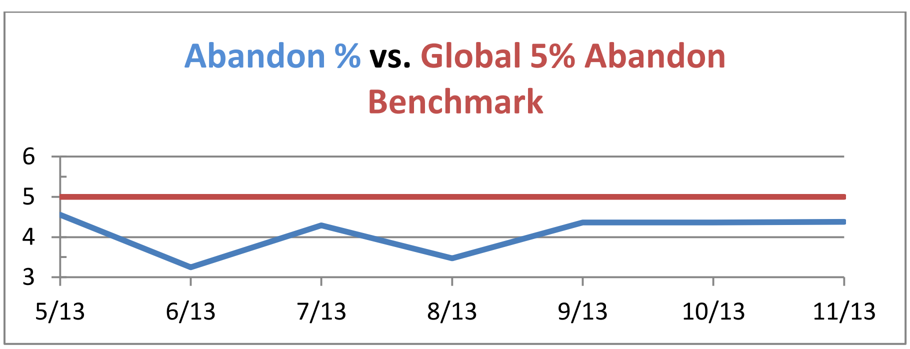
RESULTS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

There have been many positive results from this innovative approach to customer service, including:

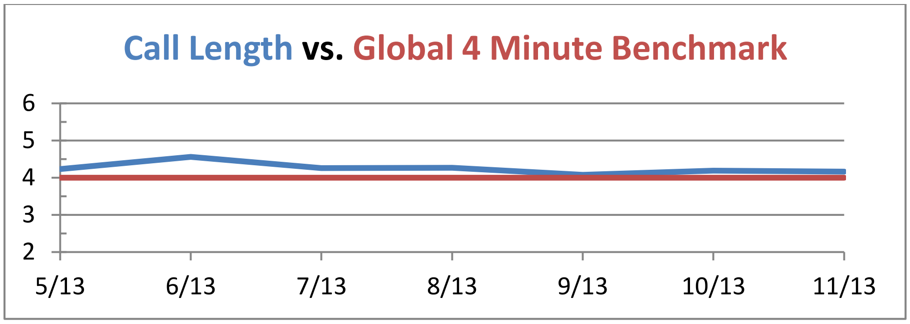
- Agency program managers now have more time to focus on daily work without routine phone and email interruption – this has led to better strategic planning and more creative and innovative ideas.
- Exceeding global call metrics – International Finance Corporation (a World Bank Group) publishes call center performance metrics as a part of global best practices.
    - The global benchmark for Service Level (percentage of calls received that are answered by a human agent within a certain timeframe) is 80% of calls answered within 20 seconds. Since implementation our Service Center model has far exceeded this metric. We answer 88% of all calls before they even go on hold.



    - Abandoned Rate is the number of calls that are abandoned while the customer is waiting for a human agent. The benchmark expressed as a percentage of all calls received is 5% to 8%. Our Service Center has an abandoned rate of 4%.



    - Call Duration is the amount of time spent speaking to customers on the telephone. Even with the complexity of the calls our Center handles call duration is only seconds above the global benchmark of 4 minutes.



- Increased cross-training opportunities.
- Improved Service Center agent morale.
- More efficient scheduling of agents based on skill levels and customer needs.
- Agents freed to participate in system testing, project development, and other program support activities.
- Improved quality of candidates for internal position openings.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. As on-line filing services were incorporated into our daily operations it was apparent that customers needed technical advice and direction. Up to this point, each Division within the Secretary of State typically answered their own calls and correspondence. As the agency continued to bring new processes online, answering calls and correspondence quickly became inefficient for each divisional program to handle separately. We learned that a centralized service center whose technicians were trained in multiple agency programs and online processes would not only provide a better customer experience, but also allow division staff to become more task oriented and find time to enhance and improve their respective areas.
2. We learned that we could accelerate program-specific learning by positioning agents who are learning the same topics close to one another. The ability to consult with their neighboring agent on more complex customer issues not only led to more consistent answers, but also allowed them to gain confidence knowing that help was not far away.
3. Incorporating agents into the development process provides better internal acceptance, a smoother transition, and a better end product. For example, the wall board tool represents many agent review cycles where comments and suggestions in terms of content and display where incorporated into the end product. This led to agents being excited about getting the wall board tool in place rather than creating anxiety or negative feelings about performance measures being displayed so openly.
4. Employees like to be challenged. By providing opportunities to learn new skills and contribute to the overall success of our organization, employee morale, sense of belonging, and productivity greatly improved.
5. Service Center training increases employee career opportunities. Service Center employees are so well trained in all aspects of the agency that they are sought after resources by other

divisions and programs. Since transition, 2 Service Center employees have competed for job openings within the agency and were ultimately hired.

6. Planning for the transition from a Call Center model to a Service Center model is paramount. With a complete plan in place the transition of a program or service has a much higher probability of success. Below is a list of high-level tasks we considered before implementation:
    a. Need for transition – identify the drivers, motivators and stakeholders involved in the service transition
    b. Service specifications - Type and volume of activity, skillset and knowledge base required, service volume cycles through time
    c. Special tools used in existing process that will need to be replicated at the Service Center
    d. Timing/Communication – when the transition can take place with minimal service impact, who needs to know about the transition, what do they need to know, when do they need to know and how often through the transition will communication be needed
    e. Identify Service Center personnel training requirements to support the incoming service
    f. Risk mitigation activities – what could go wrong, what the probability and impact might be and ideas on how to mitigate the risk
    g. Day of Transition – Checklist of tasks in order of precedence, who is performing what transition tasks, timing of task start and finish
    h. Post-Transition review – what went well, outstanding issues
    i. Service owner communication – programs can range from mostly hands off to needing weekly meetings to provide two-way information exchange concerning updates/changes to the program. Planning for this step will go a long way toward making sure the program gets what it needs from the service transition and making sure the Service Center has what it needs to successfully represent the program being transitioned
7. Since the initial restructure, we have learned that a tiered structure within the Service Center can improve customer service. A tiered structure will further enhance customer support by centralizing call and email support functions and creating an escalation process for advanced calls and emails. This will also reduce the amount of time the Call Center Manager spends on escalated calls and other administrative duties. The 2-person Tier II team receives escalated calls, responds to most incoming emails, return customer calls as necessary, and maintains daily scheduling, verifications and other administrative duties. Other administrative duties could include training, travel, event reimbursement, and data maintenance and tracking. Relieving some of these duties may allow the remaining 8 call center employees to focus on responding to incoming calls, process testing, and other duties as assigned. As most current call center employees have received training in responding to escalated calls and emails, any one of them could act as backup should either one or both of the Tier II group be away from their area or out of the office.