

# The Four Foundations of World Class Call Centers

## *A Guide to Effective Call Center Management*

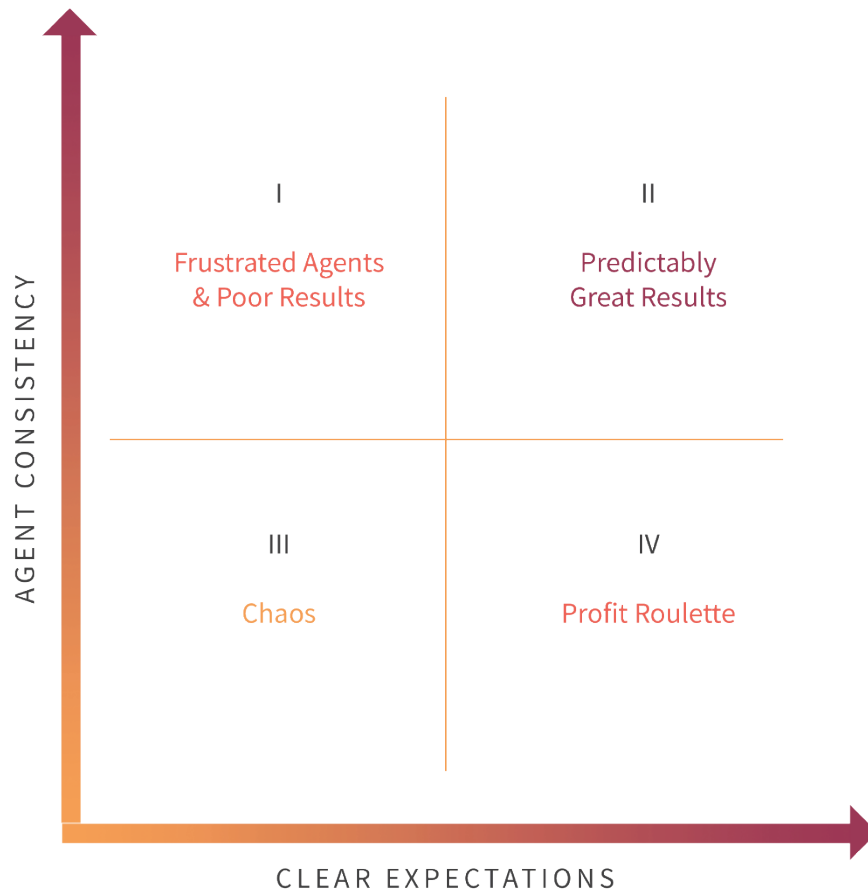
The foundations of effective call center management can be broken down into four core categories:

- I. Clear Expectations
- II. Consistency
- III. Effective Coaching
- IV. Exception Reporting

As a senior manager in charge of a call center, recognizing how your organization measures up in these four areas is critical to determining the optimal strategy and tactics to improve the performance of your call center as a whole.

Measuring ourselves on each of the first two categories will make it clear what interventions are most immediately required. The second two categories show us what skills and tools need to be in place to create those improvements. These categories can be structured in a matrix framework to demonstrate how best to manage these aspects of your business, and to achieve optimal results. First let's look at Expectations & Consistency.

### The Relationship of Expectations & Consistency



**Clear Expectations** refers to your internal processes and rules. **Agent Consistency** is the measure of how often your agents live up to those expectations.

In **Quadrant I**, where agent consistency is high but there are no clear expectations set for them, the variability is the fault of the company for not being clear on what the agent should be doing. Great agents in this category will be consistently great, and poor ones consistently poor. Even if you have a strong coaching culture in place (which we'll explore in the next matrix relationship), you have little ability to create positive change since there is no clear set of goals to strive for. Without clear expectations / processes / rules in place, you can't give the poorly performing agents useful guidance. This leads great agents to burn out, as they feel (correctly) that the company doesn't know what it wants, and so can't provide the conditions for them to operate at their best.

**Quadrant II** is the optimal spot for your organization - you have clearly defined expectations in place, and your agents consistently meet those expectations. The main goal here is to ensure that there is no slippage into one of the other quadrants, and to keep doing what's working. This is the perfect time to start experimenting with your sales processes to try to find optimizations there (i.e. if you currently require agents to ask 3 "closing questions" per call, what happens if that increases to 4, or decreases to 2? What happens if you change the order of your agents' script?). Running experiments like this with a small sample of your calls allows you to identify opportunities to make something great even better.

**Quadrant III** is pure chaos - you'll likely be experiencing high turnover in your agent staff, and your call center manager will have a very hard time identifying and rewarding promising agents. In this "Lose/Lose" scenario, it's more important to develop a set of clear expectations first, and then work on consistency through coaching (see next diagram). The reasoning for this is straightforward - without clear expectations for your agents/call center manager to strive for, it doesn't matter if there's consistency.

In **Quadrant IV**, you're playing profit roulette, and leaving far too much to chance. The call center manager knows what to ask of her agents, and the agents know what is expected, but for whatever reason they do not consistently meet expectations. Organizations in this quadrant typically have a weak coaching culture, as one of the primary goals of coaching is to generate consistency first, and then improve from that baseline.

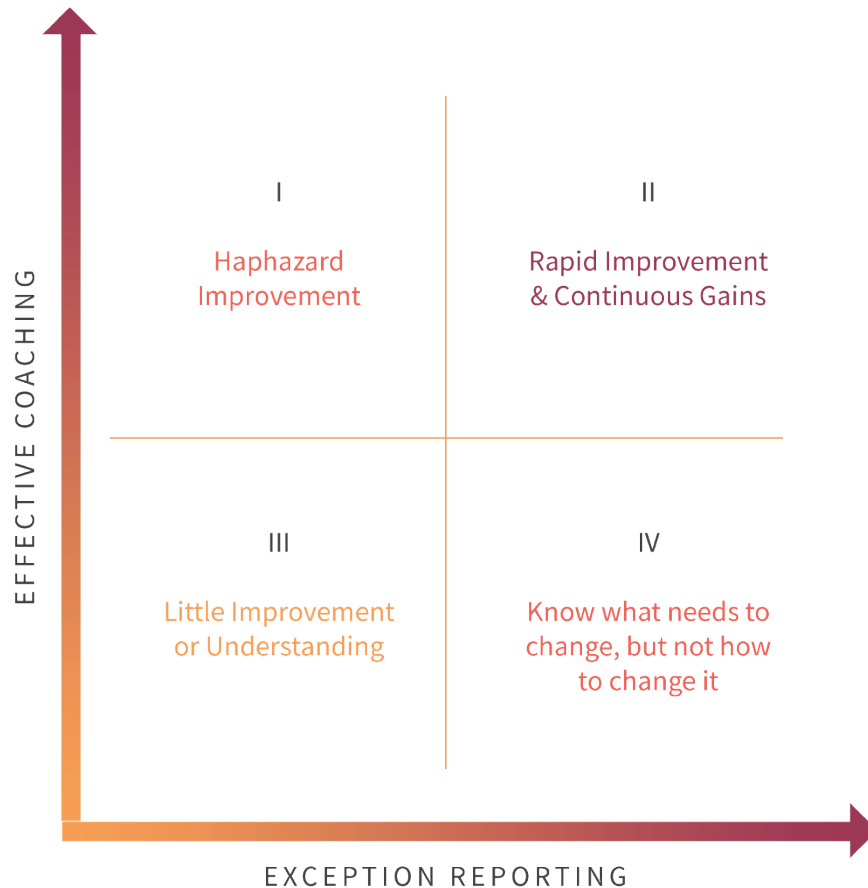
Moving from Quadrant I to Quadrant II is relatively straightforward. It's a matter of investing in creating very clear expectations, so that you can engage the agents' natural appetite to perform in a consistent fashion.

If you're in Quadrant III, the first step is the same - it's most important to create a clear set of expectations first, which will move you to Quadrant IV.

Moving from Quadrant IV to Quadrant II will require you to develop a strong and effective coaching culture, and to replace agents who (even after ample opportunity to improve) cannot consistently meet the clear expectations set. Essentially, this requires the marriage of strong interpersonal coaching skills, as well as a strong analytics and reporting process in place. These ensure the coach can easily access and share relevant examples of agent success and failure.

Next let's look at the relationship between Coaching & Reporting to explore these aspects of your business.

## The Relationship of Coaching & Reporting



Improving agent consistency and skill requires the marriage of **Effective Coaching** skills with great reporting. We narrow in on **Exception Reporting** specifically here because it is one of the most powerful, and most underused, tools to monitor corporate performance.

Essentially, an exception report acts as a tripwire - it immediately brings your attention to areas where your expectations have not been met, and which require more critical examination.

For example - assume your process states that agents should ask three qualifying questions before mentioning price. You'd want your managers/coaches to have access to a list of all calls where two or fewer questions were asked before price was mentioned, so that they could focus on correcting this behavior.

**Quadrant I** represents organizations where the coaches (i.e. call center managers) are very skilled, but they must rely on chance to find "coachable calls". Since a call center manager can only ever listen to a tiny fraction of the total calls for each agent, the absence of strong exception reporting means that they won't be able to determine areas of either consistent progress or struggle for their agents. Coaching sessions in such organizations can often be frustrating for agents, because they feel that they're being judged unfairly for anomalous calls, OR that they're not getting the support they need to grow.

**Quadrant II** is the ideal state - coaches can see exactly how well agents are doing on all of the areas required thanks to the strong exception reporting. They can find the areas of greatest opportunity for the agents to work on (IE "You're doing great in most areas, but you consistently rush past the qualifying questions phase of the sales process, which is hurting your conversion rate - Let's review that phase now, why it's important, and set concrete goals for you to work

on for your next week of calls.”). When operating in this state, organizations can start to focus on finding additional areas of differentiation between the top and bottom performers, and start coaching everybody else to more closely emulate the top performers.

As before, **Quadrant III** is the worst of all possible worlds. Not only do organizations in this category not know how their agents are doing, the coaching staff isn’t skilled enough to help them improve. The most important work here is to get strong reporting in place, because without that, it will be impossible to determine whether or not the call center manager is making progress in helping the agents grow their skill sets.

In **Quadrant IV**, the areas that agents are failing in become obvious, but the call center manager doesn’t have the skills or ability to help them improve. This may be rectified by training the manager on basic coaching skills, introducing a standardized coaching framework, bringing in an external coach, or it may require replacing the call center manager. Whatever method you choose, it’s imperative that you prioritize coaching as a core part of your call center culture.

So we can see in the relationships outlined above, by setting clear expectations and promoting agent consistency you can generate predictably great performance results; and by coupling those results with the rapid improvements and continuous gains achieved through effective coaching based on comprehensive exception reporting, you can build your call center into a world class organization through effective, data-based management.

### Yactraq’s Call Center Solutions

Yactraq provides call centers of any size with the data they need to optimally run their business and achieve world class results. Through Omnitraq, our configurable business intelligence platform, call centers can index 100% of their calls to generate best-in-class Exception Reporting to serve as a cornerstone of their management strategy.

Omnitraq employs a versatile infrastructure and machine learning techniques to build speech vocabularies that are customized to a call center’s specific business, can consist of a handful to tens of thousands of words, and can be built in a matter of weeks at industry leading affordability. In addition to Exception Reporting, our solutions include Agent Performance Evaluation, Sales Analytics, Call Operations Management, and Voice-of-the-Customer applications.

As the value leader in speech technology, Yactraq delivers the high-ROI solutions you need to revolutionize your call center’s performance across any vertical and no matter the size of your business. Get in touch with us to learn more.

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