GLOBAL
Help Desk Services

Help Desk Call Center Staffing

How to Build a Successful Support Team for Your Help Desk Call Center

Table of
Contents

Help Desk Call Center Staffing: The Guide to Building a Successful Support Team

The right size. The right budget. The right people. The right help desk.

When there's a technology issue, can your users get the support they need?

For far too many companies of all shapes and sizes, the answer is no. Users are frustrated, losing productivity, and searching for answers in all the wrong places.

If your help desk is too small (or even nonexistent), it can create problems that cascade down into enormous effects on your business … but so can any wrong decisions you make along the way.

That's why we created this guide.

Staffing an IT help desk is no small task, but we're going to break it down into small, manageable pieces. From determining the staffing levels you need and calculating costs to finding and hiring the right people, this guide will show you how to build a support team your users can count on.

Part 1

How to Determine Your IT Help Desk Staffing Levels

One of the first steps to building out your help desk team is figuring out just how many people you should actually hire.

While that might sound easy at first, once you start to dig in, you'll see complications arise — fluctuations in workload, call times, communication channels, and other factors all have to be taken into account to staff your help desk correctly.

Here are five questions to answer as you determine the staffing levels you need.

1. How many calls-per-hour will your help desk need to handle?

If you're expecting only one call per hour, obviously your staffing levels will be very different from an organization that generates 10 or 20 per hour. You'll also need to factor in talk time — if your average call lasts five minutes, your team will have more capacity than those that are fielding 20-minute phone calls.

Here's a deeper breakdown to show how talk times affect the number of calls your agents can answer:

Potential Calls Per Hour Per Agent										
Talk Time (Minutes)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Call capacity	60.0	30.0	20.0	15.0	12.0	10.0	8.6	7.5	6.7	6.0
Talk Time (Minutes)	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Call capacity	5.5	5.0	4.6	4.3	4.0	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.2	3.0
Talk Time (Minutes)	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Call capacity	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.0
Talk Time (Minutes)	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
Call capacity	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5
Talk Time (Minutes)	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
Call capacity	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2
Talk Time (Minutes)	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
Call capacity	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0

2. What percentage of time will an agent be unavailable?

Your help desk should be documenting every ticket that comes through. But part of that process does mean being temporarily unavailable to answer the phone. As you're determining your staffing levels, you'll need to account for the percentage of time each agent will be unavailable.

Compare this table with the one above to see how the calls per hour change when you factor in a 15% rate of unavailable time:

Potential Calls Per Hour Per Agent									
15%	Percent Unavailable Per Hour								
Talk Time (Minutes)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Call capacity	51.0	25.5	17.0	12.8	10.2	8.6	7.3	6.4	5.7	5.1
Talk Time (Minutes)	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Call capacity	4.6	4.3	3.9	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.6
Talk Time (Minutes)	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Call capacity	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.7
Talk Time (Minutes)	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
Call capacity	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3
Talk Time (Minutes)	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
Call capacity	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0
Talk Time (Minutes)	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
Call capacity	1.0	0.98	0.96	0.94	0.93	0.91	0.89	0.88	0.86	0.85

3. Are you staffing for an average, or can you handle busier days?

If you look at the average call volume in a given week, it may not tell the whole story. Ten calls on Monday and zero on Tuesday average out to five per day.

And if you are only staffed for five calls per day, you'll have a lot of frustrated users at the start of every week.

It's important, then, to consider how volume spikes on certain days and how that should affect your staffing. And while it might be true that you feel overstaffed on slower days, those extra agents may equip you to absorb upticks in calls during software rollouts, new product launches, and other atypical events.

4. Besides answering phones, how else will agents take tickets?

If your help desk offers contact channels like online chats or web portals, that will also affect how much capacity your agents have. Keep in mind that there's a tradeoff to these other channels: While they may support concurrent work (e.g., an agent handling multiple chats at a time), that also means an agent's focus will be fractured, resulting in longer handle times for each ticket.

Channels like email may also be quicker transactionally, but they ultimately require more touchpoints and communications to resolve an issue. The delayed back-and-forth typical of this channel can also result in longer resolution times while agents wait to send or receive a reply.

As you're considering the channels your agents will use, be sure to fully account for the unique challenges and opportunities they offer. These factors will all be a part of the equation as you work to determine how many agents you'll need.

5. How long does it take to make a new agent productive?

Another factor that could affect your staffing levels is training time. Five brand-new agents simply can't be as productive as five agents with years of experience.

Training is another factor that affects productivity. It takes time to bring a new agent up to speed. That training process also takes productivity away from the existing agent doing the training. Trainers may only be able to work at around 50% of their normal capacity during the training period, which can make a significant impact on the number of support requests they can handle.

The training period also takes longer if you don't have prepared scripts or if you don't have documented processes. All of this affects overall productivity, which in turn can affect how many people you need to keep up with your calls.

Try this tool to crunch the numbers

Does this all still seem a little abstract? Visit Call Centre Helper and use their Erlang calculator to calculate the number of staff that you'll need. Using this tool, plus the answers you gave to the questions above, can help you nail down how many agents your help desk should have.

Calculating How Much a Help Desk Will Cost

Once you have some idea of how many agents your help desk will need, you can start calculating how much your help desk will cost.

Arriving at this number is not quite as simple as multiplying salary by the total number of staff. Let's dig into the factors that drive the expense.

What is your expected monthly ticket volume?

Hopefully you've already got some metrics around the support calls you receive, which might help to make this one of the easier figures to calculate.

> Keep in mind, your volumes may be artificially deflated. This happens because users turn to other sources for help. They may ask each other for guidance or go searching on Google for answers. This phenomenon is known as "shadow IT," and it can actually be quite bad for your business. The good news is that properly staffing your help desk is the first step in preventing this problem. But it's something you should factor in as you think about the ticket volume you should expect.

What are your overhead costs?

The cost of an agent is more than a simple matter of salary. There's also the matter of overhead. Some of the things you should factor into your calculations include:

- Individual benefits package (health care, 401(k), etc.)
- Training costs
- Software and systems licensing
- Furniture (desks, office chairs, etc.)
- Hardware (computers, monitors, headsets)
- Office space

Some of these expenses, such as office space, can be tough to easily break down to an individual level. While you can get pretty granular with how you determine this figure, as a general rule of thumb, we recommend adding an additional 25%-35% to the salary cost to account for additional overhead.

What kind of roles will you fill for your help desk?

Generally speaking, your agents are the people on the front line of the help desk, answering calls and resolving tickets.

But your help desk may have other roles as well.

Will you be employing support staff to act as team leaders or trainers or to perform quality assurance? What about managers to run the department? Support staff and managers will typically come in at a higher salary level than your agents. Make sure you're accounting for those roles as well as working to determine your cost.
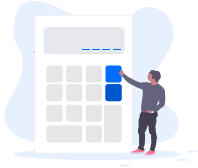
Use our cost calculator to figure out your cost-per-ticket.

Want to get a bird's eye view of what you'll spend per ticket? We can help. Check out our Help Desk Cost Calculator Lite, which makes it easy to input this data and see the results

Access now

Tip on Using This Calculator: Remember that the ticket count you enter should not be the same as your call volume. Generally, you can assume an 80% ticket-to-call ratio, meaning for every 800 tickets, there are 1,000 calls.

The reason for this difference is that it's not unusual for users to call to get a status update on unresolved tickets. Those tickets may still be underway at the help desk, or they may have been escalated to a Tier 2 or Tier 3 queue. Either way, it just isn't usually possible to achieve a 1-to-1 call ratio without creating additional challenges around tracking and reporting.

Part 3

How to Hire the Right Help Desk Support Agents

It's no secret that we're in a difficult hiring environment. Between the challenges posed by the pandemic and the Great Resignation, finding and hiring the right people can pose a real challenge to staffing your help desk.

But whatever else has changed, some things remain the same. Here are a few keys to finding the right people to fill your positions.

Hire hard, manage easy

When you're shorthanded, it can be tempting to hire whoever walks in the door. Unfortunately, this can backfire and end up causing more problems than it solves, leaving customers frustrated and your help desk as shorthanded as ever.

Instead, we recommend being thoughtful about where you post your job opening, to attract the right people. Also, put careful consideration into the job description itself. Be specific and upfront about who will be the best fit for the job – and what the job offers to the right candidate. A good place to start when updating the job description is reviewing the key qualities of a good help desk agent.

Know the key qualities of good help desk agents

In many cases, your help desk serves as the face of your company. It's important that your agents embody certain key qualities in order to fulfill this important customer service. That includes:

- **Emotional intelligence.** Help desks are demanding environments. A great employee should have self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to stay cool under pressure.

- **Excellent communication skills.** A help desk employee should be prepared to interact continuously with your clients to understand problems and offer assistance.

- **Taking the initiative.** Help desk employees shouldn't be passive. You need a team ready to take charge to get problems resolved.

- **Technical knowledge.** Employees must have the requisite technical skills for the job or demonstrate they're capable of learning the specific knowledge the job requires.

Use these IT help desk interview questions to find great staff

The interview process is the most effective screening tool you have to make sure you're bringing in the right people.

After many years in the industry, working with clients that range from small businesses to enterprise-level organizations, we've identified 13 key interview questions for help desk applicants to help you find the best talent.

You may not use every one with each candidate, but all are designed to help uncover what you need to know about your interviewees.

Emotional intelligence questions

As a hiring manager, it's important to keep an open mind about potential job candidates. Tech skills are easy enough to train, especially if you have a mature knowledge base. With that in mind, be sure you're putting more focus on soft skills and emotional intelligence.

1. Tell me about a time when you got frustrated or angry at work. How did you know you were feeling this way? How did you resolve the situation?
2. Describe your strengths as a person, as they relate to your character.
3. Tell me about a challenging work relationship with a co-worker or boss you had in a previous job.

Questions about work ethic, humility, integrity, and maturity

1. Of all the positions you've had, which one did you enjoy the most? Why?
2. What people or events have most molded you into who you are today? Why?
3. Describe the biggest risk you've ever taken.

Work history questions

1. Tell me why your recent IT work history makes you a good IT help desk analyst.
2. I see you lack IT work experience (if applicable). Tell me why your work history or personal experience makes you a good help desk analyst.
3. Please walk me through each job on your resume, how you got the job, and the reasons for leaving each job for the next one.

Technical questions

1. How practical and hands-on was your technical training?
2. Tell me about your technical certifications. What motivated you to attain them when you did?
3. Describe your technical strengths.
4. How would you resolve this ticket? (Include real-world example.)
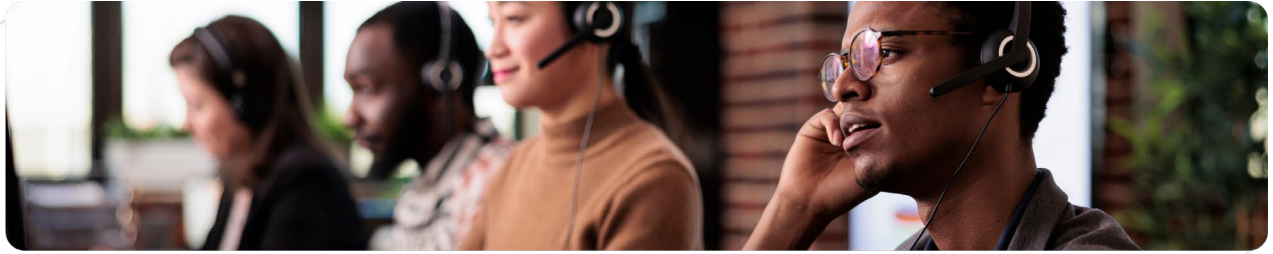
Part 4

How to Retain Your Help Desk Employees

We would be remiss if we talked about staffing a help desk without also talking about employee retention.

Some turnover is probably inevitable — many employees start their careers on the help desk as the first rung of an IT career.

But in other cases, turnover is the result of an improperly managed environment, one with high stress and low morale. Let's look at what drives these situations and what you can do to avoid them.
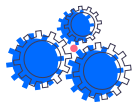
What are some factors that drive help desk turnover?

In some instances, turnover is due to managers not giving teams what they need to succeed.

For example, when your customer launches a new product, installs new software, or undergoes other big changes, it's going to impact your help desk. If you haven't prepared them for those changes or the new kinds of calls they'll receive, it will lead to a stressful environment that drives some employees to leave.

Turnover can also cascade. Once one person leaves, that leaves the remaining staff to pick up the slack, further fueling dissatisfaction.

If this goes on long enough, it can extend beyond the help desk and require other IT staff to start acting as agents, pulling them away from the higher-skilled work they're paid more to do … and impacting their morale.

> Not all turnover is driven by negative factors. As we mentioned before, help desk positions are often stepping stones on the way to a career in IT. Promoting your help desk agents into other IT roles isn't a bad thing … but you still need a plan for how you'll make up for that person's work and experience.

How should you plan for employee turnover?

Since some turnover is always inevitable, it's going to be important that you have a plan for what to do when that happens.

First, you should continually be making sure your training plans and guides are up to date. You don't want to be scrambling to update those materials while you're also down an agent and trying to hire. Keeping them fresh and accurate will make the eventual onboarding of a new agent go that much more smoothly.

Next, it's always a good idea to have a potential pool of candidates at hand. Keep good resumes and maintain friendly relations with your contacts and networks. If you've had part-time or seasonal help in the past, those candidates might also be worth reaching out to when turnover happens.

Finally, make sure you're prepared to be down an agent or two. Have a staffing plan ready to go, as well as a communication plan to share updates about potential service impacts related to staffing.

The better your preparations for turnover, the less disruptive it will be to your help desk's operations.
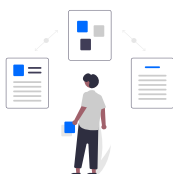
How can you improve help desk retention?

The insidious thing about low morale? It can be hard to spot in your metrics. Even if your agents are frustrated, burned out, and looking to leave, your help desk might still run perfectly well … until it suddenly doesn't.

That's why improving retention begins with good communication. You don't want to learn there's a problem after people start quitting. You should be checking in and talking to your people regularly to make sure you can step in before things get to that point.

Another way to improve retention is to make sure your people have the tools they need to succeed. That means staffing to an appropriate level to give people a right-sized workload. It also means keeping thorough documentation of your processes as well as your tickets so agents can find what they need and don't duplicate work.
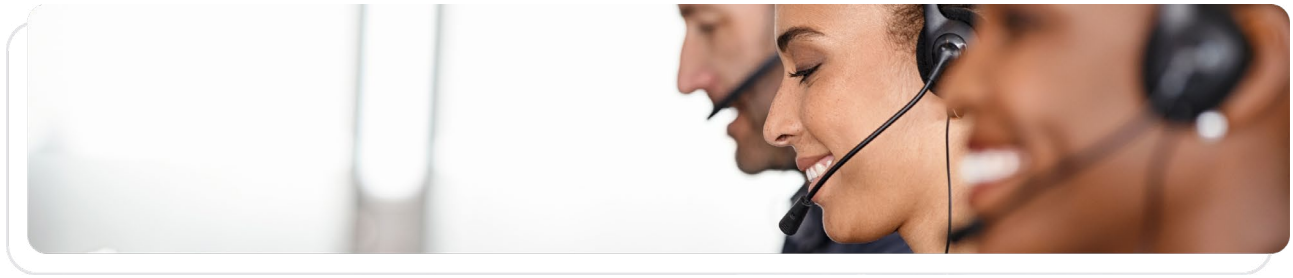
Essentially, when you provide for the needs of your help desk and take time to learn where they're struggling, you give people a reason to stay.

RELATED READING

How to Improve Employee Retention in Your IT Help Desk

Read the article

Part 5

Should You Outsource Your Help Desk Call Center?

By now, it's probably clear that staffing your IT help desk is no small feat. It can take a significant investment of both time and money to make sure it performs.

Staffing an internal help desk all on your own is not the only solution, however. Whether you're running your own business or running the IT department for an enterprise-level company, you may want to consider outsourcing your help desk call center.

Here's what that involves and what it might mean for your company.

 Why do companies outsource their help desk services?

One of the most immediate advantages of outsourcing your help desk services is that it's less expensive for your organization.

For example, if you need 24/7 support, building an internal team requires hiring five to six full-time staff at the absolute bare minimum. Even then, you're likely to see a high turnover rate because of the workload on that small team.

There's also the question of management resources. When you build out an internal team, you're not just adding help desk agents: You're also putting more demands on your leadership, pulling them away from more important strategic initiatives. Do your current leaders have time to put toward training, management, and oversight? Or will you need to hire more managers, further adding to your overall costs?

Finally, there's the capital expense and effort involved with acquiring, customizing, and maintaining the necessary tools for your new help desk team. There's the immediate cost just to get started, then a long-term investment to make sure those tools are kept up to date.

Compared to these costs, the time and money you save by outsourcing can be significant.

Six Signs You Need to Outsource IT Help Desk Services

Your help desk has a poor reputation, and users go elsewhere for support.

Your help desk lacks customer service training and skillsets.

You'd like to expand your coverage hours, but you can't justify the cost.

You don't have a service desk SLA. Or, if you do, it's rarely enforced.

You struggle to add staff and maintain quality customer service levels.

Frequent hiring and training of help desk staff is a costly hassle.

How do I know if an outsourced help desk services provider isn't a good fit for my needs?

Outsourcing your help desk services is not necessarily a magic bullet that will solve all your problems. It's equally important to make sure you choose the right company to outsource these services to.

Here are a few of the warning signs that you've outsourced to the wrong company:

1. Your users are having bad experiences because your provider has no quality standards.
2. Your provider wants you to manage their time, their support teams, or their knowledge base for them.
3. Instead of resolving problems, your provider causes further issues and headaches.
4. Your provider covers off-hours with automated messages or an answering service instead of with live agents.
5. Your provider doesn't offer reporting, metrics, or trend analysis on their performance.
6. Your provider won't stop giving you a sales pitch on their other products and services.

If you experience these problems — or if you're experiencing them now — don't let it sour you on outsourcing entirely. You just haven't found the right provider. **A good outsourcing company serves as a true partner to your organization. They work closely with you to reduce operating expenses, improve response time, and help you scale more easily.**

What questions should I ask a potential outsourced help desk services provider?

To spot the right fit, it helps to ask the right questions.

Here are a few to help you get started (and to make it easier to screen out the providers who won't be a good fit):

- How will your IT support company improve customer satisfaction?
- How do you stay on top of industry best practices?
- What ongoing training do you provide your agents?
- Are you prepared to handle changes to volume and support needs?
- Do you offer detailed analysis and reporting?
- What operations meetings do you have with your customer, and what's covered?
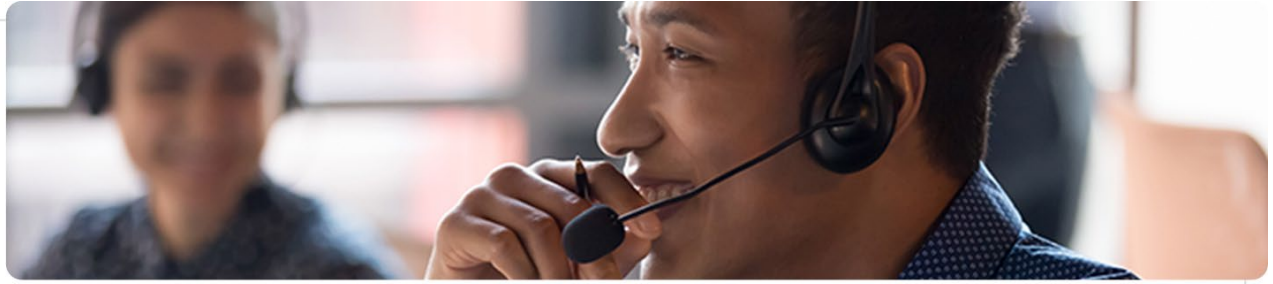
Learn more about these and 15 additional screening questions by downloading our guide, How to Choose an Enterprise Help Desk IT Support Company.

OUTSOURCED HELP DESK SERVICES ARE JUST A CONVERSATION AWAY.

We want to hear YOUR questions. Let's talk about your IT Help Desk, your company, and how we can help you grow and succeed.

Book a Consultation

The Global Help Desk Service Inc. Difference

Incorporated In 2001, **our help desk outsourcing** is 100% US-based and our agents are exclusively focused on help desk. We utilize IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) best practices across our range of services. The foundation of our success is honesty, integrity, a spirit of excellence, and world-class customer experience.

We have among the **highest SLA standards in the industry** and consistently deliver by following predictable and repeatable processes. We make first call resolution a priority to return your employees to work more quickly, relieve your Tier 2 and 3 support groups, increase customer satisfaction and the reputation of your entire IT department.

Service Highlights

Guaranteed Service Levels

White Label Service

Blended Level 1 and Level 2 Support for Increased Customer Satisfaction

Flexible Pricing

US Agents 24 x 7 x 365

Continuous Improvement Process

Quality Assurance Program

Comprehensive Reporting

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