

## **HOW DID YOU GET HERE?**

**Embracing the opportunity to build a contact center career.**



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# HOW DID YOU GET HERE? EMBRACING THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A CONTACT CENTER CAREER.

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**WHILE EVERYTHING WAS SIMPLER BACK THEN, THE RICHNESS AND INTERDEPENDENCY OF THE PEOPLE, PROCESS, AND TECHNOLOGY ELEMENTS OF CENTERS WAS VERY EVIDENT.**

I have had the privilege to know Linda Harden, publisher of *Contact Center Pipeline*, for over three decades, since her ICMI days. I have observed her passion for this industry, and it runs long and deep. Fifteen years ago, she embarked on a new adventure to bring meaningful content to contact center professionals, and boy, has she delivered!

Linda asked me to be a "founding advisor" for *Pipeline*, and I was honored to do so. More recently, she asked if I would write something for the 15th anniversary, and I was again flattered. I pondered what new angle I could bring after writing hundreds of articles, most recently sharing my views on "what's next" in the January 2024 issue. It made me think about how I got here. I want to challenge you to think about your own path. Whether you work in a center or

a vendor environment, my hope is this reflection will make you proud of what you have accomplished individually, as well as what your team and company do every day, and inspire you to continue this adventure in an industry most of us probably didn't know existed before we landed here.

Think back to your childhood. What did you want to be when you grew up? A doctor? Lawyer? Teacher? Engineer? Athlete? Coach? Musician? I'm not sure anyone grows up thinking, "I want to be a contact center professional!"



Chances are that you got here by accident. Some opportunity presented itself, and you thought, "Why not? Let's see where this takes me..." My own story had a pivot into voice communications with my electrical engineering degrees and experience working on nuclear-survivable communications systems and networks to support air traffic control facilities. As I started at AT&T, they asked me if I would work on *call centers* (it was 1987!), and I said, "Sure. What's a call center?" Little did I know that adventure would take me into the bowels of the Library of Congress to design, configure, and implement call center technology for the U.S. Copyright Office and Congressional Research Service. My journey then moved into the commercial sector where I saw centers play a pivotal role for financial services, insurance, manufacturing, healthcare, utilities, and more.

**SPEAKING OF INNOVATION: PART OF WHAT MAKES CONTACT CENTERS FUN IS TECHNOLOGY!**

While everything was simpler back then, the richness and interdependency of the people, process, and technology elements of centers was very evident. The challenges of making that all work well, on behalf of the customers and employees, hooked me quickly, like it has so many. I can now proudly say I have had a 37-year career in an industry I didn't know existed, with over 30 of those years spent consulting with hundreds of companies trying to improve their centers, buy and implement new technology, use technology in better ways, and pursue process and organizational changes.

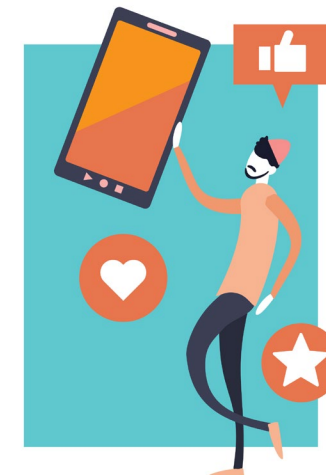
### OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

With the contact center industry so diverse in the roles it offers, *Pipeline* readers undoubtedly got here in a variety of ways. Maybe you started as an agent – not sure if it was just a tempo-

rary waystation, or something that could steer you to leadership or other paths. Maybe you were asked to apply your analytical skills to forecasting, scheduling, reporting, or analytics. Perhaps you didn't know what an Erlang model was when you started, but you dove in and learned, likely with the help of other passionate contact center professionals, resources like *Pipeline*, and communities of like-minded geeks. (I'm looking at you, Tiffany LaReau!) Maybe you were in IT and became the "go to" person for the contact center, tweaking routing, helping set up agents, troubleshooting a variety of issues. Wherever you landed in the vicinity of a center, you saw this rich diversity of challenges and opportunities.

One of my favorite parts of the assessment projects we do is talking about career paths. On the frontline, building out skills for contact types and channels helps agents thrive and develop over time, instead of being overwhelmed day one. Some will go on to be team leaders, supervisors, and managers, developing those that come after them. Others will find another path, moving into analytics, training, IT/technology, Quality Monitoring, Workforce Management, and project management. Whatever your aptitudes and strengths, contact centers can be a launching point for what's next.

I don't want to leave out our friends on the vendor side, especially since that's where I started! So many talented salespeople brought their passion to learning new technology and got hooked on solving problems for contact center customers. Others delivered skills like project management, systems engineering, product development, marketing, infrastructure and software development to build out the very important ecosystems of the vendors that keep this industry humming and innovating.



### CONSTANT INNOVATION

Speaking of innovation: part of what makes contact centers fun is *technology!* Those of us who have been around a while have watched amazing transformations from premise-based "phone systems" with \$1,000 phones and desktops with green screens to cloud-based technology, accessible anywhere through an internet connection and a browser. Technologies like CRM, knowledge management, natural language processing, analytics, skills-based routing, and graphical reporting have all contributed to lowering costs, improving service, and driving revenue. We're now watching Artificial Intelligence (AI) take us to the next generation of contact center technology.

But innovation is not just about technology; operations and organizational methods evolve too! For example, centers have new ways to manage remote agents and to motivate and inspire staff with gamification. Staff connect in real-time through chat sessions and online communities host celebrations and welcome new colleagues. The physical center with decorations hanging up and a good pizza party is not the only way to support team building and have fun anymore!

**YOU'RE NOT DONE – NO, LET ME REPHRASE THAT, YOU'RE NEVER DONE!**

### CONSTANT DEVELOPMENT

So, this is where I ask you to never stand still. You may be a long-time member of the industry, with a career path that has spanned years. We thank you for your service and cherish your contributions and wisdom. Or you may be brand new to all this and wondering what it holds for you. That's one of the great things about the industry – there are always fresh faces, eager to learn and bringing new ideas and challenging the status quo (because "we've always done it that way" is never a good explanation for why something is the way it is!).



## WHAT'S YOUR PARTY LINE?

When you meet someone new and they ask you what you do, how do you answer? Chances are you say something that triggers that new acquaintance to share the story of their worst customer service experience – *like it's your fault!*

My dad was a field sales engineer for Texas Instruments, selling chips and control components that were important parts of a variety of consumer and commercial products. As a result, we had one of the first microwave ovens ever created. Talk about innovation! He had a catchy tagline to describe what he did: "I'm a peddler of rinky dinky parts!" I've never come up with something nearly as clever, but I should since there are plenty of jokes about consultants that I need to fend off and well, I love what I do! How about, "I get to help people solve problems and develop and pursue new plans, while both learning and sharing knowledge every day."

Now, I challenge *you* to create *your* tagline – so that you convey the pride and joy you have in your job, set a positive tone about this industry, and maybe share a bit of humor as well!

### Here are some starters to get you thinking...

- **CC Supervisor/Manager/Director:**
  - "I am a coach, customer advocate, firefighter, project leader, and reporter – all at the same time!"
- **Support functions:**
  - WFM: "I am Ms./Mr. Right: I work to make sure we have the right number of people in the right place at the right time!"
  - Reporting and Analytics: "I turn mountains of data into insight gold – and help define actions that improve the service we deliver."
- **IT:**
  - "I help the people and process side of our contact center achieve their goals with the awesome enabling technology we deliver and support."
- **Vendors:**
  - Sales: "I sell software that helps *our* customers serve *their* customers efficiently and effectively."
  - Project Management: "I turn visions into reality with a great process from design to configure, to test, and go live..."

Regardless, you're not done – no, let me rephrase that, you're never done! You will grow and evolve as the industry does. You have a chance to learn from others – whether about the fundamentals that don't really change (like calls arrive randomly and bunch up!), or the latest, greatest thing a bot can do with AI. Contact center professionals love to share their experiences, transfer knowledge, and help their peers. We can leverage our learnings while appreciating that this industry is always pushed forward by new thinking.

**”** *CHERISH THE JOURNEY, BECAUSE YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE IT MAY LEAD!*

### AN ONGOING JOURNEY

One of the many blessings from this accidental career in the contact center industry is that I have long-time friends, clients, and colleagues that I enjoy catching up with. We talk about what's new, and what challenges centers face. At times, it feels like we continue to solve the same problems, and we fight a "two steps forward, one step back" battle as budgets, conflicting priorities, "shiny object syndrome," and resource limitations can all get in the way. But there are also constant victories, as we see service levels improve, turnover decline, customer satisfaction scores go up. We see new technology embraced by staff and customers alike – because it makes things easier and more effective and can even be cool and fun! And we see operational changes and organizational initiatives that make the center a better place to work every day.

So, build your roadmap – for your center, and for you, as a contact center professional. Cherish the journey, because you never know where it may lead! 🎯



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