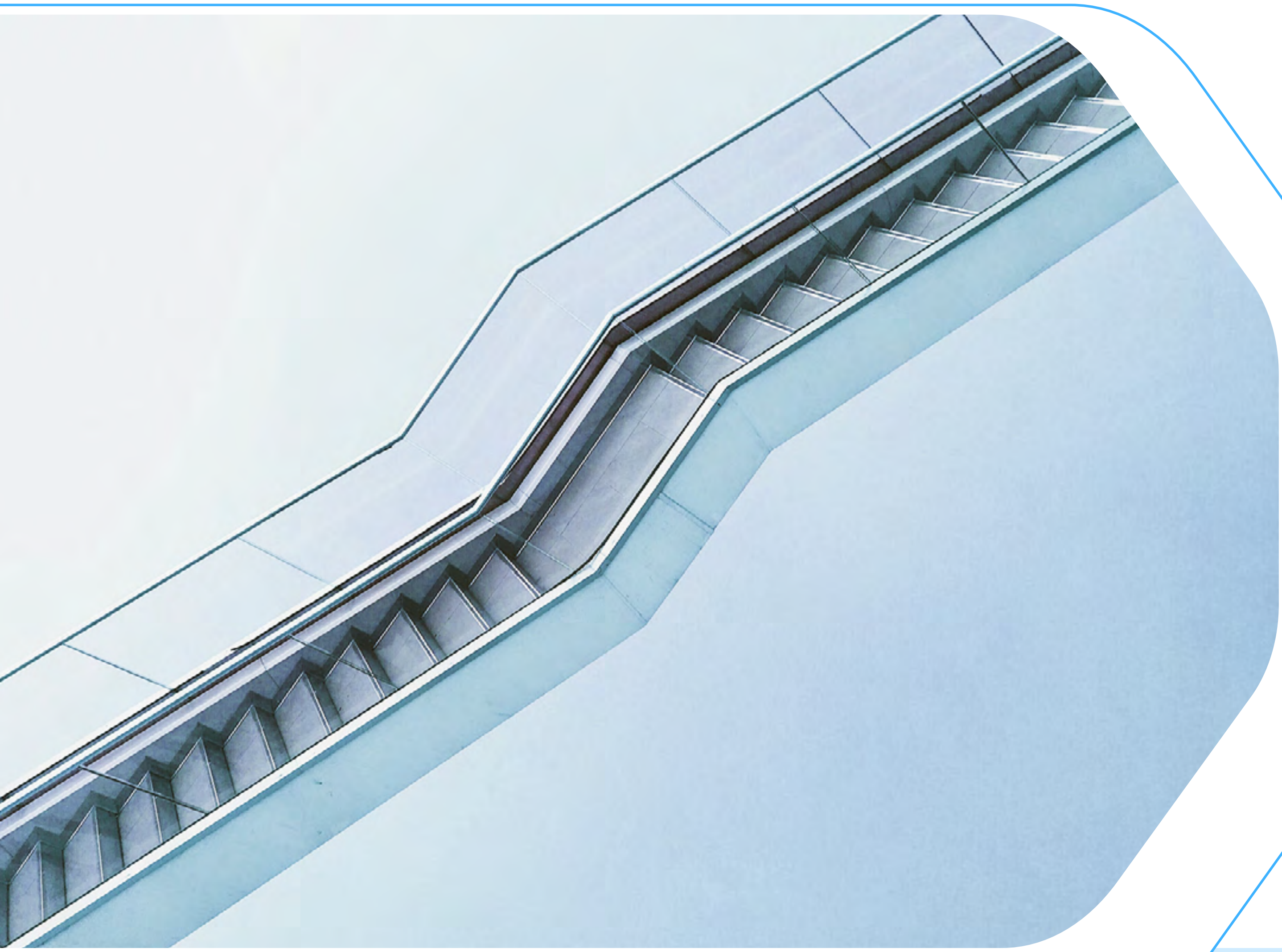
WHITE PAPER

Agiloft



# Seven Secrets for Effectively Managing a Support Organization

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# Introduction

Would you rather buy a product from a company with a reputation for having a great Support organization or a great Sales organization?

Join the crowd if you answered Support; survey after survey shows that it is one of the strongest factors influencing sales, and every company has strong self-interest in doing it right.

So why is Support so often perceived as broken? The answer is that effectively managing a Support organization for even a simple product is difficult, and managing support for a complex product or service is as tough as it gets.

This paper discusses the challenges involved in managing a sophisticated support organization and the key strategies for dealing with those challenges.

# 1. Be Adaptable

> "It's not the strongest, nor the most intelligent who survive, but the most adaptable"
>
> — Charles Darwin

If history has proven anything, it's that winners are adapters. Evolution itself is rooted in this idea, and companies, like creatures in nature, must adapt to thrive. There are countless success stories of companies bucking expectations and making real profit from adaptation.

## The Solution

Over time, your business will grow or shrink, shift focus, adapt new technologies, meet new challenges, and discover new opportunities to reduce costs and improve performance through automation. A system that adapts as you do will save your organization money, time, and frustration.

New challenges can surface almost overnight. You need a reasonably-priced system, that you control, that will quickly adapt. What factors should you consider?

## Configurability

The ideal product starts as a good fit, adapts to your requirements, and gives you freedom to automate new business processes as needed. It doesn't force you to change your business processes to live inside hard-coded functions. Probe the limitations of each potential software solution. Good questions to ask include:

- Can you define custom fields, tables and table relationships?
- Can you create custom business rules, workflows, charts and reports?
- Can you define custom access permissions or are you limited to a set of pre-defined roles?
- Do custom tables and workflows behave like the native ones?
- Does the product provide an API for customization and integration with other systems?

It's impossible to predict future requirements, but adaptable software will handle the changes as they come. If your organization is currently struggling with multiple helpdesk products, you will be able to consolidate them all into a single adaptable system.

## Adaptation Time

The software should not only be deeply configurable solution, but easy to modify. If it takes assistance from dedicated IT staff to modify the product, or you need to depend on the "common sense" of programmers to make your desired changes, you may end up waiting for a long time and paying a lot of money for a disappointing result.

The easiest way to find out how long it takes to adapt software to meet your challenges is by observing it firsthand during the demo – keep some of your requirements in reserve so that you can tell the vendor about them during the demo itself. Ask that they be implemented while you watch and then request access to the resulting system so that you can test the result. A good question to ask is "Could I or my staff have made such changes, or will we be dependent on expensive consultants?"

## 2. Make it Personal

People want to feel that suppliers give care and attention to their individual needs.

So doctors at HMO's are taught "bedside-manner" and marketers at Apple strive to make the entire company seem "personal". This section describes how you can provide personal service without raising costs.

### The Basics

Find out the customer's name during the first 10 seconds of a call, then use it immediately and thereafter. This technique is obvious and basic, but highly effective. For example a call might start: "Hi, what is your name...", "John, how can I help you?"

Take responsibility and follow up. Customers care that you care and are much happier if they get a follow up - even if it is just to say "John, I am sorry, but I followed up with Kathy and we just cannot do what you want." You can automate this by setting a flag such as "Follow-Up Required" that automatically reminds your staff to follow up with the customer and escalates the issue if they fail to do so.

Listen with an open mind. Ask open-ended questions and get the facts before offering a solution. In many cases, the customer needs to vent a bit before they will even be willing to listen to a solution, especially if the problem is their fault.

### Remember What You're Told

Your customer may communicate with multiple individuals from multiple departments through voice, email, chat or online forms. Whatever the format, the information they convey should be captured and available during the next interaction so that they do not have to repeat themselves.

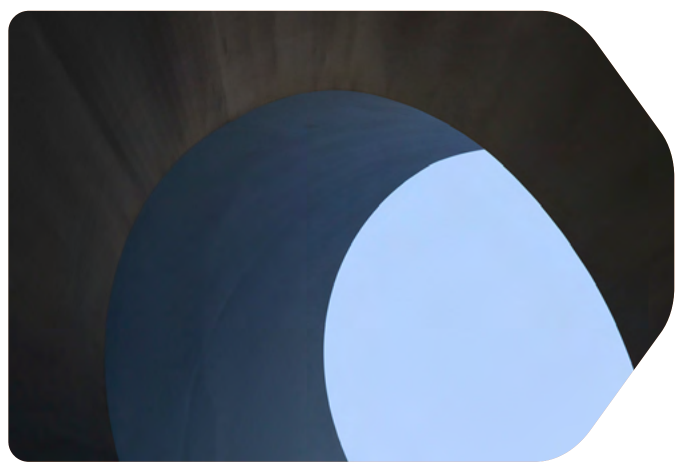
You can achieve this using web forms tailored for each interaction type, email and online chat integration, and capture of all interactions in a central database.

### Acknowledge Immediately

By configuring your system to generate an immediate response to incoming emails, together with a tracking number that can be used in future communications; you are letting the customer know "I hear you". It costs nothing and improves the efficiency of future communications.

### Satisfy SLAs

Service Level Agreement promises can only be kept by automating the process. The software infrastructure needs to monitor activity, notify the appropriate individuals to ensure that SLA requirements are met and escalate issues before you are out of compliance. Automatically ensuring that promises are kept not only burnishes your reputation, it saves you time and money.



## 3. Measure the Right Things

Statistics that reflect the wrong help desk metrics can drive the very worst decisions. The peril is illustrated by the following real-life example.

Joe was consistently closing 15 issues per day while Mary only managed 7. Who should get promoted?

Happily, Mary got promoted and Joe got fired. Although he was closing over twice as many tickets, he was not actually solving the customer problems and over 80% of them had to submit a new request. This came to light when the helpdesk manager put in place a CRM system that tracked customer satisfaction for each support representative.

> "There are lies, damn lies, and statistics"
>
> — Benjamin Disraeli

It was later estimated that Joe had cost the company $250,000 in lost customers.

It is not enough to measure; you must measure the right things. Here are a few key metrics that illustrate this point:

| Concept | Wrong Metric | Better Metric |
|---|---|---|
| Service Level Agreement (SLA) compliance | Average time required to close each ticket | Average of the total time required to close each ticket measured in the working hours of the individual and/or team to which the ticket is assigned minus the time spent re-assigned to the customer for clarification/additional information |
| Staff productivity | Number of tickets closed per day | (Tickets closed per day * Average Satisfaction Rating) minus (Tickets that are Re-opened * Aggravation Factor for re-opening a ticket)<br>Note: If Average Satisfaction rating ranges from 1 to 10, the Aggravation Factor should be set to at least 15 |
| Backlog Severity | Number of open tickets | (Number of open tickets) * (Average time to close) |
| Cost of Support | Amount of money spent on support | Amount of money spent on support minus the volume of sales generated by support staff up-selling customers on additional products/services |

# 4. Hire the Right Employees

"You should first get the right people on the bus and then figure out where to drive it — not the other way around."

— Jim Collins

By far, the most effective way to be a great manager is to hire great employees. Of course, the problem is finding the few great candidates in a sea of resumes, so that is what this section is all about: a process for finding employees that is more effective and takes less time than the traditional process. But first, let's clear up a couple of myths.

## Myth 1: Interviews Are Effective

The exact number depends on the interviewer, but researchers have found that typical interview accuracy rates are only 30% better than random selection. Further, there is almost no correlation between how good someone thinks they are at interviewing and how effective they are. If you have never hired a dud employee, congratulations! If you have, read on.

## Myth 2: Checking References Improves Outcomes

Not only are many employers too afraid of lawsuits to give bad references, some will even give excellent references to help rid themselves of problem employees. In general the only thing harder than finding a good employee is finding a bad reference.

Prior experience is an excellent indicator of how much money employees will want, but a poor indicator of how well they will actually perform.

## A More Efficient Process

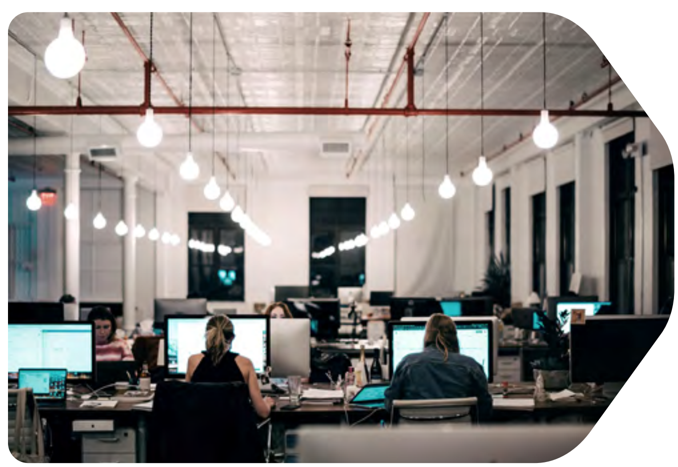
Of course, interviews, reference and background checks are an essential part of the hiring process, but they should not be the sole criteria. A more efficient process:

Create custom web forms for each job opening and set up business rules to prioritize and/or auto-reject candidates based upon information provided in the form. For example, you can ask them to take a quick online test and include the result in their application. Appropriate rules can eliminate 70-90% of the candidates without any effort on your part.

Ask the remaining candidates to take an online aptitude test for that specific position. Depending on the position, only the top 10-20% progress to the next stage.

Only hire candidates who achieve unanimous buy-in from team members. Immediately make a job offer, contingent upon reference, credit and criminal background checks. Do not keep them waiting or another employer may step in.

A disciplined, automated hiring process can not only free up your time and ensure you find the best possible candidate, it is objective and can be audited to demonstrate an absence of bias.



# 5. Be Proactive

To provide proactive support you need to recognize and resolve issues before they become problems.

This section describes how you can obtain early warning signs of pending issues and either resolve them in advance or reduce the severity from a disaster to a minor blip.

## Answer Before Asked

Once a question has been asked and answered by one customer, why not make it available to all the others?

Provide an FAQ at your website so that customers can get answers to common questions 24/7 without even asking your staff. The FAQ should be tightly integrated with the ticketing system so that you can publish the best answer to a new question with just a mouse click.

## Plan for the Unexpected

Even with redundant power supplies, RAID hard drives, and ECC memory, any given server will eventually fail.

If you are hosting your support system, deploy hotswap redundant servers so that service is automatically transferred to the other server. If you are using a SaaS service, check that their SLA offers high availability service levels and industry-recognized reliability. An SLA that just provides a pro-rata refund is worthless.

No matter how carefully you test, your own product and infrastructure will have problems. Set up automatic monitoring and notify your customers of critical problems in other areas of your product infrastructure, before they call. When possible, include the resolution ETA.

## Early Alerts of Changes

You need to have the right number of staff to handle an ever changing flow of new issues. Do not just track the number of open issues; track the rate of new arrivals with a weekly trend chart. Plan for a flood of new problems when a new product is released.

## Handle Issues in Order

Service reps may try to inflate their closure rates by picking the easy issues to work on. This hurts both customers and other staff.

Use round-robin assignment or skill-based assignment of each issue to an individual rather than simply leaving it in a pool.

Make it easy for staff to open and work on the next issue in their queue.

## Improve Staff Morale

Customer support is a tough job at the best of times and it is made even more frustrating by having to answer the same questions time and again.

Allow customers to self-register and submit problem reports or requests over the web 24/7, thus freeing your staff from manual data entry. For customers who do call or submit problems, create a library of standard solutions that your staff can import into the ticket. This not only saves time, it helps prevent mistakes.

## Anticipate Staff Changes

Staff vacations, sick-leaves and changes should be transparent to customers.

Make sure that your support system supports the rapid re-assignment of issues and can automatically re-assign issues that have been dormant for too long.

## Survey Your Customers

Seek feedback on your support interactions.

Implement surveys that go out to the customers based on “types of issues” to stratify your data. You can find out what about a product the customer doesn’t like, why they cancelled, etc.

# 6. Become a Profit Center

The easiest way to justify a bigger budget is to generate more revenue, and Support is superbly positioned to do exactly that - customers call Support far more often than they call Sales. Here are some simple steps you can take to exploit that opportunity.

### Review Tickets

Consider which of them might be addressed by other goods and services that your company offers.

### Gather Information

Gather information in ticket submission forms that will indicate which customers are good prospects for other products.

### Train Your Staff on How to Up-Sell

Train to up-sell to customers and incentivize them to do so, just like salespeople.

### Coordinate with Sales

You want their active assistance, not a turf war.

### Directly Measure Monetary Value

Measure the value of Support staff up-sells and assign value to new leads and other intangibles. Use these numbers to make a stronger case for the Support organization.

### Don't Let Support Staff Forget the Bottom Line!

First priority should be to respond promptly and thoroughly to customer concerns before thinking about sales.

> "Post-sales service ranks among the top three priorities for chief financial officers worldwide."
>
> — Aberdeen Group

### Use Live Chat for Quick Turn-Around

Use live chat for common billing issues, such as credit card updates, address changes, and shipping questions. Live chat can decrease checkout abandonment and up-sell other products.

### Track Performance

Track performance by embedding unique hyperlinks in emails to customers, thereby identifying agents who generate up-sales.

# 7. Utilize the Wisdom of Your Users

Facilitating communication between your users can significantly reduce the burden placed on first responders.

An effective Support organization utilizes all resources at its disposal and seeks to balance the support load as efficiently as possible. To most organizations this means appropriately assigning tasks to staff, but many forget to use the enormous pool of knowledge and labor that exists in the user base.

## Provide a Centrally Located, Public, and Prominently Featured Forum

Provide a forum for discussion and communication between users. Integrate it as much as possible with your existing infrastructure to streamline the user experience.

## Encourage Users to Refer to the Forums

Refer to the forums as an additional line of support. Users can post issues and collaborate online 24/7, even outside of business hours.

## Have your Staff Scan the Forums

Have staff regularly scan the forums to get an idea of common problems, post quick solutions, and see what workarounds customers devise.

## Build Listening into Processes

Utilizing the wisdom of your users is the essence of the Seven Secrets.

New customers are far more expensive to acquire than keeping those you have. Processes that capture what your customers know and how they feel are the cheapest way to monitor the pulse your marketplace.

Each secret you employ provides real benefits: Be Adaptable, Make it Personal to increase customer satisfaction, Measure the Right Things to accurately reflect how well your organization is doing, save time by automating and monitoring the process of Hiring the Right Employees, Be Proactive to stay one step ahead of surprises, Become a Profit Center to increase resources, and tap the mental energy of the crowds when you Utilize the Wisdom of Your Users.

Have your own ideas for how to better manage a support organization? Let us know about them!

## About Agiloft, Inc.

As the global leader in agile contract lifecycle management (CLM) software, Agiloft provides significant savings in purchasing, enables more efficient legal operations, and accelerates sales cycles, all while drastically lowering compliance risk. Agiloft's adaptable no-code platform ensures rapid deployment and a fully extensible system. Using contracts as the core system of commercial record, Agiloft's CLM software leverages AI to improve contract management for legal departments, procurement, and sales operations. For more information, visit https://www.agiloft.com.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