



Customer Service Agent Empowerment Report 2021



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Putting the 'power' in agent empowerment



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Customer service agents are much like heroes. Support heroes.

These are the people who work day in day out, utilizing their unique strengths, to deliver a top notch customer experience on behalf of a company.

But like any superhero, agents need their 'powers' to save the day and get the job done.

These 'powers' can be tangible. For example, a comfortable desk chair or an extra monitor. However, I believe it's the intangible 'power', the environment in which leaders create for their teams, that makes the biggest difference to a team's success.

As a customer support manager/team lead, there are two questions you can ask to measure your team's success. Are they happy? Are they high-performing?

If you can truly answer yes to both of these questions, then you are on the right track to empowering your team.

Putting the 'power' in agent empowerment

But as a manager, do you have the right to assume what empowers your team? How do you know what makes them more motivated? More productive? Less likely to change their job?

The only way to know for sure is to get these answers directly from the source. The agents!

That's why we collected data (keeping it anonymous to ensure honesty in responses) from 250+ customer service agents around the world on what **empowers them to stay on top of their game**.

We hope to provide a **mouthpiece for agents** to answer the questions perhaps they've never been asked or that they've never had the opportunity to voice in their workplace. We ask what they want, what they think is missing and **how they think managers, industry-wide, can create a better work environment** for them.

To get a complete overview of every element of the role, we cover four areas of empowerment: feedback, autonomy, rewards/recognition, and career development.

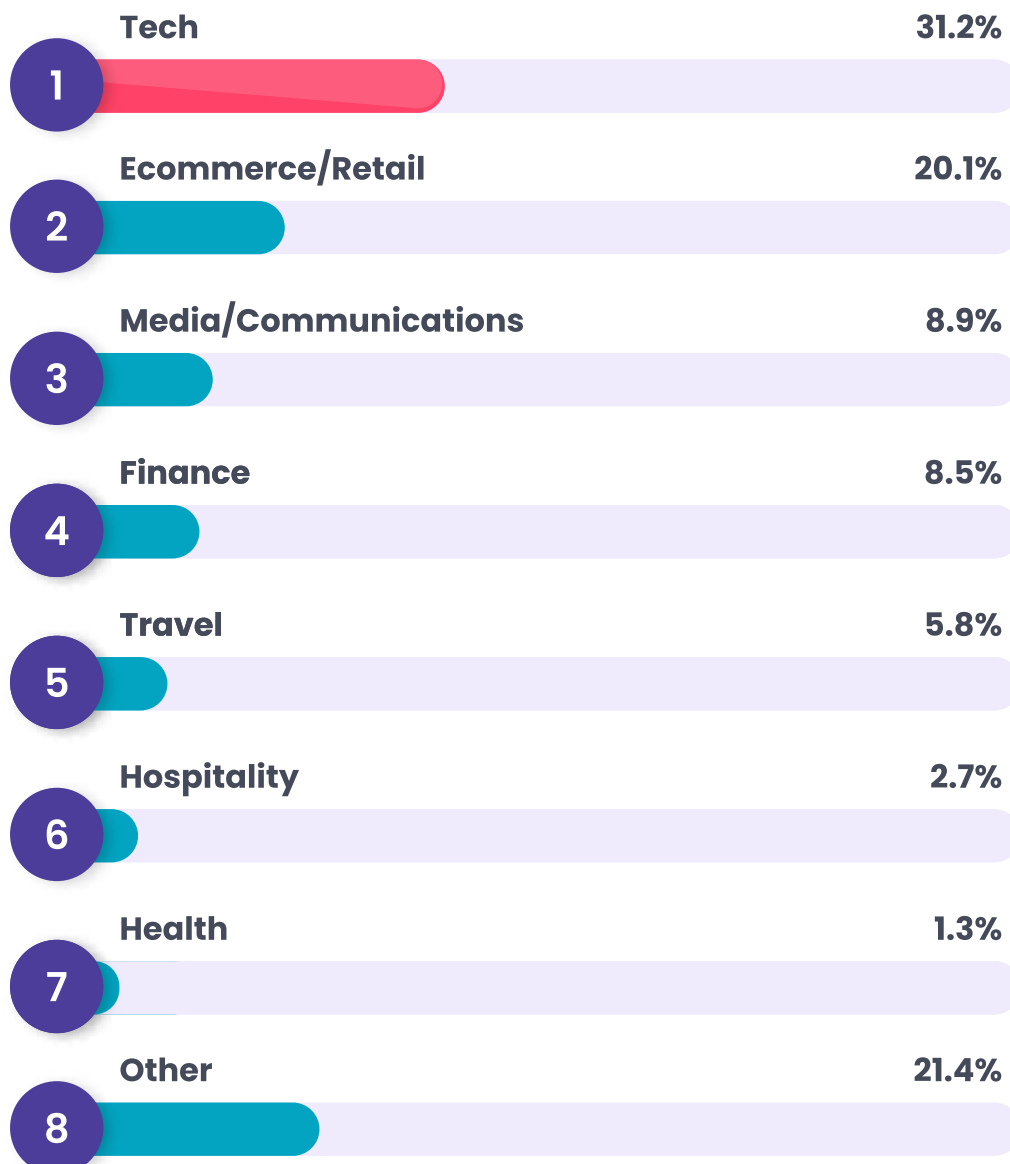
This report provides **groundbreaking insights** into the minds of the world's support heroes. We hope this helps you better understand what your agents require to succeed and in turn, develop healthier, more productive customer service teams.



Who Took The Survey?

To ensure we represent an accurate cross section of customer service agents, we spoke to hundreds (250+) of individuals from a diverse range of industries, experience levels, department sizes and geographical locations.

The majority of the respondents come from the Tech and Ecommerce/Retail industries.



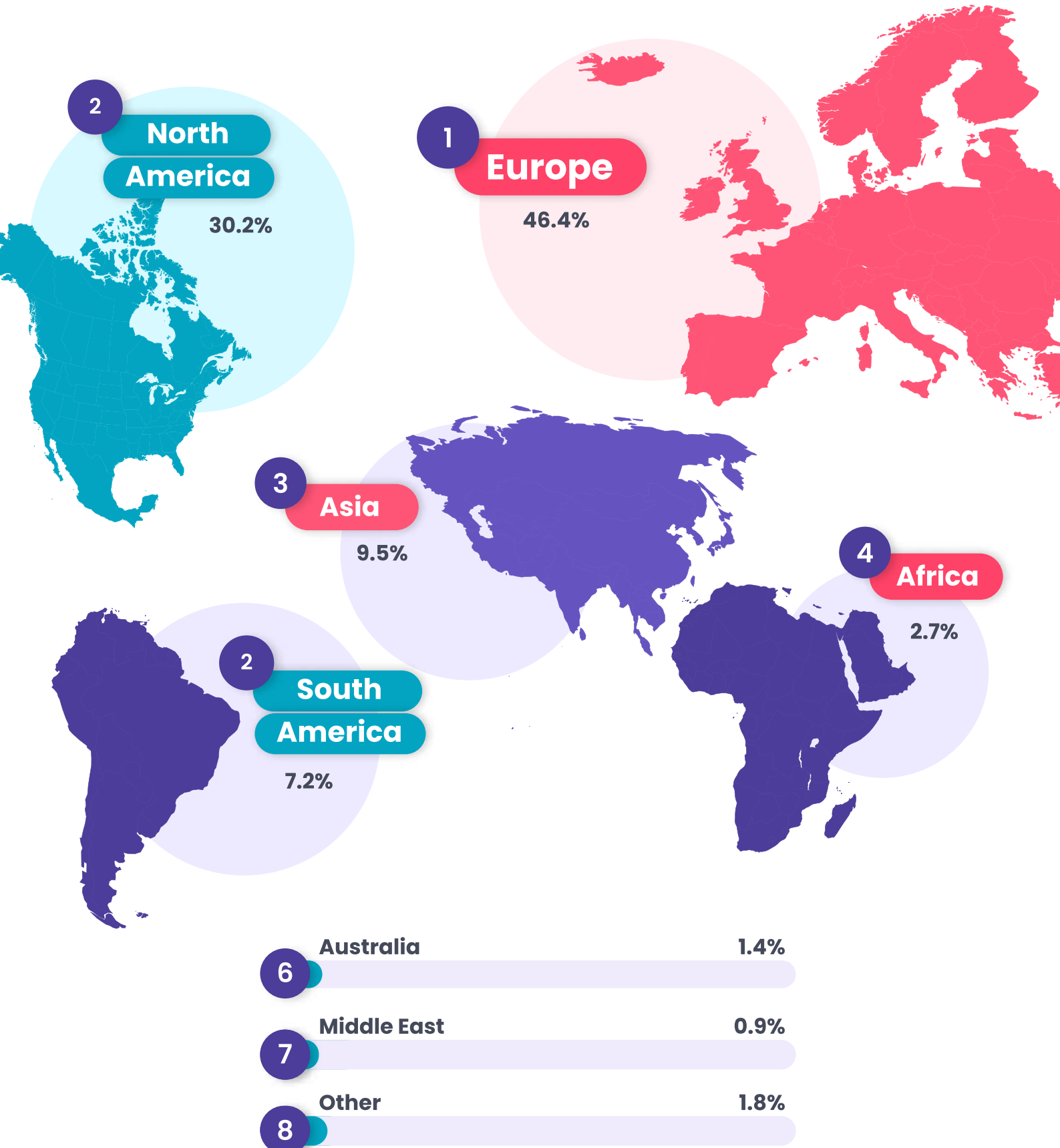
Customer service department size varies from Startup to Enterprise with a vast majority of respondents working in a team of 100+ agents.

How many customer support agents work at your company?



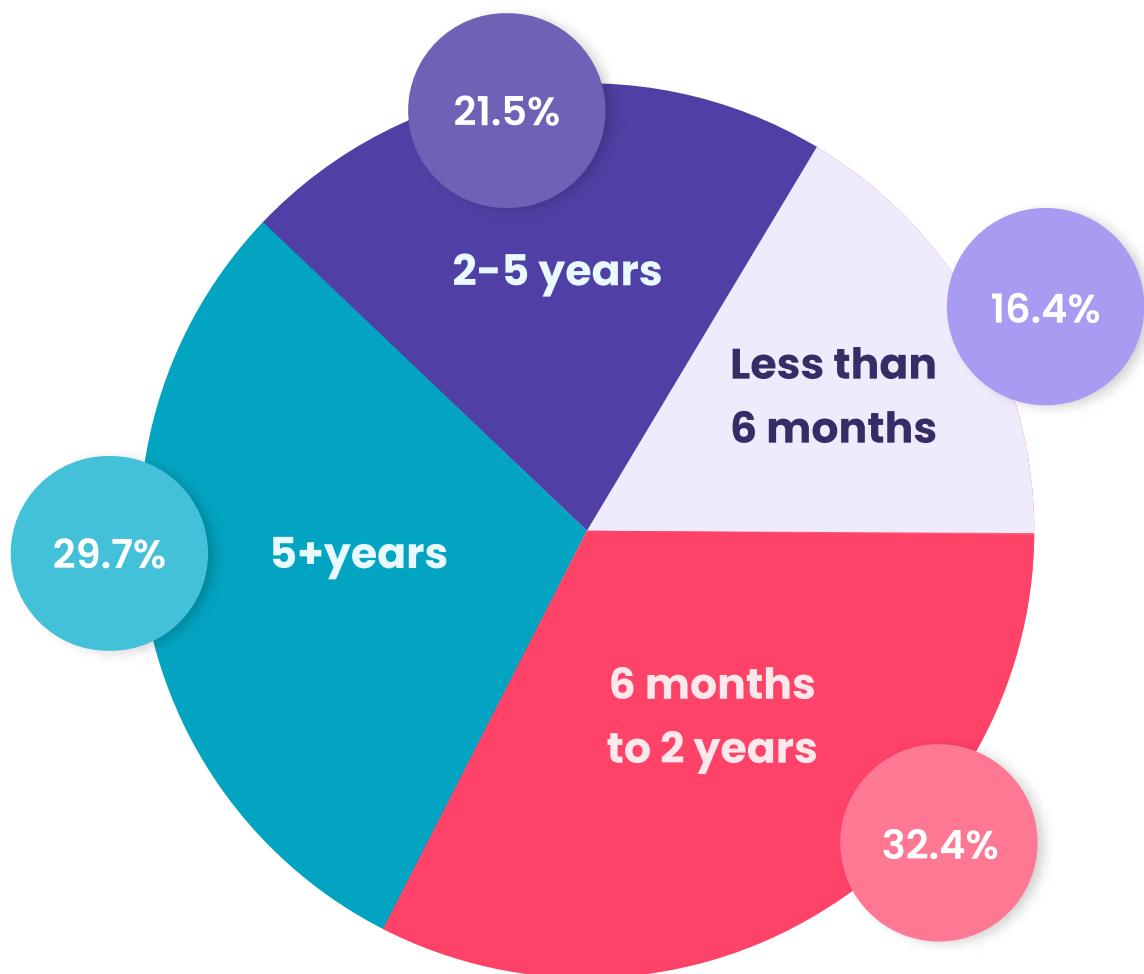
The largest portion of respondents work in Europe with a diverse cross-section of cultures around the world also represented.

Which region do you work in?

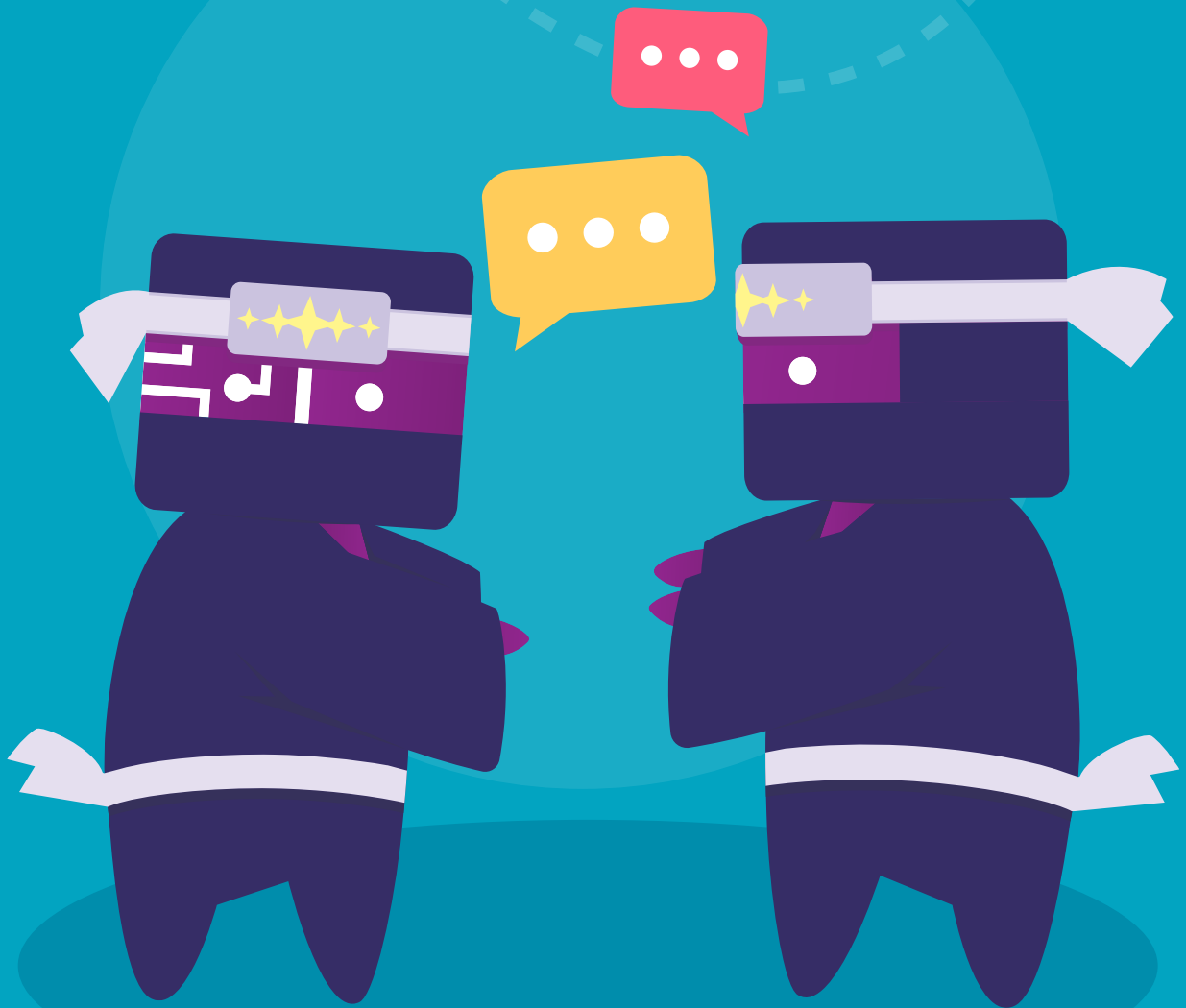


How long have you worked in a customer support role?

Experience levels vary from trainees to veterans with the majority of respondents having worked as an agent for 0.5–2 years.



Feedback



Providing quality feedback to your customer support agents is one of the most critical strategies to ensure they are empowered to provide the best customer experience possible. Giving agents regular insights into their performance can help easily pinpoint areas for improvement and motivate your team to increase the quality and productivity of their service.

However, providing effective feedback can often be a balancing act. Not enough feedback and your agents may feel neglected and unaware of how to improve. Too much feedback can cause team members to feel micromanaged and that they have no ownership of their tasks.

**45%**

of respondents said they only want one performance feedback session per month

**6%**

said they would prefer to have no feedback at all

It seems that the **healthy balance of feedback agents are looking for is a single 1:1 session per month.** However, the majority of managers seem to be providing too much or too little.

**38%**

of respondents said they get feedback more than twice a week

**19%**

claimed they get no feedback from their managers/team leads



Nevertheless, the **feedback that is being given to agents is high quality**, with most managers backing up their words with extra guidance and the tools needed to improve performance.

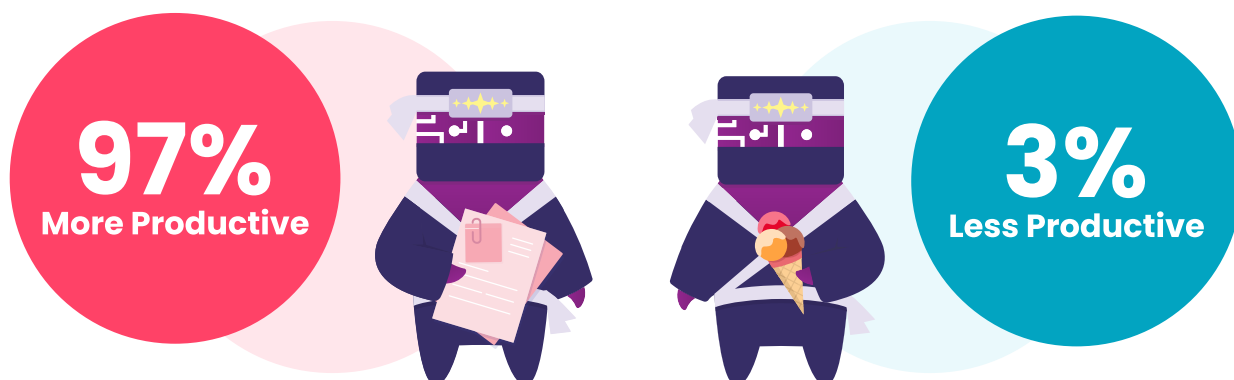
73%

of respondents stated that the quality of the feedback given to them was excellent

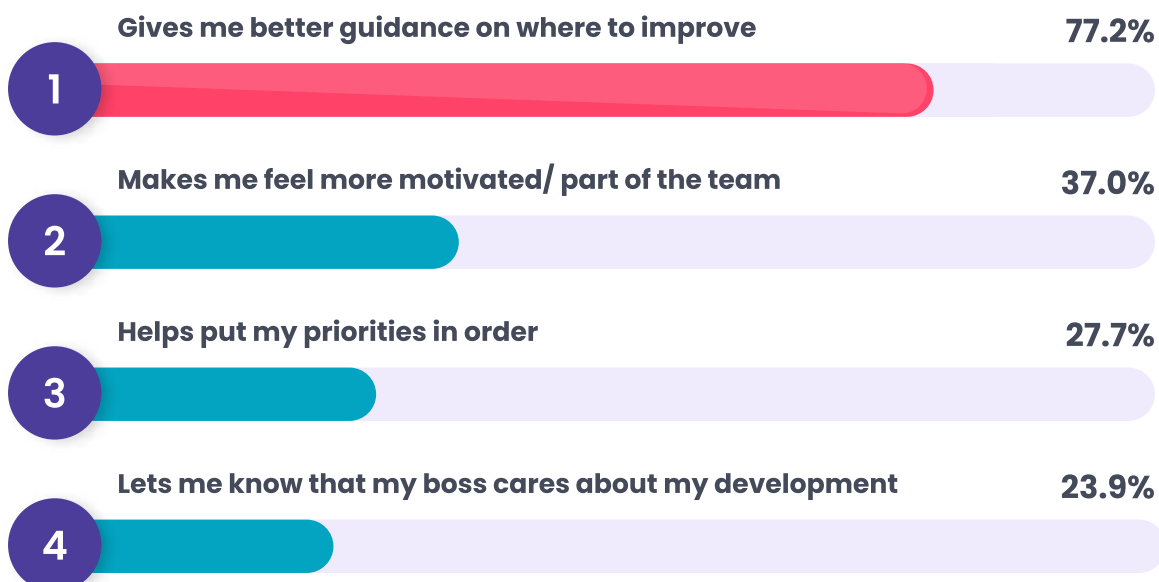
69%

of respondents strongly agree that they have been given the guidance and support (e.g advice, right tools etc) to act upon this feedback

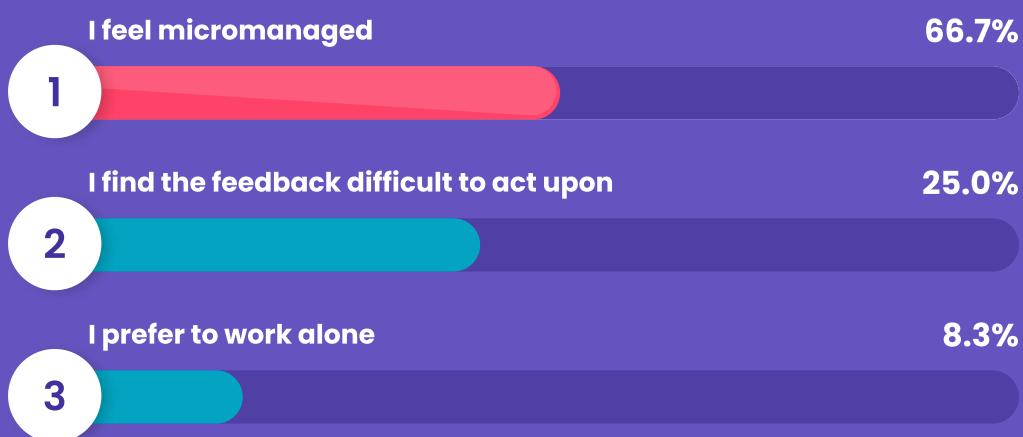
But at the end of the day, does regular feedback actually make agents more productive? In short, yes. But why exactly?



How does feedback make you more productive at work?



Why does feedback not make you more productive?



Autonomy



What is employee autonomy in customer support?

Employee autonomy is the extent to which agents have decision making freedom regarding day to day workplace tasks. This can include things such as: personal goal-setting, macros/response scripts, working hours etc.

Management and autonomy in the workplace are often viewed as polarizing terms. However, as more and more support teams aim to empower their agent's with extra flexibility in their roles, it is becoming apparent that both management and autonomy simultaneously is what helps build happy, productive teams.

Most agents are happy with their level of autonomy, but could be **much happier**



8/10

respondents said that they were given a satisfactory amount of autonomy to make decisions in their role.



yet...



73%

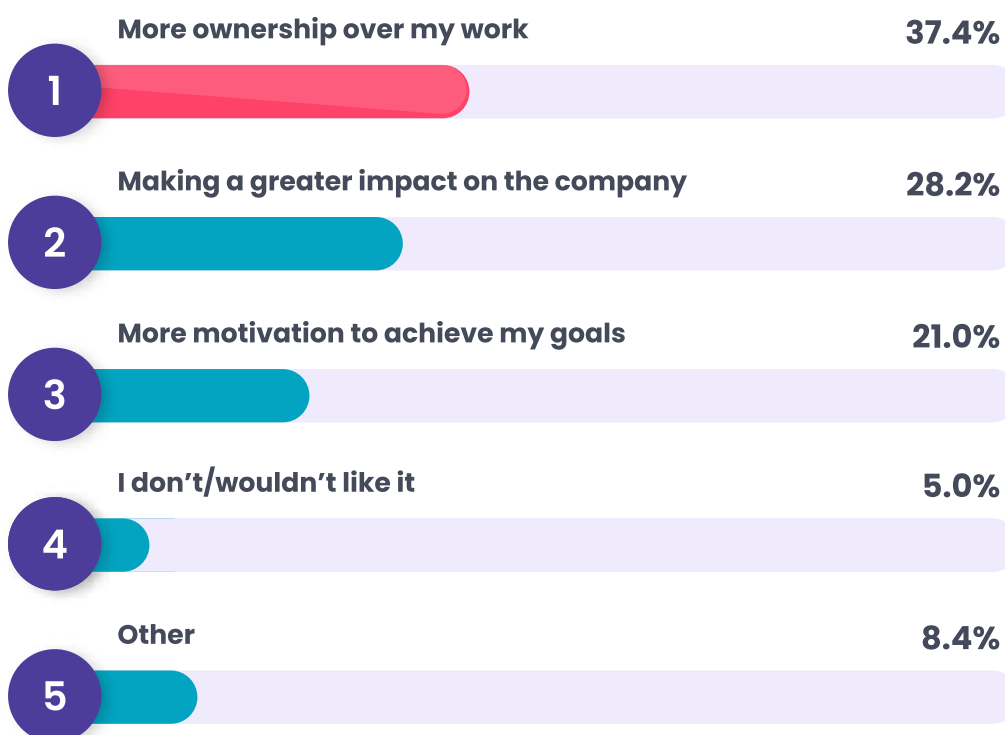
of agents said they want more autonomy in their role and only 4% claimed they wanted less.

Whilst, the majority of support agents are satisfied with their level of freedom, **most of them still want more** and a portion still feel micromanaged.

1/4 of agents still feel that they are being micromanaged

So what is it about more autonomy that is so appealing to customer support agents?

What do/would you like about having more decision making freedom in your role?



And why should managers give agents more freedom? Is there any benefit for the company beyond increased job satisfaction?

80% said if given more decision making freedom they would work beyond what's expected of them

Rewards & Recognition



When it comes to productivity and increased performance, engagement and empowerment go hand in hand. Providing your team with the freedom and the tools to succeed in their role is only half the picture. But what do you do when they achieve these successes? How do you keep them motivated to do even better next time?

It's no secret that customer service teams that implement a rewards & recognition program are more likely to see improvements in productivity, job satisfaction and employee retention. However, are managers doing enough to motivate their employees? And which forms of rewards/recognition wield the greatest results?

53%

of teams don't have a bonus/rewards program in their team

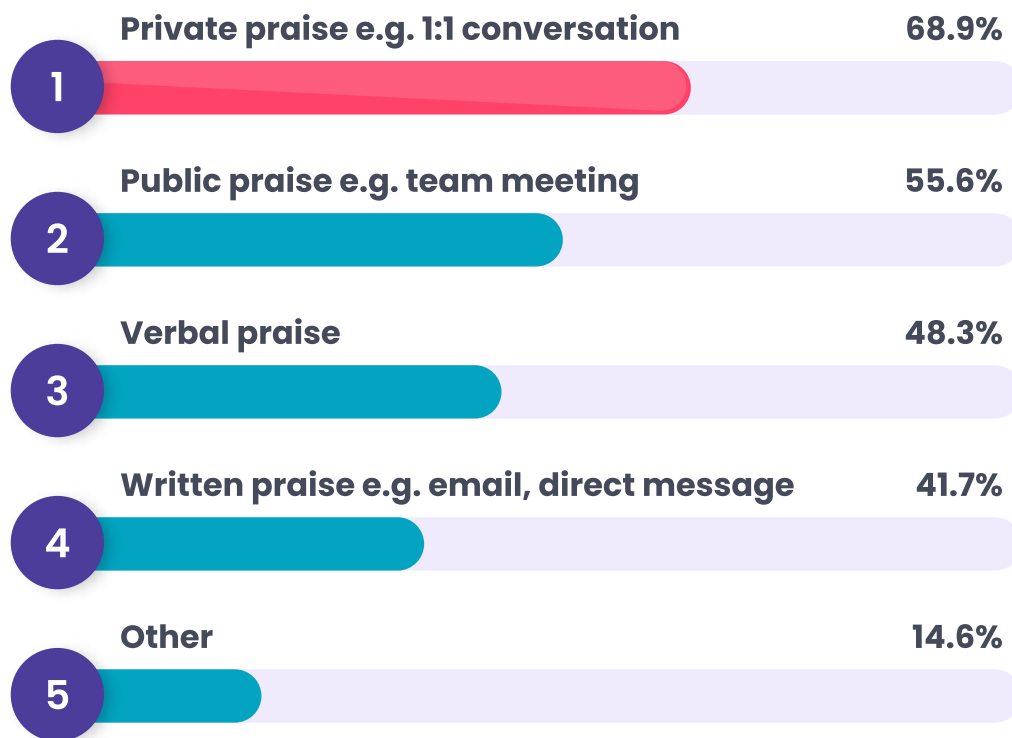
36%

said they don't receive any recognition from their boss at all

With rewards and recognition being proven as the most influential strategy to improve employee satisfaction and performance, it is surprising that such a large number of support managers don't offer any form of incentives for their team.

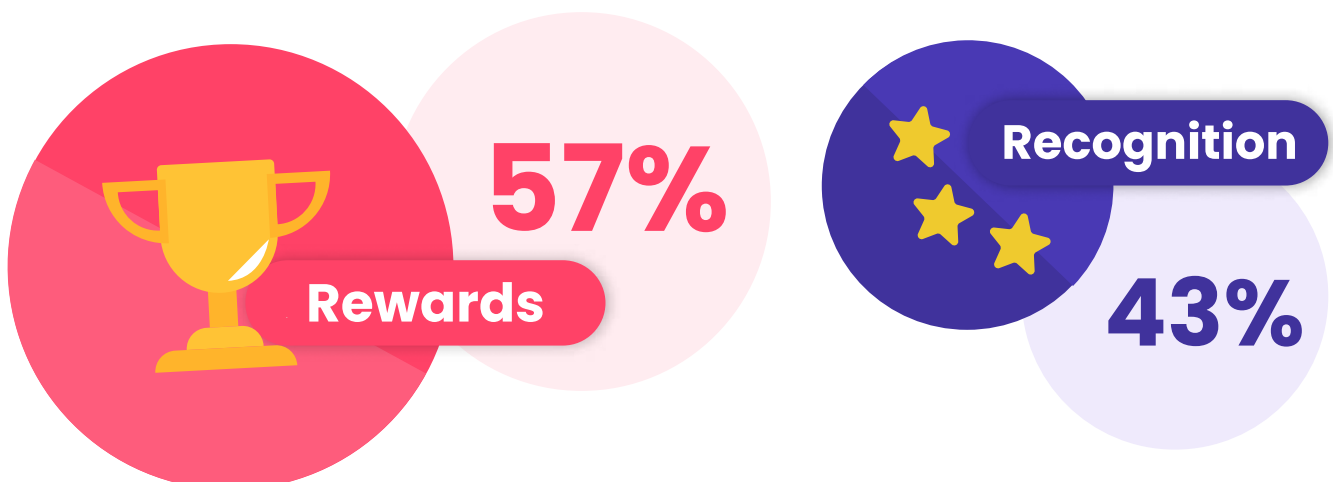


Which form/s of recognition do you receive?



The majority of managers (53%) are not providing rewards, however most of them (63%) do provide some sort of recognition. This begs the question, which one empowers agents more?

The majority of agents are more motivated by rewards (financial/gifts) than recognition (praise)



Whilst most agents are more motivated by rewards, receiving recognition from their manager is still an **extremely valuable contributor** to their productivity in the workplace.

65%

strongly agree that their manager does a great job of giving them recognition

79%

said that recognition for my work motivates me to work beyond expectation



Career Development

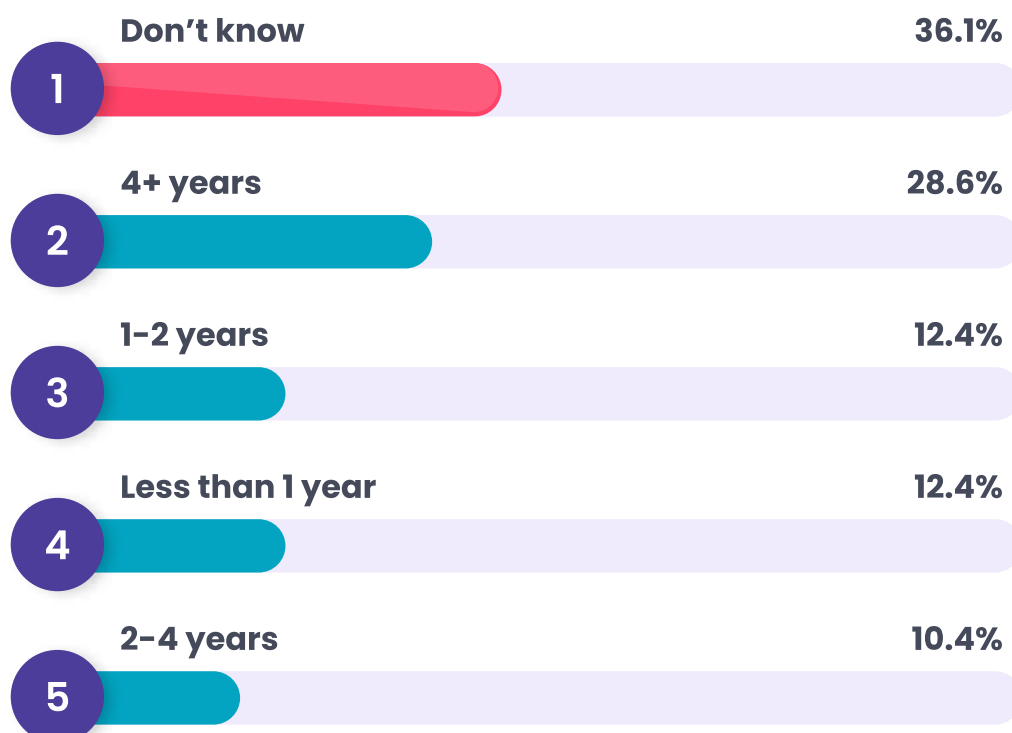


The industry of customer support has shifted greatly in the last 20 years. The stigma around it being a stepping stone occupation is vastly changing.

With more and more professionals choosing support as their calling, a significant part of being a great customer support manager is empowering your agents to fulfill their career ambitions.

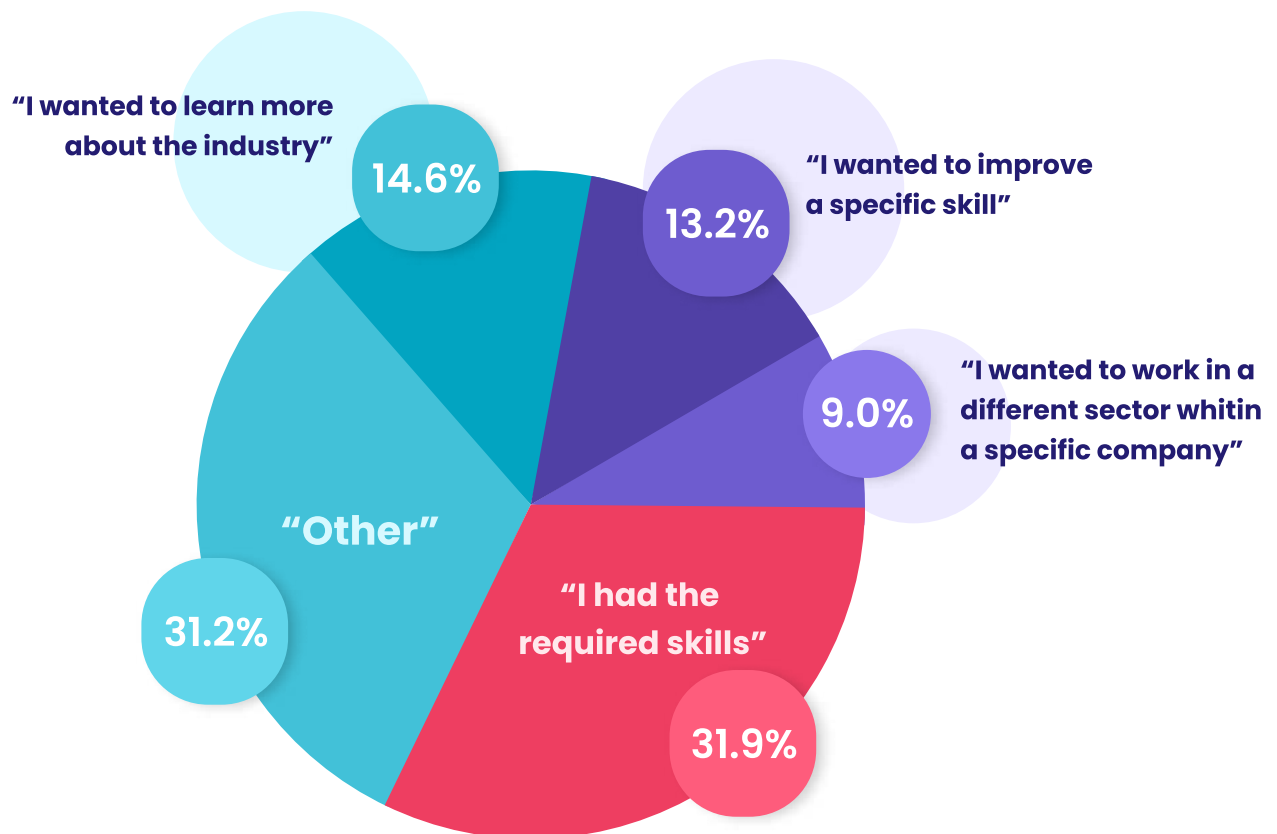
Whilst 40% of agents plan on developing a career in customer support, 60% don't know or are using it as a stepping stone

I see myself continuing to work in the customer support industry for...



It's no secret that customer support roles are a common pick for entry level workers, but why support and not another industry?

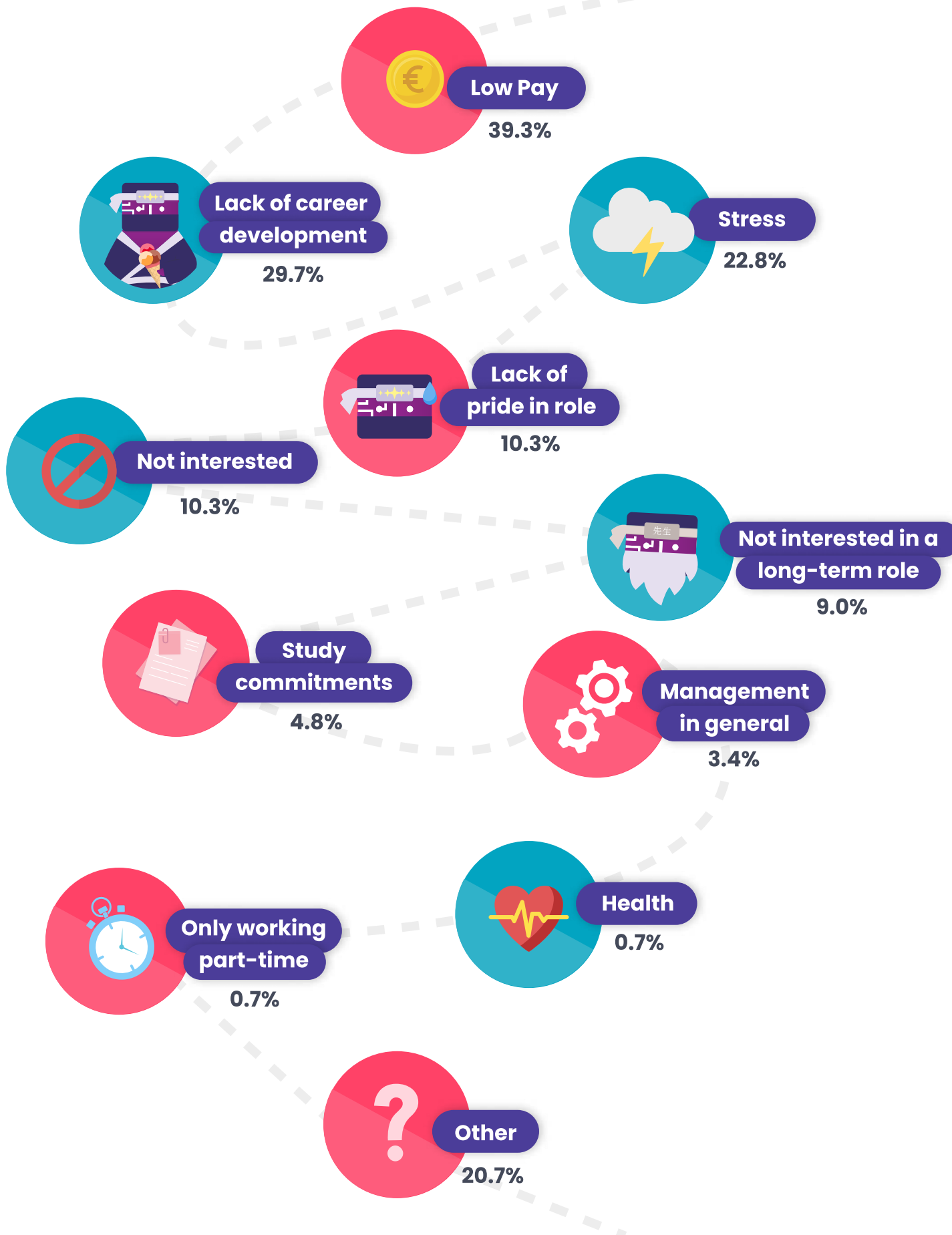
If you expect to jump to another industry, why did you choose to work in customer support?



It's also common knowledge that as an industry, customer support has a high staff turnover rate. Whilst it is slowly becoming more popular as a career option, **many are still choosing to opt out early. But why?**

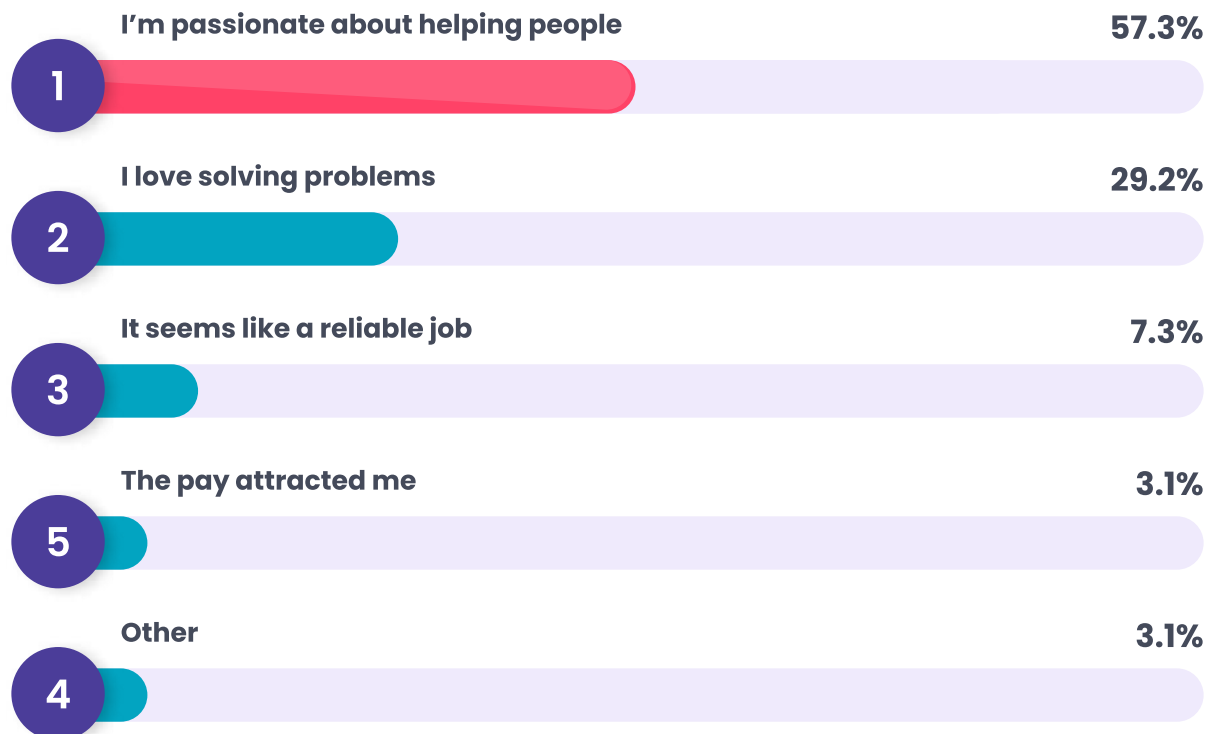


If you expect to jump to another industry, why do you not want to stay in customer support?



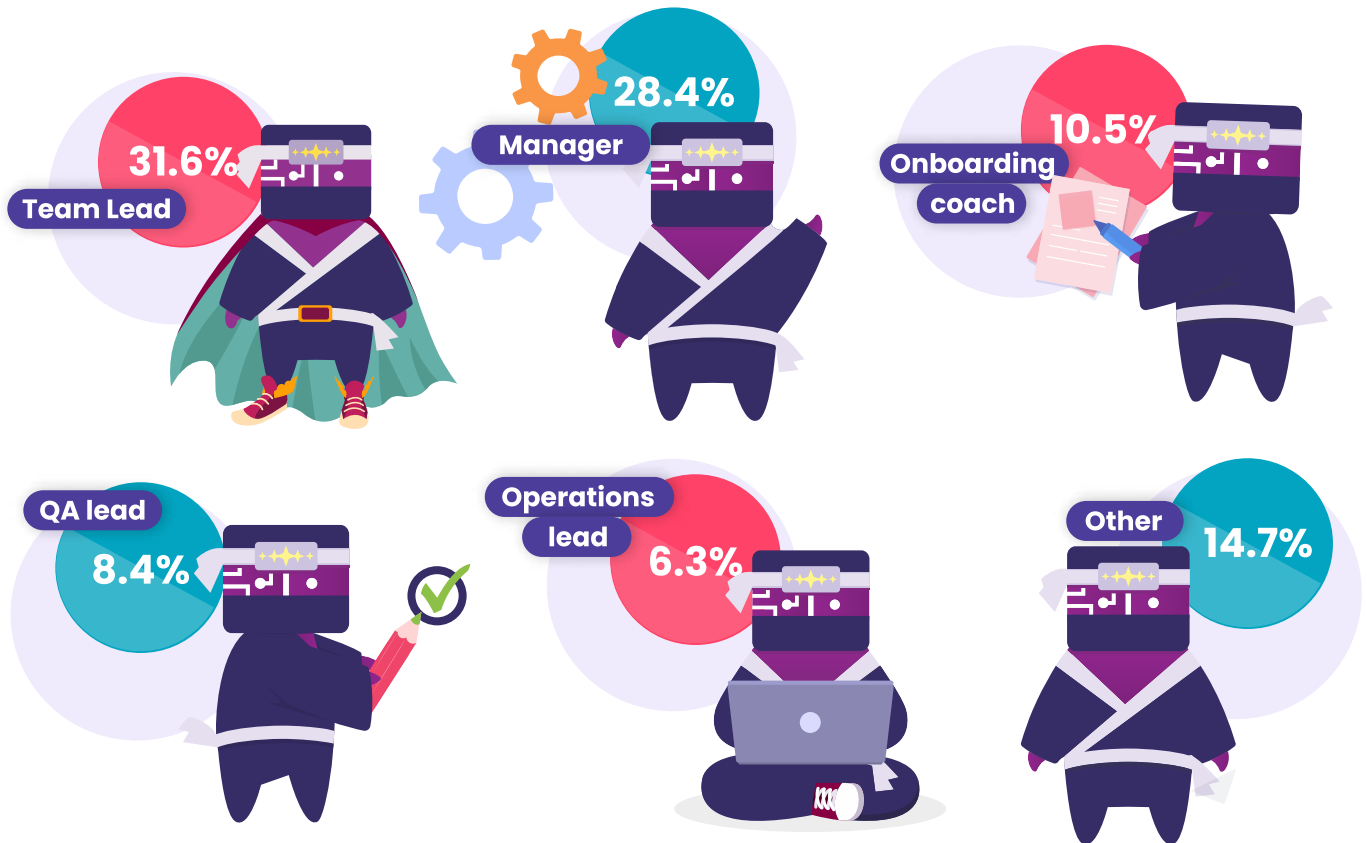
For those wanting to continue building a career in the industry, the vast majority stated this was due to their passion for helping people.

What makes you want to build a career in customer support?



Another thing that has developed within the support industry is the once standardized career path. With departments becoming increasingly valuable and dynamic, there are a number of specified roles that once didn't exist within a support team. In turn, this is opening up new avenues for agents looking to take the next step in their career development.

What role would you want to go into as your next step in your career in customer support?



3/4

strongly agree that they are given the opportunity by management to make this progression

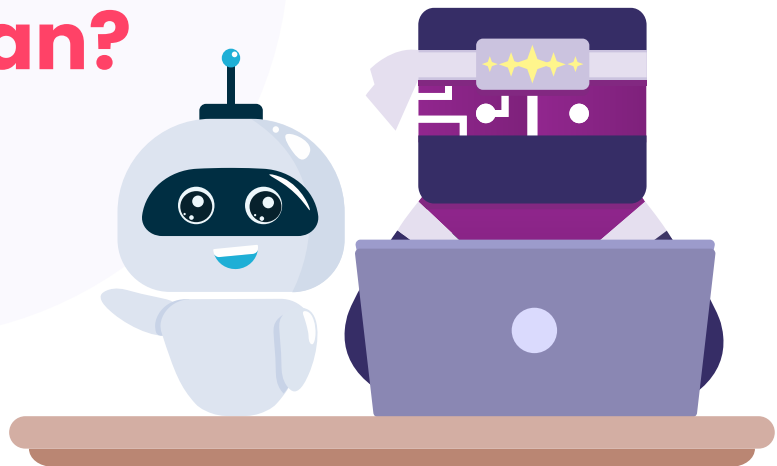
87%

would recommend working in customer support at their company to a family member/friend

The background is a solid dark purple. It features several faint, lighter purple geometric shapes: a large circle in the upper right, a smaller circle in the lower right, and a dashed line that curves from the upper left towards the bottom left. There are also some curved, semi-transparent shapes that look like stylized 'C' or 'G' characters.

Closing Thoughts

The future of customer service is...**human?**



If you Google, 'the future of customer service' there are a certain number of topics each article mentions: automation, self-service and chatbots to name a few.

Nowhere to be found is a mention of empowering your customer service agents, bottom-up management structures, or anything about humans actually.

As interesting as this futuristic narrative is, I'm sorry to break it to you, but human to human (H2H) customer service isn't going anywhere. Not for a long time at least.

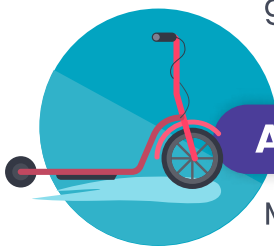
So until robots take over the world, look after your agents. Empower them to be the best they can be. It'll benefit not only your entire department, but the entire company you're representing.

If you don't know where to start here are some concluding tips from our report:



Feedback

Agents want 1 feedback session per month because it gives them better guidance on where to improve.



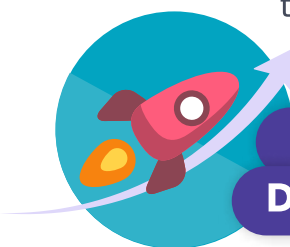
Autonomy

Most support agents want more decision making freedom because it gives them more ownership over their work and it will make them work beyond what is expected.



Rewards

Agents are most motivated by rewards (money/gifts) over praise but recognition makes them work harder than they would without it.



Career Development

The top 3 reasons that agents leave their roles are: low pay, lack of career development opportunities, and stress.

So there you have it. I hope this report has given you some guidance on the power of empowerment.

Happy supporting!

How Kaizo can help

The Kaizo platform helps customer service teams provide higher quality customer experiences by empowering agents to be more engaged and higher performing in the workplace. Taking a bottom up approach, Kaizo lightens the load of performance management for all roles in a support department.

For managers and team leads it allows them to seamlessly track, analyze and improve every aspect of their team's service in real-time, on one unified platform. For agents, it gives them the power to take more ownership of their performance, motivating them to achieve whilst allowing managers to simply guide rather than manage.

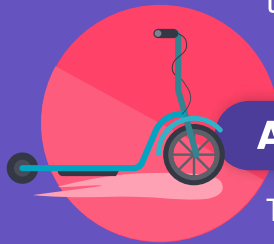


Kaizo empowers team's in all areas:



Feedback

The Scorecards and QA features help managers/team leads easily pinpoint improvement areas in real-time and to provide actionable feedback to their agents.



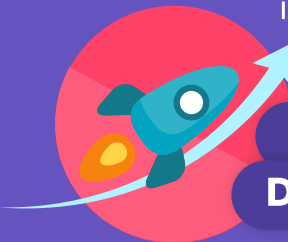
Autonomy

The Gamified Skill-Building feature gives agents the autonomy to set their own goals and track their own performance, improving both their engagement and positive impact on their company.



Rewards

The gamified point system & personal ninja avatar that are present throughout the Kaizo suite engage agents by instantly quantifying and gratifying their successes making it easier for managers to reward their top performers.



Career Development

The entire Kaizo platform assists both managers and agents to improve the efficiency, productivity and quality of their work, making career development more simple than ever.

If you want to find out how Kaizo can help your team, check our website and schedule a demo with one of our friendly ninjas!

