



Get Familiar With Schedule Adherence

Picture this: you've spent hours looking over your call center metrics to build your agent schedule. You've analyzed huge sets of data to determine how many agents you need, when you need them, for how long, and at what times. You've got everything calculated and scheduled down to the minute, and you've built a calendar that should, in theory, get you the kind of results you want—from your team and for your customers.

But the reality of how that schedule plays out ends up being very, very different. A few agents show up late for their shifts. A few more agents decide to extend their breaks—or take a break at a different time than you had planned. Individually, it doesn't seem like a lot of time; just a few minutes here or there. But when you look at your metrics, those “few minutes here or there” are having a serious impact on your team's performance.



That concept is called schedule adherence, and it can make or break a call center's success—and if you want your team to succeed, it needs to be a top priority.

But what, exactly, is schedule adherence? Why is it so important? And how can you improve schedule adherence—and create a better experience for your team and your customers in the process?

What is schedule adherence—and why is it so important?

Schedule adherence is an agent performance metric that measures the overlap between when a call center agent is scheduled to work and when they actually work. Schedule adherence is calculated by dividing the number of minutes an employee works during a shift by the number of minutes they were scheduled to work; then, that number is multiplied by 100 so that the final calculation is expressed as a percentage.

Or, in formula form:

$$\text{Schedule Adherence} = \frac{\text{Total Minutes Worked}}{\text{Total Minutes Scheduled} \times 100}$$

For example, let's say an agent is scheduled to work 210 minutes (a four-hour shift with a 30-minute meal break)—but, during their scheduled block, they only end up working 200 minutes (thanks to arriving five minutes late and adding an extra five minutes to the end of their break time).

In that scenario, their schedule adherence would be $200/210 \times 100$ —or 95.2 percent.

Schedule adherence is so important because, unlike scheduling for other positions, scheduling for call center agents and synchronous contact channels is incredibly time-sensitive. Scheduling decisions are made based on a variety of data points (like call volume, call length, and available agents); agents are strategically scheduled to optimize performance, drive results, and deliver the best experience for customers. But

if even one agent strays from that scheduling strategy, even just for a few minutes, it can completely throw off the entire flow for the day—and lead to serious issues for your customers, agents, and business as a whole.

Schedule adherence can impact operations in a variety of ways:

- **Longer hold times.** When agents aren't sticking to their schedules, there may not be enough agents to manage call volume. This can lead to longer hold times for customers and a less positive customer service experience overall, even if just one agent strays from their scheduled work time. This is called the “power of one,” and it becomes increasingly important the fewer call center agents you have scheduled at any given time. For example, let's say you have 150 call center agents scheduled for a shift with a 45-second average speed of answer (ASA). Losing one of those agents (and going from 150 to 149) will impact your ASA, but not as significantly as if you had 50 agents and went to 49—or 10 and went to 9. The fewer agents scheduled, the larger the impact the power of one will have on your operations (and your customers)—so while schedule adherence is always important, it's particularly important when you're managing a smaller call center.
- **Agent burnout.** When schedule adherence is low, fewer agents have to handle a higher volume of calls—which can lead to resentment, frustration, and, ultimately, burnout for the agents picking up the slack.
- **Overstaffing.** On the flip side, if agents try to “make up” for their schedule adherence by extending their shift or working at a different time, it can lead to too many agents answering calls—which, from a business perspective, isn't the most advantageous way to spend payroll dollars. (It's important to note that schedule adherence,

which is how closely agents stick to their work schedule, is sometimes confused for schedule conformance, which is the total productive time an agent spends working during their shift. To keep things simple, just remember that schedule adherence is about when agents work during their scheduled shift—while schedule conformance is about how much agents work during their scheduled shift.)

How to improve schedule adherence within your team

Clearly, schedule adherence is a must for high-performing call center teams. But how, exactly, can you get your team to adhere to their schedules—and increase productivity in the process?

Get your agents on board

In large part, improving schedule adherence boils down to getting agents to adhere to their schedules. But telling people to show up on time and stick to their scheduled shifts isn't enough; for most people, showing up 10 minutes late or taking an unscheduled five-minute break to grab a snack just doesn't seem like that big of a deal.

So, if you really want to move the needle on schedule adherence, you need to show your agents why it's so important. And the best way to show them? Through a game.

Gather your agents in groups of 10—and give each of them a balloon. Ask them to bounce the balloons in the air between them, making sure that

no balloon falls or hits the ground.

Then, pull one agent out of the group—but have them leave their balloon behind. Now, there's 9 agents—but still 10 balloons they need to keep up in the air. After a few moments, pull out another agent, then another—so the group of agents progressively gets smaller, but still has to keep the same number of balloons up in the air.

After a few rounds, the remaining agents will be scrambling to keep all the balloons up in the air—and inevitably, they'll lose track and one (or more!) will hit the ground.

Once they've finished the game, let them know that it's a metaphor for schedule adherence; when agents aren't at their desks when they're scheduled, there are fewer agents available to take calls (or, in terms of the game, keep the balloons in the air); all the remaining agents have to work harder—and inevitably, they're going to drop a call/balloon.

Once agents realize how schedule adherence impacts their fellow co-workers, they'll be more likely to stick to their assigned schedules—and your adherence metrics will improve as a result.

Finding smarter, faster, better scheduling with Assembled

A CASE STUDY WITH CARE/OF

Care/of

We saw Assembled as a trustworthy system, not just a set of spreadsheets, that was going to help us staff for today and forecast for tomorrow. It also helped that the Assembled team really knew how CX worked because they had been in our shoes.

Henry Dunn, Director of CX

Challenge: Spreadsheets are error-prone and not designed for scale

Thanks to Care/of, wellness has a new and (very) personalized look.

In contrast to an overwhelming status quo—endless shelves of indistinguishable vitamins - and outdated models of care, the Care/of promise is a simple yet welcome one: to be a trusted partner in your journey to a more healthy life. Exceptional customer support is central to this idea, naturally. “It’s about adding a more human component to an offering that’s both personalized and convenient at its core,” says Henry Dunn, Care/of’s Director of Customer Experience. Henry and his CX team aren’t exactly your average support organization. Part customer service, part user researchers, and part retention experts, this team of 12 agents does whatever it takes to ensure customers are getting exactly what they need, as quickly as possible.

This context-switching, multi-hat-wearing team relied on a workflow based in Google Sheets to ensure agents knew where they needed to be at any given time across email and chat. And yet, the team had to move in between spreadsheets, Zendesk and Slack just to find an answer to a question, or to get the most updated information on scheduling changes. “Reporting was a hodgepodge,” says Henry, “and it would usually require our BI tool for certain things, and the spreadsheet for others.”

For team lead and scheduler-extraordinaire Hannah Santisi, this was far from ideal. Not only would building schedules take up to 10 hours a week, but it would “feel like we were starting from scratch every day.” Each tab in their Google Sheets represented a different day’s schedule, which inevitably led to mix-ups (“I read the wrong tab to find my schedule”), mistakes (“I accidentally deleted a schedule”), or unreadable cells (“The formula broke!”).

Even though Google Sheets seems easy, it’s still really painful. For me, it was incredibly manual and time-consuming. And for agents, it felt like a one-way dialogue, where we were just telling them where they needed to be, without context on why we made those decisions.

Hannah Santisi, CX Team Lead

For a small team, these errors would inevitably lead to downstream pain. Agents might feel guilty or self-conscious for making a mistake, and customers might experience longer wait times while a scheduling mix-up was resolved. To address these pains head-on, the Care/of team tried —and quickly abandoned—Tymeshift.

CASE STUDY

Even though Tymeshift integrated with Zendesk, it was buggy. Worst of all, our agents felt like they were being watched because of how adherence worked. Tymeshift created a really weird dynamic on our team, where agents felt managed by the tool.

Hannah Santisi, CX Team Lead

Creating a cleaner system of record with Assembled

Not having to check 12 different agents' calendars to schedule has been great, since the Google Calendar sync does it for me. And Assembled's templates make it easy to copy, paste, and edit schedules in bulk.

Hannah Santisi, CX Team Lead

For Hannah, whose top priority was making sure agents were happy, engaged, and performing well, it was time to think beyond basic scheduling and time-tracking tools. This was equally critical for Henry, whose focus was on finding new and better ways to retain customers. After an “easy onboarding experience”, the Care/of team was off to the races. Almost immediately, they felt the benefits of an easier-to-create, easier-to-view schedule. Agents were able to see their up-to-date schedule in Google Calendar, which meant they spent less time tool-switching, and more time focused on customer-facing work. Schedule creation even went from 10 hours a week down to just 2.



Spreadsheets told agents where to be, but that's it. Assembled gives them the critical information they need to start their day without confusion or resentment. They can also go in and easily request time off or changes to their schedule in Assembled.

Hannah Santisi, CX Team Lead

Thanks to the staffing timeline, agents were able to see schedules more holistically and in the context of forecasted demand, which gave them important context into how and why the scheduling decisions were made. For Hannah and Henry, the Realtime Dashboard allows them to see exactly where everyone is, what they're doing, and is able to double-click into any out-of-adherence instances. This way, managers can hold agents accountable without making them feel like they're under constant watch or being micro-managed. As for what's next for this multi-talented team? The sky's the limit, especially as they are freed up to proactively find ways to improve and enhance the Care/of experience. “Happier agents mean happier customers. Assembled is helping us fuel this cycle.”

Set the right schedule adherence goals.

If you want to improve your schedule adherence, you need clear goals. But if you want your improvements to actually increase productivity across your team, you need to set the right schedule adherence goals.

So what do the right schedule adherence goals and metrics look like? The goals and metrics that will lead to increased productivity have a few things in common, including:

- **They're realistic.** In a perfect world, 100% schedule adherence would be the goal. But you're managing people, not robots—and the truth is, 100% compliance just isn't realistic. When setting goals for your agents, make sure it's a schedule adherence percentage they can actually achieve (90 to 95 percent is a solid goal).
- **They're clear.** The last thing you want your schedule adherence goals to be is ambiguous. When setting goals, make sure you're clear about not only what the schedule adherence goal is in theory, but how it looks in practice. For example, if your goal is a 92 percent adherence rate—and that's it—it leaves a lot of room for interpretation. For example, if people show up 20 minutes late every day, they might think that they can just “make up” that time by working through their break. But while that might improve their schedule conformance (how much productive time they work during their shift), it wouldn't actually help their schedule adherence (how closely the agent sticks to their scheduled work time). That's why, if you want your agents to hit their schedule adherence goals, it's important to be clear about what, exactly, that looks like—and how closely they need to stick to their schedule in order to hit their goal. A more appropriate goal would be something along the lines of “92 percent adherence with no more than a 10-minute difference

between time worked and scheduled start and end times, both for shift and scheduled breaks.”

- **They're tailored to individual channels.** Just like different queues or channels will require a different scheduling strategy, different queues or channels should also have different schedule adherence goals. For example, schedule adherence goals for a queue that spends 30+ minutes on each call is going to be different than an agent that spends 2 minutes or less. Make sure, when setting goals, you're keeping the structure and workflow of each queue or channel in mind—and setting schedule adherence goals accordingly.

Offer incentives for schedule adherence

If you want to improve schedule adherence, you need your team to adhere to their schedules and hit their goals. And the best way to ensure they do that? Incentivize them.

Offer rewards for agents that hit their schedule adherence goals—both at an individual and team level. For example, if your team exceeds their schedule adherence goals for the month, you might reward them with a catered lunch to celebrate. If individual team members hit their goals for a month, you might offer a fun reward like a gift card for coffee or some company merch, like a mug or t-shirt.

The point is, people are more likely to do something if there is something in it for them—so offering incentives for schedule adherence can be a great way to encourage employees to stick to their schedules.

Identify adherence issues—and address them head on

Part of improving schedule adherence is identifying what's not working—and taking the necessary steps to change it. So, if you want to improve schedule adherence overall, take the time into what, exactly, is causing the adherence problems—and then address those issues head on.

For example, is an employee chronically late? They could be struggling with a personal issue (like transportation troubles), so pull them aside to see what's going on and see if there's anything you can do to help them arrive on time. Is a specific department of agents struggling to hit their schedule adherence goals? It could be that you're not scheduling those agents in a way that suits their job duties; schedule a meeting with the team and ask for feedback to figure out what's going on—then, take that feedback and adjust their schedules as necessary.

Adherence issues won't magically disappear on their own. So, if you find yourself dealing with an adherence issue—and you want to encourage schedule adherence across your organization—make it a priority to address that issue head on.

Assembled

Want to learn more about how Assembled can help you better manage your staffing—and hit your schedule adherence goals in the process?

SCHEDULE A DEMO TODAY!



If you remember nothing else...

- Schedule Adherence = $\frac{\text{Total Minutes Worked}}{\text{Total Minutes Scheduled}} \times 100$
- Poor schedule adherence leads to a variety of issues, including longer hold times for customers, staffing issues, and increased risk of burnout for call agents
- Agents need to understand how schedule adherence impacts their team—so show them how straying from their schedule negatively impacts their co-workers
- Don't go overboard with schedule adherence goals. Make sure the goals you set are actually achievable; otherwise, it could discourage agents—and have the opposite of the desired effect
- If you're dealing with an adherence issue, go directly to the source, find out what needs to be done to address the issue, and take action.