Preventing Contact Center Agent Burnout

by Jeff Toister
Service Culture Guide

Summary

Burnout is a huge challenge for contact centers.

It contributes to poor customer service, absenteeism, and turnover.

The aim of this study was to determine what factors put agents at risk of burnout, and what makes them more resilient.

Key findings include:

- 59% of agents face some risk of burnout
- 28% face a severe burnout risk

Contact Center Agents at Risk of Burnout

Severe Risk 28%

Not at Risk 41%

At Risk 31%
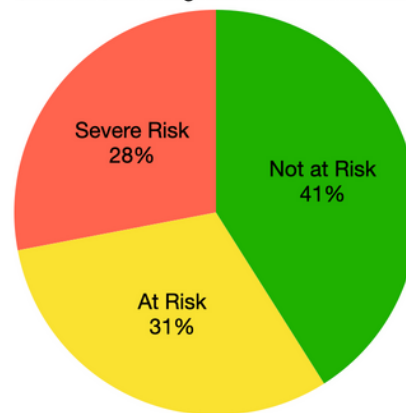
What is the profile of an agent with a severe risk of burnout?

- 41% don't feel they are paid fairly
- 31% don't receive regular feedback
- 30% don't have a good friend at work

One surprise? Working from home has no impact on burnout. Contact center agents who worked onsite have the same burnout risk as agents who primarily work from home.

What makes an agent more resilient to burnout?
The study discovered 11 factors that are correlated with lower burnout risk. The top three:

1. **Empowerment.** 92% of low-risk agents felt empowered, compared with just 72% of high-risk agents
2. **Pay.** 77% of low-risk agents felt adequately paid, compared to just 59% of high-risk agents
3. **Support.** 94% of low-risk agents have a supportive boss, compared to just 77% of high-risk agents.

Study Overview

The goal of the study was to identify job-related factors that increased the risk of burnout for contact center agents.

What is burnout?

Burnout is defined by the American Psychological Association as "physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion accompanied by decreased motivation, lowered performance, and negative attitudes toward oneself and others."

Study Design

A total of 951 contact center agents completed a burnout risk assessment and survey between January and February 2023.

The survey was anonymous, though agents could opt-in to a drawing to receive one of three Amazon gift cards.

Participants were first asked to complete a burnout self-assessment provided by MindTools. The assessment generated a burnout risk score on a scale of 15-75.

- **15-32** = Not at risk of burnout
- **33-49** = At risk of burnout
- **50-75** = Severe risk of burnout

The average score was 39.

Participants were then asked a series of 15 yes/no questions about their work environment. The topics ranged from the training they received to whether they had a good friend at work.

The answers were compared to participants' burnout risk scores.

A question with a difference of 10 or more percentage points between responses from the Not At Risk and Severe Risk groups indicates a strong relationship between that question and burnout.

Results

Overall, 59% of contact center agents are at risk of burnout, including 28% who faced a severe risk. 11 of 15 survey questions correlated with severe burnout risk.

|	Not at Risk	Severe Risk	Difference
Do you feel empowered to help customers with most of their needs?	93%	72%	+21
Are you paid fairly for the work you do?	77%	59%	+18
Is your boss generally supportive?	94%	77%	+17
Is your contact center adequately staffed?	90%	75%	+15
Are your organization's products or services generally of good quality?	93%	79%	+14
Does your boss set a positive example?	91%	77%	+14
Do you believe your company is customer-focused?	94%	80%	+14
Do you receive regular feedback from your boss?	83%	69%	+14
Do you feel your coworkers generally deliver outstanding customer service?	90%	77%	+13
Do you have a good friend at work?	82%	70%	+12
Have you received adequate training to do your job?	92%	80%	+12

Bosses

Good bosses can help agents remain resilient to burnout.

There were four questions related to bosses in the survey, and all four were correlated to lower burnout risk.

1. Is your boss generally supportive?
2. Does your boss set a positive example?
3. Do you receive regular feedback from your boss?
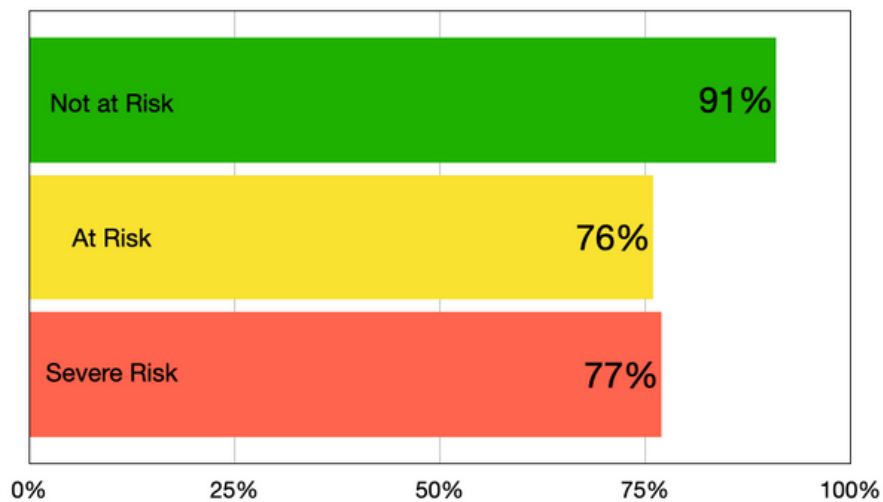4. Have you received adequate training to do your job?

Agents who are not at risk of burnout are more likely to have a supportive boss.
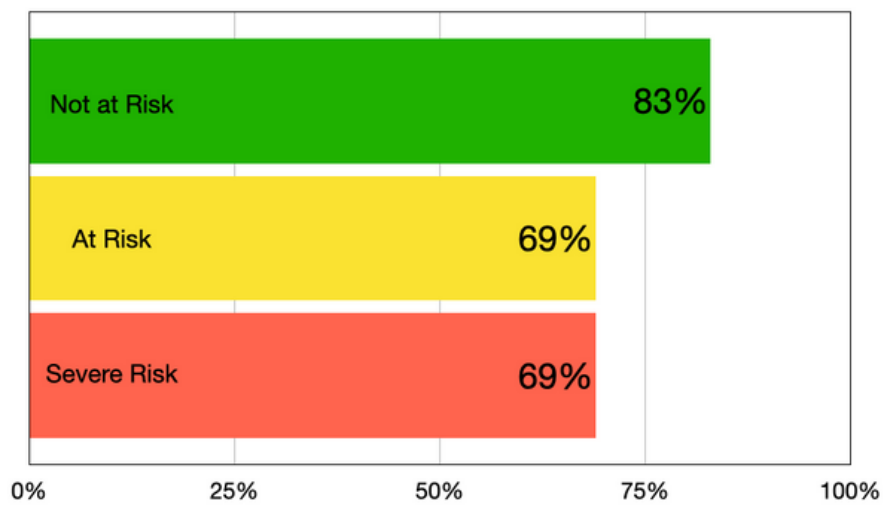
Is your boss generally supportive?

Risk Level	Percentage
Not at Risk	94%
At Risk	84%
Severe Risk	77%
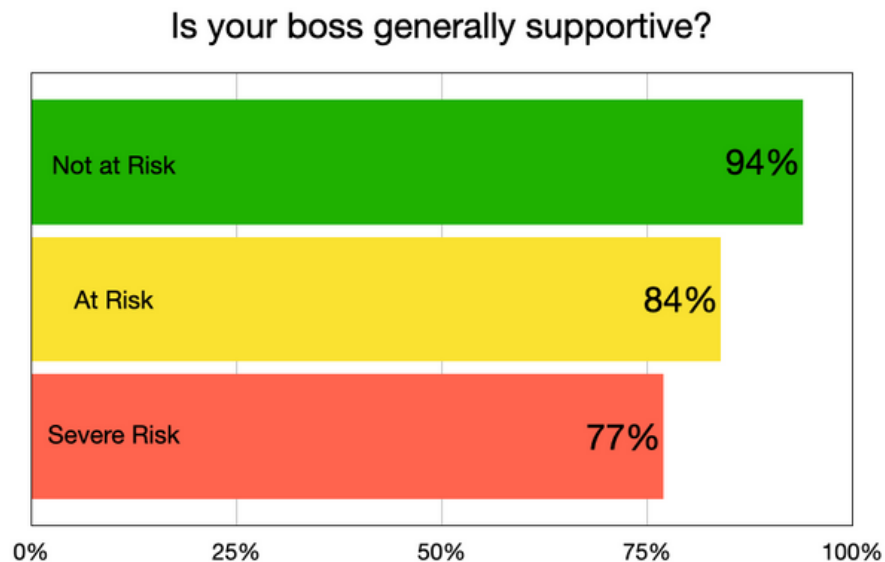
Bosses

Agents who are not at risk of burnout are more likely to have a boss who sets a positive example and provides regular feedback.

## Does your boss set a positive example?

Risk Level	Percentage
Not at Risk	91%
At Risk	76%
Severe Risk	77%

Do you receive regular feedback from your boss?

Risk Level	Percentage
Not at Risk	83%
At Risk	69%
Severe Risk	69%

Bosses

Agents who are not at risk of burnout are more likely to feel they have received adequate training. While many people in a contact center might have play a role in training agents, the boss is ultimately responsible.

Have you received adequate training to do your job?

Category	Percentage
Not at Risk	92%
At Risk	81%
Severe Risk	80%
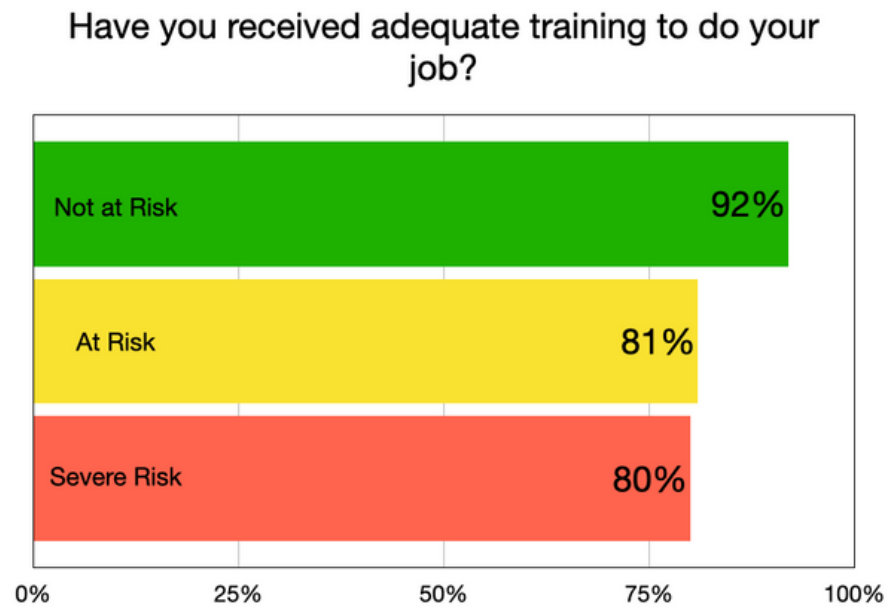
Resources:

These resources can help you reduce burnout risk on your team.

- **Support:** Become a more supportive boss using Maslow's Hierarchy
- **Role Model:** 7 ways leaders can model great customer service
- **Feedback:** How to hold customer service employees accountable
- **Training:** Check out this collection of training resources

Organization

The company you work for can also affect your burnout risk.

There were three survey questions about the organization employees worked for. All three were correlated with burnout resilience.

1. Are you paid fairly for the work you do?
2. Are your organization's products or services generally of good quality?
3. Do you believe your company is customer-focused?

Agents who feel they are paid fairly are more resilient to burnout. While fair pay can be subjective, there's often a business case for giving agents a raise.

Are you paid fairly for the work you do?

Category	Percentage
Not at Risk	77%
At Risk	53%
Severe Risk	59%
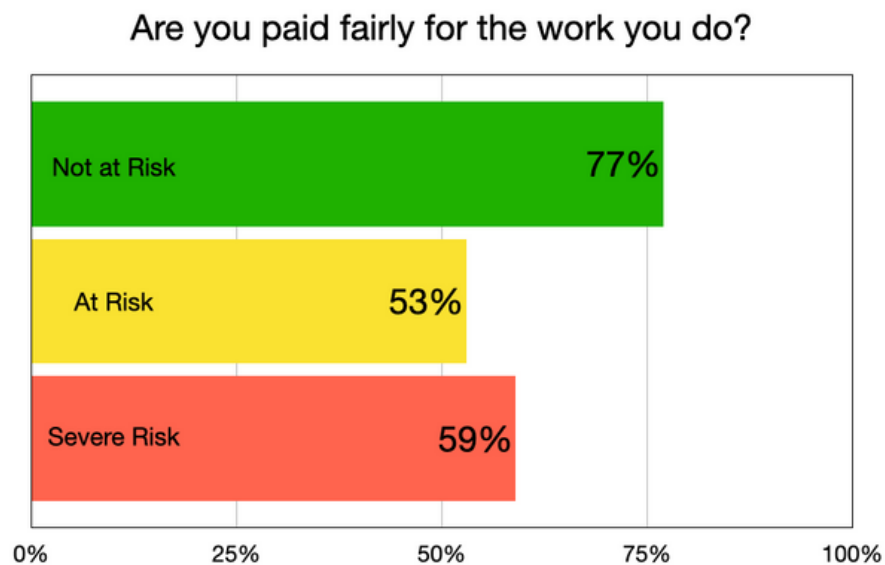
Organization

Agents who are not at risk of burnout are more likely to believe their company offers quality products. A customer experience promise audit can help you improve.

Are your organization's products or services generally of good quality?

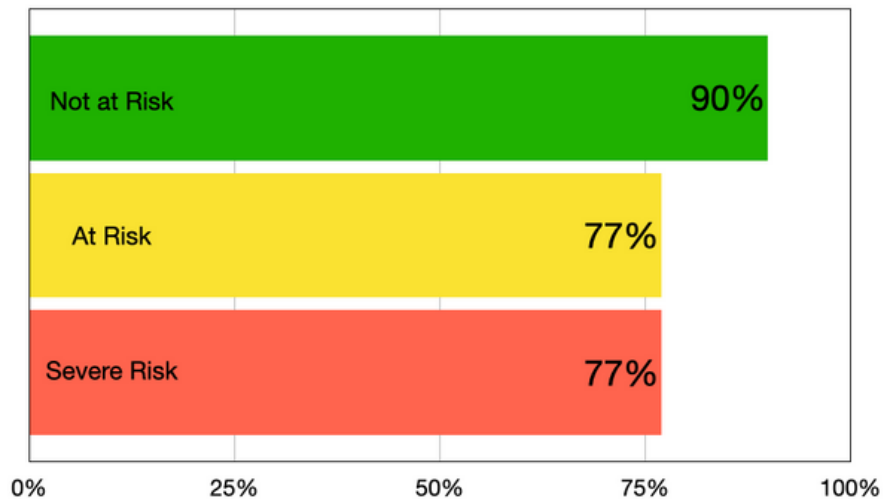|	
Not at Risk	93%
At Risk	83%
Severe Risk	79%

Customer-focused organizations have agents with a much lower risk of burnout. Get a step-by-step guide to becoming customer-focused with The Service Culture Handbook..

Do you believe your company is customer-focused?

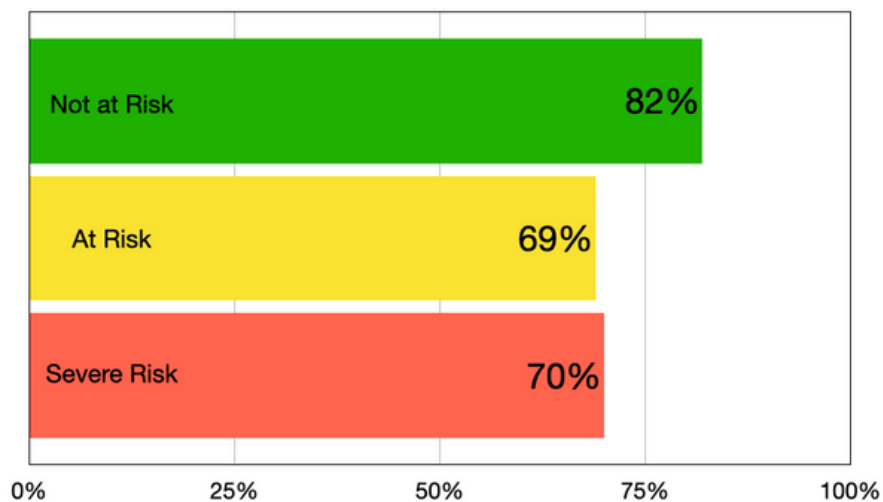|	
Not at Risk	94%
At Risk	84%
Severe Risk	80%
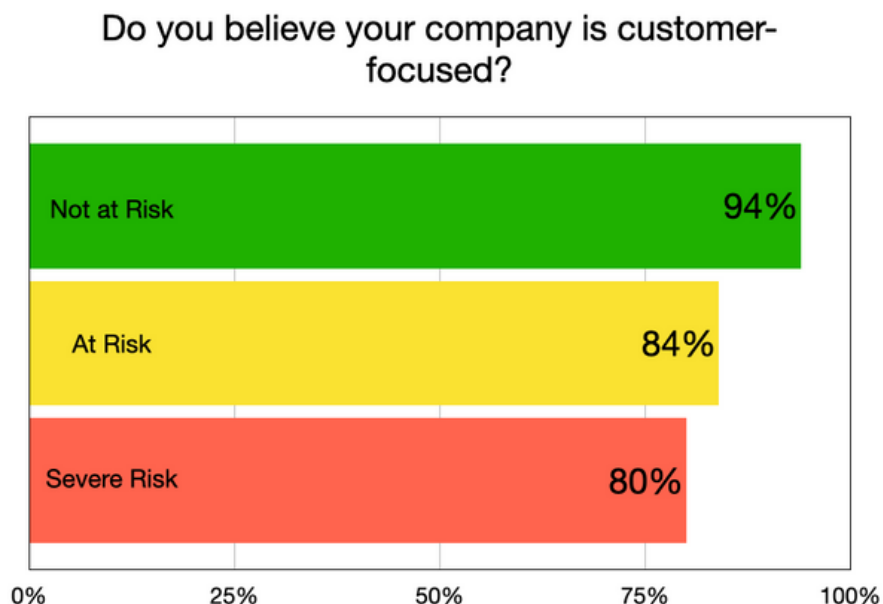
Coworkers

The people you work with can affect your resilience to burnout. That means toxic employees can be pushing good employees out the door. The best solution for a toxic employee is to <u>fire them</u>.

Do you feel your coworkers generally deliver outstanding customer service?

Not at Risk	90%
At Risk	77%
Severe Risk	77%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Do you have a good friend at work?

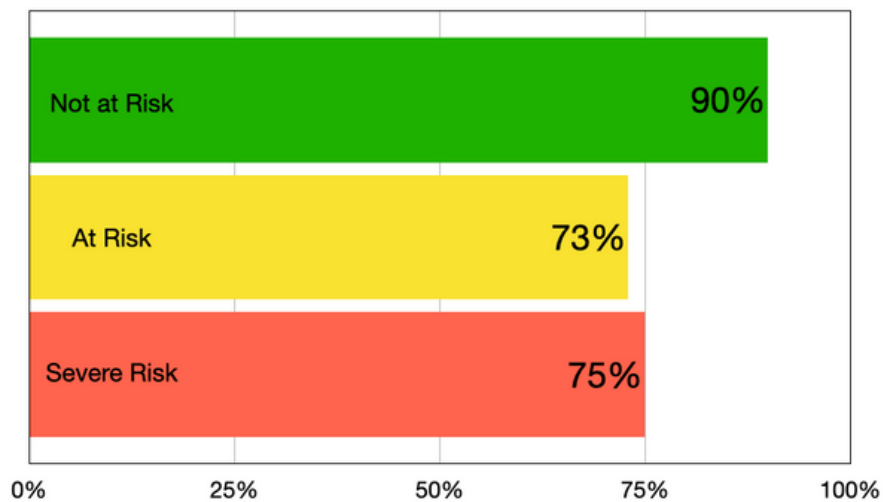|	
Not at Risk	82%
At Risk	69%
Severe Risk	70%

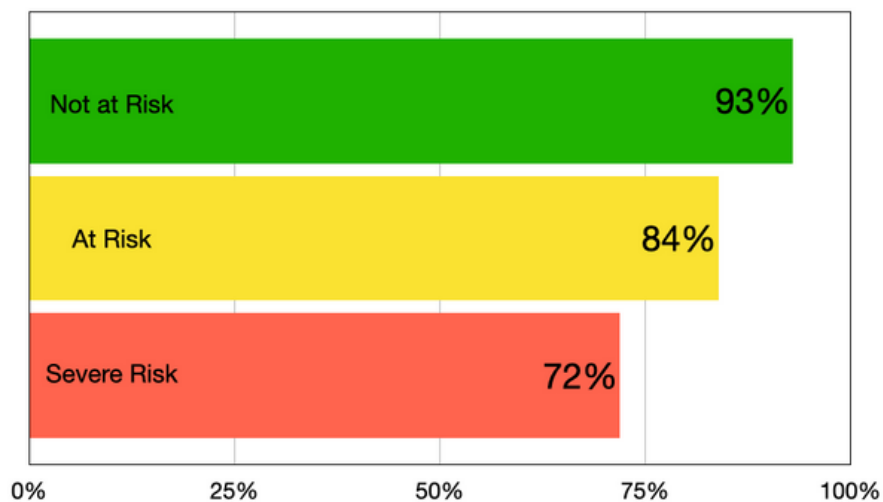0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Operations

The way a contact center is run can affect burnout resilience, but some factors are more important than others.

Two factors were correlated with lower burnout risk. You can improve in these areas with my hiring resources and empowerment guide.

Is your contact center adequately staffed?

Category	Percentage
Not at Risk	90%
At Risk	73%
Severe Risk	75%

Do you feel empowered to help customers with most of their needs?

| Category	Percentage
Not at Risk	93%
At Risk	84%
Severe Risk	72%

Operations

These factors were not closely correlated with lower burnout risk:

## Are customers given a survey where they are asked to rate your service?

Category	Percentage
Not at Risk	69%
At Risk	53%
Severe Risk	66%
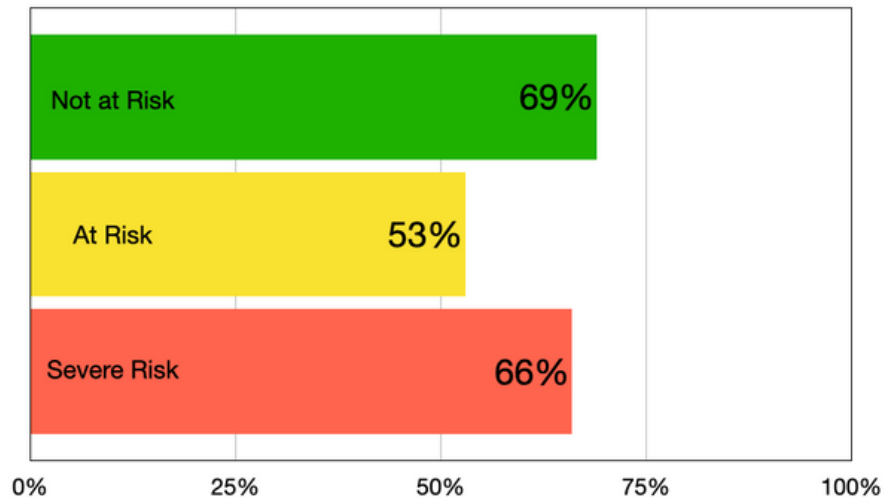
Does your contact center use leaderboards, games, prizes, or other incentives to encourage good performance?

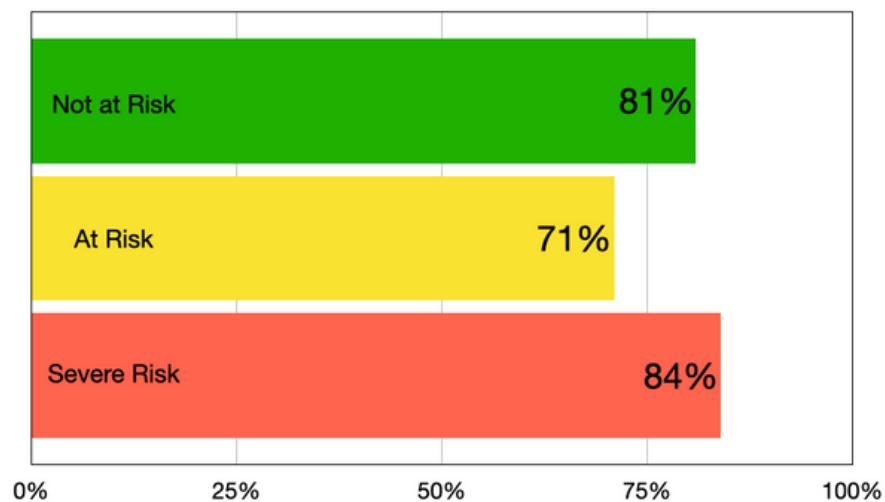| Category	Percentage
Not at Risk	73%
At Risk	72%
Severe Risk	78%
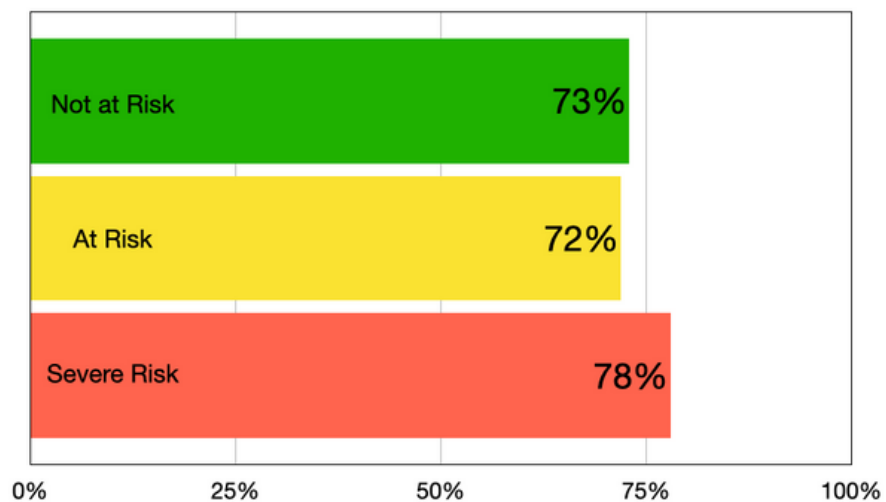
Work Environment

The survey asked two questions about the work environment, but neither was correlated with lower burnout risk.

Do you work from home as a remote agent at least 50% of the time?

Not at Risk	62%
At Risk	60%
Severe Risk	65%
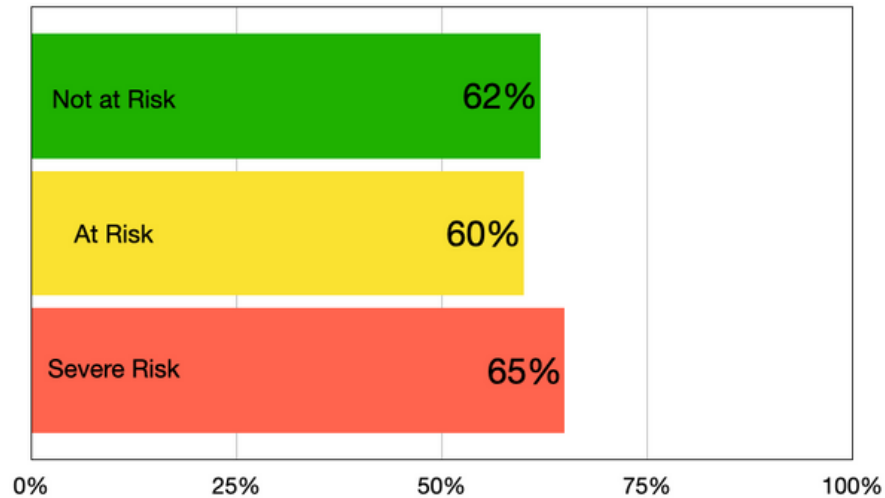
From your workstation, can you see how many customers are in queue (calls, chats, etc.)?

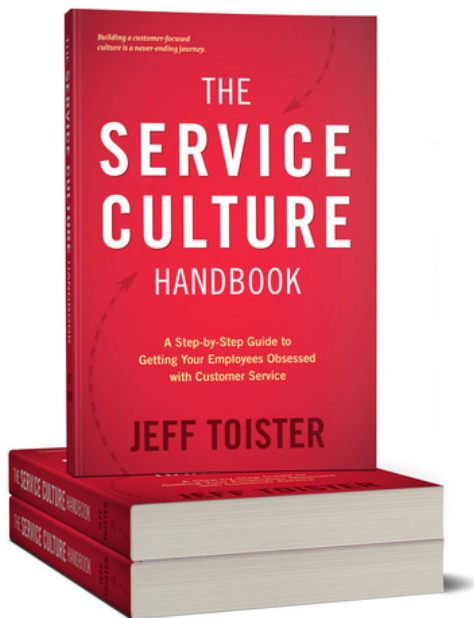|	
Not at Risk	81%
At Risk	71%
Severe Risk	84%

Conclusion

Becoming a customer-focused company is the clearest path to lowering your employee burnout risk.

Customer-focused companies tend to do all of these things really well:

1. Empowered employees
2. Good compensation
3. Effective leadership
4. Quality products and services
5. Thoughtful hiring practices

Get the Book

The Service Culture Handbook is a step-by-step guide to getting your employees obsessed with service.

It can help you reduce burnout risk while improving customer loyalty.

You can download the first chapter for free.

When you're ready, get the book here:

- Amazon
- BookPal (discounts on 25+ copies)

About Jeff Toister

Jeff Toister is your service culture guide.

His first customer interaction ended in failure. Vowing to learn from that experience, he became obsessed with customer service.

Today, Jeff helps companies get their employees obsessed with customer service. He has written four customer service books, including The Service Culture Handbook. Over 1,000,000 people have taken one of his training courses on LinkedIn Learning. Jeff has also been named by Global Gurus as one of the Top 30 Customer Experience professionals in the world.

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