



# BACK TO SCHOOL: LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE TAO OF RODNEY DANGERFIELD

Contact centers remain steadfast in their demand for learning, coaching and training solutions.

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**B**ack to school means a lot of things to a lot of people. For many kids, back to school means shopping for new school clothes, seeing old and new school friends, finding out who your teacher is and who's in your home room, school dances, after-schools sports and the list goes on. For mom and dad, it might mean a return to routine schedules, helping with homework and school projects, parent-teacher meetings, and lots of school activities. For me, back to school means only one thing: Rodney Dangerfield.

Definitely among the greatest waste-of-time guy-movies ever made, "Back to School" was a 1986 masterpiece starring Rodney Dangerfield as Thornton Melon, the uneducated son of immigrants who makes his fortune by opening a clothing store called "Tall and Fat." That single store grows into a successful chain of clothing stores and eventually makes Thornton Melon a corporate giant, which translates to a great vehicle for Dangerfield's style of comedy. I still remember the TV commercial in the movie in which Dangerfield's character asks, "Are you a large person? A little on the hefty side? When you go jogging do you leave potholes? At the zoo, do elephants throw you peanuts? Do you look at a menu and say, 'OK'?"

The plotline takes Dangerfield's character back to college, enrolling so he can provide moral support to his discouraged student son. The rest of the film is a cavalcade of classic Dangerfield one-liners, most of which can't be reproduced in this G-rated magazine. Despite such distractions as an appearance in the movie by my secret '80s heartthrob, Sally Kellerman, the movie did have an underlying message about the importance of education. "Back to School" brought a new meaning to the term "lifelong learning."

Turns out the contact center industry is no stranger to the idea of lifelong learning either. The proof is in the continued demand for e-learning, coaching and training. Regular readers of this column know that my work with the National Association of Call Centers (NACC) at The University of Southern Mississippi provides me regular contact with a representative population of contact center solutions buyers in the form of NACC members and subscribers. We ask these buyers at the end of each year which technology solutions they will be evaluating for purchase, or have funded for purchase, in the year ahead. When we look at the top five technology solutions cited for purchase by these buyers, e-learning, which encompasses coaching and training, appears in the top five for the past two years. Among a changing array of analytics and other solutions, buyers remain steadfast in their demand for learning, coaching and training solutions.

E-learning, coaching and training are not exactly the new kids on the block. In fact, my study of this market segment goes back more than 15 years. For many of those years, e-learning, coaching and training were featured topics at most industry conferences and workshops. This, of course, was back when industry conferences had at least a partial focus on technology innovations and the application of practical technology solutions in customer service management. This was back when industry visionaries were welcome additions to conference programs. Like industry conferences and trade shows, contact center solutions come and go. The fact that e-learning, coaching and training remain in such high demand after being an industry stalwart for nearly two decades is testament to the value this solution has brought, and still brings, to the contact center industry. This is software with staying power.

To better understand the reasons why coaching and training has such remarkable industry staying power, I turned to Envision, the company that, for all intents and purposes, invented contact center coaching and training and remains the de facto industry leader today. According to Envision CEO Rodney Kuhn, "As contact center recording and data capture technologies become more sophisticated and provide more information about how customers interact with a business, so increases the need for enhanced coaching and training to ensure agents are continuing to provide exceptional customer experiences."

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“Delivering the right coaching that includes the actual recorded call, supervisor feedback and additional training clips—sent to agents when the time is right—gives them the ability to immediately course correct and provide much better customer service,” Kuhn added. “This coaching concept continues to be a focus in the industry because informed, well-trained agents can provide customers with the information they need during the first interaction, which leads to greater customer satisfaction and more loyal customers.”

While changes in the contact center industry over the years have led to many solutions becoming obsolete and disappearing, these same changes are in large part driving the continued demand for coaching and training. In addition, emerging metrics such as first-call resolution (FCR) and voice of the customer (VoC) are playing a large part in ensuring that the demand for coaching and training only grows in the future.

While coaching and training isn’t exactly a “rags to riches” story like Thornton Melon’s is, it is a similar success story nonetheless. In “Back to School,” Thornton Melon’s contemporaries are staid and stuffy while Thornton retains a youthful energy that makes him a popular man on campus. In the contact center industry, many solutions reach market saturation and growth slows while coaching and training solutions continue to remain fresh to contact center managers. Rodney Dangerfield was perfect for “Back to School” because of his impeccable comic timing. For the contact center, timing is perfect for the lifelong learning delivered by coaching and training.

I love happy endings. 

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