



BPO BULLHORN

Straight talk. Smart insight. No bull.

Thursday, August 20, 2026

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Hello there

This week:

- Star Equity Acquires Harte Hanks. BPO Is the Next Move.
- Foundever's Books Are \$900 Million Lighter
- Goldman Sachs Finding: Call Centers Are 39% Below Where Growth Trends

Enterprise software vendors have been quietly absorbing the costs of tools they handed out "free." Harvard Business Review says that era is ending. And the Sky News technology correspondent has a warning about the pattern of incidents the sector keeps calling isolated.

There is a lot to sit with this week.

Let's get moo-ving! 🐮📣

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Editorial Team

Bullseye: The Essentials 

Industry News

→ Star Equity Acquires Harte Hanks for \$38.4 Million to Expand into Customer Service Outsourcing

Star Equity Holdings (NASDAQ: STRR) has agreed to acquire marketing services firm Harte Hanks for \$38.4 million, adding customer service outsourcing and inside sales outsourcing to its existing recruitment process outsourcing business through Hudson Talent Solutions. The combined entity would have reported \$384 million in revenue in 2025. Harte Hanks shareholders must still approve the deal, which is expected to close within 60 to 90 days.

→ Foundever Cuts Nearly \$900 Million in Debt in Major Balance Sheet Reset

Foundever has closed a recapitalization that cuts total debt by nearly \$900 million while securing a new three-year \$225 million global accounts receivable facility to replace its previous factoring arrangement. The company also received a \$225 million common equity injection from existing majority shareholders and extended its revolving credit facility to December 2030. The transaction was supported by lenders holding 95.4% of its term loan.

Insights

→ Call Center Employment Is 39% Below Trend in the US

Goldman Sachs analyzed more than 800 occupations across major developed economies and found that employment in call centers, software publishing, management consulting, and advertising has fallen sharply below historical trend. Call center employment is now 39% below trend in the US, 33% below trend in Canada, and 27% below trend in Germany, with the bank attributing the pattern to industries where tools capable of automating work are already available. Entry-level workers face the strongest pressure: a 10% occupational exposure to automation is associated with a 0.6 percentage-point annual drag on headcount growth in Australia, compared to just 0.1 percentage points across the broader labor market.

Technology

→ **The Era of Free Enterprise Tools Is Ending. Here Is What Comes Next.**

Enterprise software vendors have been quietly absorbing the costs of tools they included as "complimentary" or "unmetered" features. This customer-acquisition strategy created a false sense of budgetary security for buyers. Writing for Harvard Business Review, Stacia Garr of RedThread Research argues that as organizations replace fixed labor costs with variable consumption costs, leaders need to stop treating these tools as software purchases and start treating them as organizational design challenges requiring new approaches to budgeting, workforce planning, and risk management.

Governance

→ **UK Government Examines the Risk of Losing Access to US**

Technology Models

In June, the Trump administration applied export controls to Anthropic's models. Because Anthropic could not verify nationality in real time, it suspended access for all users until the restrictions were lifted on June 30. The UK government is now examining the economic and security risks of depending on tools whose availability can be determined by geopolitical decisions outside customers' control. IO CEO Chris Newton-Smith, whose firm surveyed 3,000 security professionals and found 54% said their organizations had adopted these tools too quickly, said: "Access to an AI model should never be mistaken for control over it."

Customer Experience

→ **The Economics of Customer Service Are Changing. Average Handle Time Is Losing Its Grip.**

Zendesk's Jon Aniano argues that the metric driving contact center investment is shifting from call deflection to full resolution, with deflection rates having moved from 10-15% a decade ago to automated resolution rates of 70-90% today. That shift, he says, changes what human agents are for: rather than rationing their time across simultaneous interactions, they can give full attention to high-emotion, high-value conversations. The emphasis in measurement, he adds, is moving from average handle time

and first call resolution to whether the customer's problem was actually solved.

Media Field Guide

Video

'Brace for Impact': The AI Hacking Wave Is Coming

Sky News technology correspondent Rowland Manthorpe reports on the pattern of AI models escaping test environments and accessing systems they should not, following OpenAI's admission that its models hacked another company in what it described as an unprecedented incident. Manthorpe argues the wave is "so much worse than we thought" and warns against treating the incidents as isolated events.

Why watch: In a week when the UK government is examining what happens when the tools your organization depends on are not fully under your control, this is the context behind why the question is being asked.

Podcast

Why your contact center cost model is broken

Robert Bradshaw, founder of WiserOwl, joins Adrian Swinscoe to make one argument: contact centers measure activity with extraordinary precision and then cost it using an average that erases all of that precision. The conversation covers what that means in practice, what leaders should be doing instead, and how actual cost data addresses the two most important contact center problems in the enterprise.

Why listen: In a week when the sector is debating what contact center work actually costs and who pays when the pricing model changes, this is the practitioner making the case for measuring it properly

Book

The Employee Experience Advantage

Jacob Morgan draws on 150 studies and interviews with 150 executives across 250 organizations to argue that employee engagement is the effect, not the cause. The book maps three environments that shape every employee experience: cultural, technological, and physical, and offers a practical framework for designing each one. It carries a foreword by Marshall Goldsmith.

Why read: In a week when Goldman Sachs found entry-level workers bearing the steepest employment pressure, this is the framework for understanding why people choose to show up.

What media would you like to see more of? **Hit reply** and let us know. We'll give you a shoutout if we include it.

[Continue the conversation](#)

Resource Rodeo 🤠

Spotted:

- [A Practical Guide to Impact Sourcing](#)
- [2026 UK Contact Centre Outsourcing Report – CCMA](#)
- [State of Customer Experience 2026](#)
- [EY Human Signals: Agentic AI](#)
- [HR Monitor 2026: A Turning Point for the People Function](#)
- [The State of Agent Experience 2026](#)

Toro's Timetable

August

25 – [CX Summit APAC](#) | Sydney

September

9 - [**Customer Connect Expo**](#) | Atlanta, GA

23 - [**Customer Experience Management Summit**](#) | Vienna

30 - [**Customer Experience Live**](#) | Dubai

October

7 - [**Customer Contact Week**](#) | Nashville, TN

20 - [**Customer Experience Live**](#) | Madrid

The Tail End

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