



# 10 QUESTIONS

## to Ask About a Global Ethics Hotline

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# Why Do I Need A Whistleblower Hotline?

Choosing a vendor to provide your ethics reporting hotline shouldn't be a tedious task. But you may have questions about how a hotline works. You may also want to make sure that the provider you choose knows what they're doing. Before we get into question you should be asking a provider to help you understand how their hotline service works and if it is right for you, it's first beneficial to understand why you would consider implementing a hotline to begin with.

The longer an unethical or illegal action goes on, the more damage it can cause to the company. It is in the best interest of the company to know of any violations as soon as possible so they can be dealt with quickly. When over 40% of unethical activity is detected through employee tips into a hotline, an organization can take action sooner, thereby protecting the organization's assets, revenue, reputation, and employee well-being.

There are a number of benefits to implementing a whistleblower hotline:

- **Encouraging a speak-up culture:** If there is wrongdoing happening inside your organization, there's at least one person who knows it's happening. But more than likely, a few people are aware of its going on. You may have employees who feel just fine reporting misconduct face to face, but most don't. There is still fear of retaliation by either management or colleagues. Given the chance, most employees would prefer to report wrongdoing anonymously. And by reporting sooner, a company will become aware of unethical activity earlier, thereby saving time, money and legal inquiries.
- **Knowing about misconduct lessens its duration:** Knowing about misconduct sooner enables organization to put a stop to it earlier. The median duration of fraud until detection is about 18 months. For smaller organizations, that could mean the difference between staying in business or going out of business, because smaller business don't have the resources to recover these types of issues.
- **Understanding a deeper issue:** Ethics hotlines are a great tool to gain a deeper insight into an organization's culture. It's one thing to know that a certain type of wrongdoing is taking place. But why is it happening in the first place. Chances are there's a deeper issue or concern that is spreading through the employee population that could be dragging the morale down. Don't just treat the symptoms; dig deeper to get to the root of the issue.



# 10 Questions to Ask About a Global Ethics Hotline

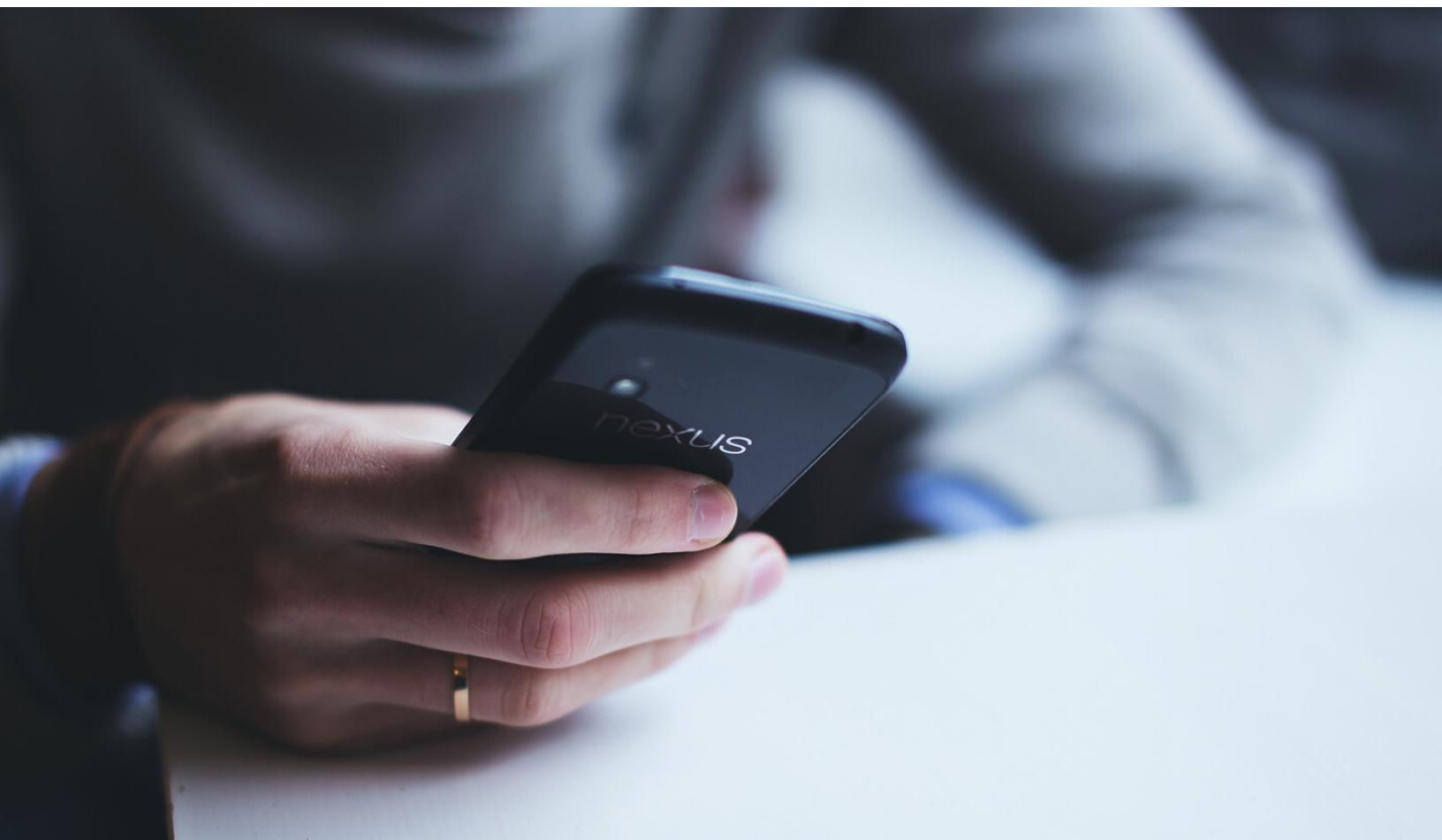
We've covered some main benefits of implementing a whistleblower hotline. But how do you know if a hotline provider will be a complimentary fit to your organization? There are some key questions you should be asking a provider to understand just how their call center works. These questions should help you make an intuitive and informed decision to help you move ahead with their services. So let's jump in.

## Live Answer vs. Voicemail

*Does the call center, the provider uses, offer live-answer operators, or will the caller be placed into a voicemail?*

When your employees call to report a concern, will they be speaking to a live person, or delivering their concern to a voicemail? Some internally hosted systems offer voicemail by necessity. If an employee calls after hours to report a concern, there needs to be a place to receive that caller's information. The drawback to voicemail is that the caller may not relay a fully comprehensive report. When talking to a live agent, that agent will be able to ask intuitive and educated questions of the caller, helping to guide them in delivering a thorough report. An additional drawback to leaving a message on a voicemail is that there may be a time limit for leaving a message. Or worse the mailbox is full and prevents the caller from leaving any message at all.

A live call center operator will be able to build a report with the caller. The operator will be able to comfort the caller if they are feeling scared or stressed. The operator will be able to tailor their questions to the caller's emotional state and the situation they are reporting on. And, a call center has the ability to keep a caller on the line for as long as it takes to receive a fully comprehensive and intuitive report.





## Operator Education and Training

### *How are contact center agents trained?*

An important question to ask any ethics hotline vendor is how are their contact center agents trained to receive calls.

A contact center should be recruiting agents through programs aimed at call center education at a college or University level. Because call center agents will be receiving calls that can be quite sensitive in nature, it is recommended they have a formal education to put them in good standing to receive a variety of calls.

Training should be somewhat extensive and involve orientation covering specialized telephone etiquette training, system training, call handling and management training, knowledge based and computer telephony training. After all, the caller wants to feel like they matter and the call center agent shouldn't be wondering how to use the system while they are trying to comfort a caller.

Agents should be monitored during live calls both remotely and on the call center floor, and monitored for quality, productivity and overall efficiency of each call. Does the vendor's call center put agents on test calls before they start to answer live calls. Test calls offer a great opportunity for the agents to fully understand the types of callers and concerns they will be handling.

## Hotline Operator Tenure

### *How long are call center agents in their positions?*

Ask the ethics hotline provider about the tenure of their contact center agents. And do they employ any temporary staff? Why are these important questions? When your employees, or other stakeholders call into a hotline, there will be a number of variables that need to be taken into account.

First, the caller is likely going to be stressed or scared to some degree. A tenured call center agent will be able to assist the caller by focusing on their elevated emotional state first and foremost before beginning to receive their information. The call center agent should be experienced in altering their demeanor to match the caller depending on the caller's state of mind. The agent will know how to build rapport with the caller, making them feel safe and secure, so the caller can feel good about delivering their report. Temporary staff may not have this knowledge or experience when talking to callers experiencing varying emotional states, and the risk of the caller dropping off the line is that much greater.

A call center agent who has built up experience receiving a variety of calls covering a multitude of ethical concerns will be able to not only follow a specific script used on the platform they are inputting the callers information into, but they will also be able to simultaneously tailor the questions to match the callers emotional state, ensuring information is captured accurately and thoroughly.

## Review of Call Quality

*Are quality checks done at the call center level?*

Does the call center the hotline vendor is using do call quality checks and reviews? This is to ensure that the call center agents remain consistent with how calls are taken, how callers are treated, and how the information is received.

Are coaching sessions done on a continual basis? This helps determine if the call center agents are updated in real-time with new information as it happens relating to the software they use and the service they provide. An agent should not be prevented in any way from conducting a professional and thorough call because they are unfamiliar with software changes.

Ask about how agents are trained in dealing with difficult callers, and conflict resolution. How are they training in ensuring a professional phone manner while remaining empathetic and at the same time engaging in investigative techniques. And are the agents reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they remain consistent and professional in these topics. It is important that agents get individual as well as group training sessions to ensure they deliver the best quality service.



Lastly, how intricately enmeshed is the ethics hotline provider when it comes to the quality of their call center agents? Does the vendor survey customers and employees to gain feedback on the experience of the caller, and information received by the company after a report has been submitted? This provides valuable feedback and ongoing improvements to the program.

## Caller Wait Time

*How fast are calls answered?*

How does the vendor ensure hotline calls are answered promptly? That the caller isn't put on hold? The caller wait time is important because the longer a caller is waiting to speak to a live agent, the bigger the likelihood they will abandon the call altogether.

When a caller has to wait to speak to an agent, this could tell the caller that their time isn't important. Or that their concern isn't important enough to voice. If the caller is given the opportunity to leave, then this could mean valuable information is not relayed to the organization; information that should be shared that provides insight into the workplace and the inner culture. If a caller were to leave because they were waiting too long for an agent, this could put a strain on the ethics and compliance program. Why? Because the longer unethical misconduct is not investigated, the greater the damage to revenue, reputation, and morale.

A vendor should have a vested interest in the quality of their call center and should be able to relay statistics on their average speed of answer. Go ahead and ask the vendor what the average speed of answer is. A good basis to go by is around 18 seconds with a service level of 90% of calls being answered in 60 seconds or less.

## Abandon Rate

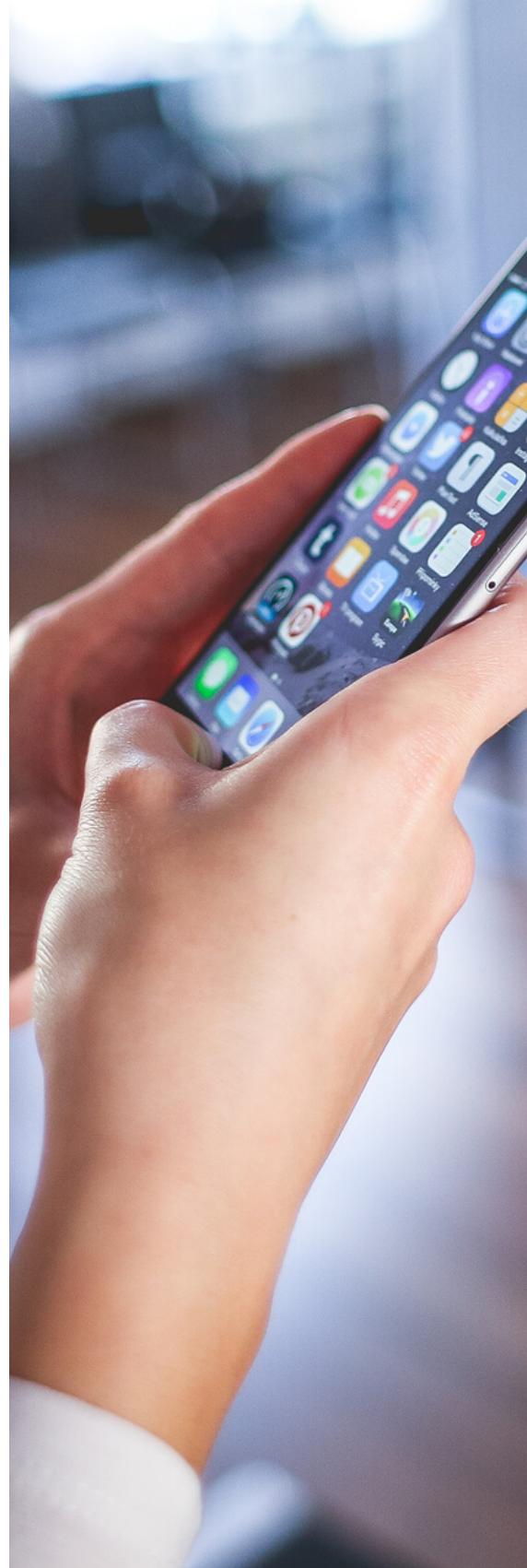
*How often are callers hanging up before even speaking to an agent?*

The speed of answering a call is important to ensure the caller is talking to a professional agent sooner. However, equally important is keeping the caller on the line. Like in the previous point, if a caller does feel like they need to abandon the call for whatever reason, then they take with them valuable information the organization just might need to know about.

The call abandon rate is a statistic the vendor should have access to. While it's virtually impossible to have 100 percent of callers complete their full call and submit their concern, it is important to understand how many calls are abandoned on average.

Part of what makes each call successful is how long a caller is able to talk to an agent without feeling like they are made to hurry up and finish. A good call center will keep the caller on the line for as long as it takes to complete a thorough report. This should be a priority.

Although there will be cases where callers will decide to abandon their call for reasons only they know, the call center the vendor uses should make it their priority to ensure that each caller is treated with the utmost respect and are made to feel their time, and reason for calling, is important.



## Collection of Standard Fields

*What fields are collected during a call?*

A call center agent is responsible for gathering as much information as possible, including the location of an incident, the date and time of the call, the subject of the incident, the nature of the incident, and the substance of the incident, including facts, data, details, examples, and witnesses etc. These questions make up the bulk of the intake form, and the call center agents are trained to follow this form to capture an accurate and comprehensive report. These details are necessary to validate a reported concern and provides an organization with enough information to investigate and ultimately resolve a report.

Ask the vendor what types of questions are used on the form. It should contain open and closed ended questions, as well as areas where the caller can input information in their own words to provide additional details to add more substance to their report. The information received is valuable to an organization and provides it with additional context it can use to strengthen policies and procedures. And better still, a thorough report gives employees the opportunity to feel like they are contributing to the ever-changing culture of the organization.

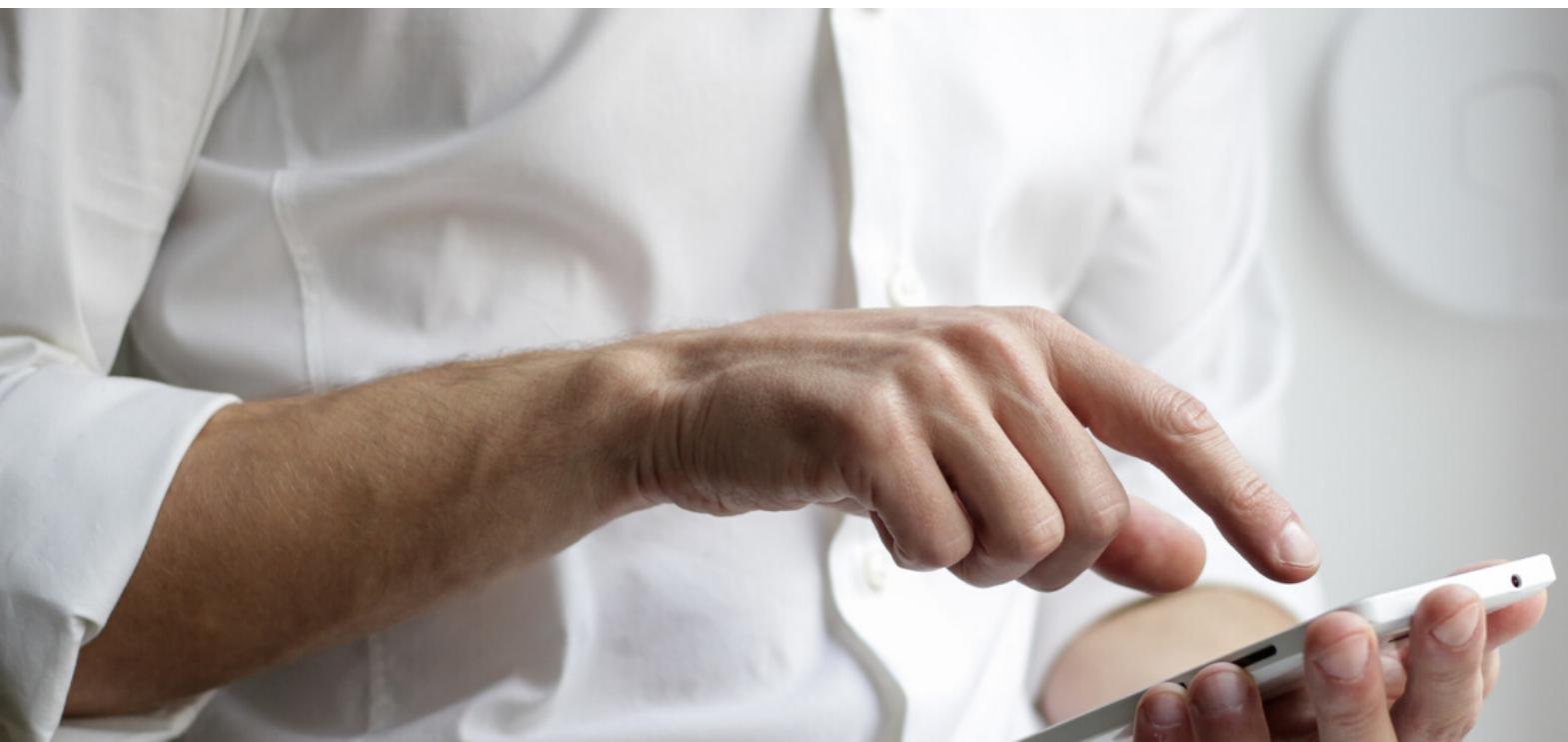
## Notification Options

*How is a company notified of a new report?*

After a report has been submitted, how is it received at the organization level? Most platforms will offer a notification being automatically sent to specific program administrators after a report has been filed, letting them know of the new report. But ask the vendor if this notification is instant once a report has been submitted, or if there is a delay in the notification being sent. This is an important factor if the reported concern is urgent and needing immediate attention.

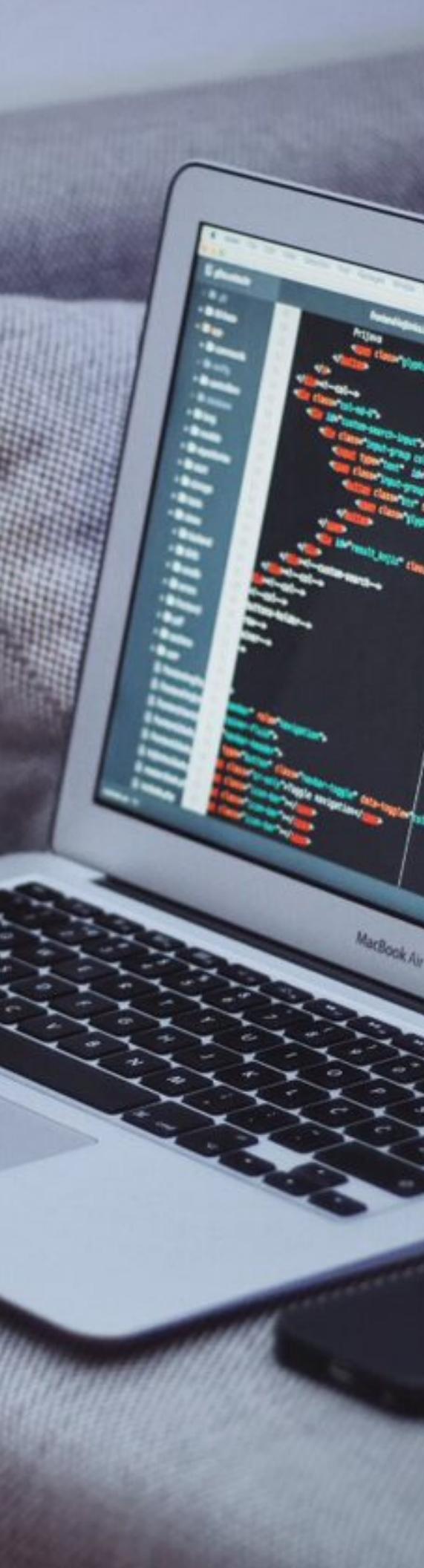
And when it comes to those urgent concerns, what if it is related to a serious safety concern or other urgent matter. And what if the people receiving notifications of newly submitted reports are off-line for some reason? They could be traveling, or on vacation. Therefore, ask the vendor if they have any other option for notifying company administrators of important concerns.

For example, do they offer SMS text messaging that notifies company administrators of a new report via a text message as well as an email notification? This will ensure that all reports are seen immediately and action can be taken right away.



## Routing of Submitted Cases

*Can specific cases be routed to specific company administrators?*



The previous point talked about how fast a notification of a new report is received once its been submitted. But who gets those reports? If you are with a larger organization with more complex needs, ask the vendor if there is a capability to route specific reported cases to specific people in the organization.

Customizing case routing depending on the type of reported concern allows an organization to route submitted reports by specific case type to specific company management. This in turn, simplifies the workflow. As an example, if a caller chose a Human Resources related case type when filing their report with the call center agent, such as a hostile work environment, that report could be forwarded to the designated company administrator responsible for Human Resources complaints. This process prevents people from receiving reported concerns that are not relevant to their area of expertise.

Also ask the vendor if there is an option for routing specific cases based on a department the caller chose to report against. This works by forwarding complaints to management responsible for specific departments. If a caller chose the marketing department as the location their complaint took place, that complaint could be forwarded to someone who works in the marketing department. Like case routing, this process prevents someone who does not work in a department from receiving reported complaints that aren't relevant to their expertise.

## Data Privacy

*What policies are in place to ensure client data remains confidential?*

A call center is going to have access to a client's confidential information. It's the nature of the business. Once an employee starts talking, that information is relayed, and the call center agent is going to ask questions about that concern in order help the employee with their report. Ask the vendor about their policies around protecting client data once received at the call center. All employees, those in the call center, and those with the vendor, should be bound by confidentiality agreements. Criminal background checks, credit, and reference checks should also take place. As well, when the call center agent talks with the caller, they should be able to ensure they highlight any identifying information the caller may be inadvertently providing and redact that information if they agree.

Also, there will be employees at the vendor level who will have access to a client's data. Specifically dedicated system administrators tasked with ensuring the system continues to operate on a technical level, who perform system maintenance and other technical upgrades. Ask the vendor about their Information Security Policy and how it trains their employees on the policy both from a physical security perspective as well as from proper management of technology and hardware.

And lastly, ask about how data is stored. A cloud storage provider provides a secure, encrypted platform.

## Conclusion

The hotline provider you choose will depend on your needs. There is a saying that having some form of mechanism in place to receive unethical concerns is better than having none at all. But ultimately you want to be partnering with a provider who not only knows what they are doing, but also provides the best service to meet your needs.

Now you have some questions to ask a vendor to learn more about the ethics hotline service they provide:

- **Live Answer vs. Voicemail** - Will your employees be talking to a live person, or delivering their concern into a voicemail?
- **Operator Education and Training** - How are the call center agents trained to receive calls that can be sensitive in nature?
- **Hotline Operator Tenure** - Typically how long are call center agents in their position and are temporary staff used?
- **Review of Call Quality** - Does the vendor do audit checks of calls?
- **Caller Wait Time** - How long is too long for a caller to wait on hold before speaking to an agent?
- **Abandon Rate** - How often are callers abandoning their calls and how can this be prevented?
- **Collection of Standard Fields** - What information is asked of the caller to enable the collection of a thorough report?
- **Notification Options** - How is the organization's management notified of concerns when they are submitted?
- **Routing of Submitted Cases** - Are there any options for customized routing to ensure reports are received by a person best suited to investigate that report?
- **Data Privacy** - How is your sensitive data protected?

## ***IntegrityCounts | Global Ethics Hotlines***

For employees that rely on a human connection, anonymous hotline capabilities are critical to ensuring that the employee feels supported and nurtured when reporting misconduct. Our global and local multilingual hotlines are answered live 24/7/365.

Our service offers the most human whistleblower experience in the market, a smarter process with faster response times while maintaining anonymity for whistleblowers, leading to better and more effective investigations.

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