



pagertree

The Definitive Guide to Better On-Call

7½ Reasons Better On-Call Makes a Real Difference

1/2

On-Call rotations are essential to supporting 24/7 application availability. But too many companies slap together an ad-hoc process without ever considering the repercussions. In this guide, we'll explore the 7½ reasons **better on-call makes a REAL difference** for your company, and we'll throw in a few tips and tricks to help you along the way.



Part 1: Know Your Numbers!

In today's connected world, customers expect **24/7 availability**. But what's the difference between 99% availability, and 99.9999% availability?



99% = **3.65 days** of downtime



99.9999% = **15 minutes** of downtime



5 key metrics every on-call process should be monitoring



MTTA

Mean Time to Acknowledge is a measure of responsiveness. Acknowledgment and first response is all about setting customer expectations - we're aware of the issue and we're on it!



MTTR

Mean Time to Resolution is a measure of efficiency. This metric entails everything from identifying root cause to actually deploying a fix.



Total Time

Total Time total time is the most representative measure of customer experience, from first notice all the way to final resolution.

MTBF

Mean Time Between Failures

It's one thing to measure how quickly you respond to incidents, it's another to measure how frequently incidents occur. MTBF is an important counter-metric that ensures your team is getting smarter about preventing incidents in the first place.

Time On-Call

Time On-Call per Person - ah, the human element. People aren't meant to run on fumes. Mean time on call is a measure of burnout. Distributing your on-call schedules smartly avoids burning out your best employees, and helps load-balance across the team.





Part 2: CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Customer loyalty can be fickle - it takes a lifetime to build, and only a moment to break. So when customers expect 24/7 availability, **every second** makes a difference.



Customers have spoken:
What sways their loyalty?

18%

said an outage was **VERY DAMAGING** to a company's reputation



89%



stopped doing business with a company due to poor customer service

73%



of customers said they **commit to a brand** because of strong customer service



What defines "strong" customer service?

 **Speed & Ease**

77%

said valuing their **TIME** is the **most important** element of customer service



31%

of customers will **switch channels** if they don't get a response within 1 hour



70%

will do business with you **if you resolve a complaint**

"Delighting customers doesn't build loyalty..."

"... reducing their effort - the work they must do to get their problem solved - does."

Let's be real. Unless you're a comedic hotline, customers don't contact you to be delighted. They contact you to get their issues resolved, and they need you to **BE THERE** when you say you will. Whether it's a late-night alert or over-the-weekend incident, on-call is about customer loyalty!

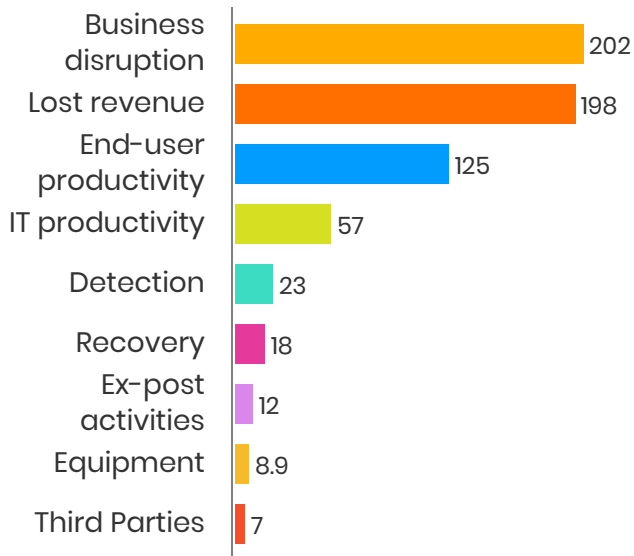


Part 3: THE HIDDEN COSTS OF DOWNTIME

Show me the money! Oh but sometimes it's easier to just *not* know! For all the direct costs we spend staffing, monitoring, and resolving incidents, the inconvenient truth is that **63% of outage costs are actually indirect.**



Where are outage costs primarily incurred?



Median cost per outage in 1000's



Damaged reputation and customer churn are the most expensive part of an outage. Every minute you're down is time spent driving customers away.



All the work you do to drive customers to your web page? A system outage means **putting your revenue engine on pause**



Companies average anywhere from **14 to 87 hours of downtime each year.** Email down? Servers unresponsive? The labor cost of idling employees adds up quickly.

A conservative estimate from Gartner calculates the hourly cost of downtime for computer networks at \$42,000



It's the little things that add up to big costs.



80% of unplanned outages are due to ill-planned changes made by administrators



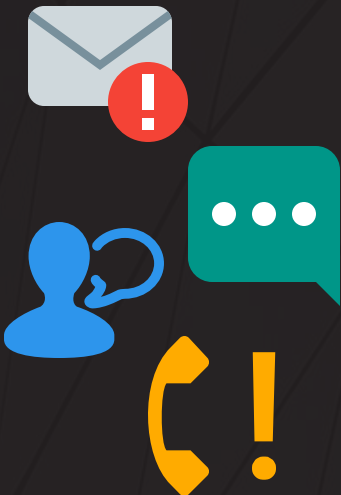
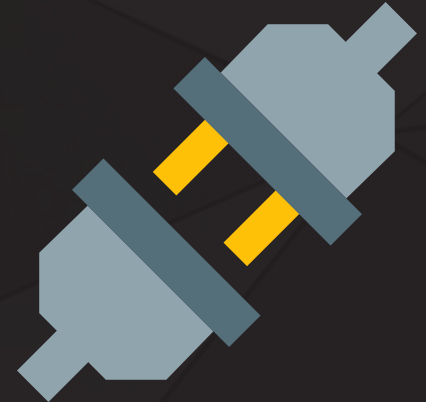
60% of availability and performance errors are the result of misconfigurations



Pro Tip!

Use automation and multiple notification channels for redundancy

Don't let manual processes slow down your response times. **Use automated systems to trigger your on-call process.** Whether it's a system monitor or customer inquiry that kicks-off the process, you'll always be faster if your on-call solution is seamlessly integrated with your monitors.



Once the incident is created, the next critical step in the process is getting someone to respond QUICKLY. **Use multiple notification channels like email, chatbots, SMS, and voice to ensure notifications don't get missed.** Putting multiple team members on the same layer can get more eyes on the alert and even faster response times, but you'll want to ensure your system clearly communicates across team members to avoid duplicating effort.

In addition to multiple notification channels, you should also setup escalation rules in case your primary on-call is unavailable. **Define different escalation policies based on the type and severity of the incident in order to ensure appropriate response times and meet critical SLA's.** Automated escalation rules are the fastest way to reroute the alert with no delays.





Part 4: BURNOUT – THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Just *being* on-call, without actually getting a call, is enough to significantly disrupt sleep patterns. Recent research highlights the **costly effects of being on-call** and extended work hours.



Companies are facing a sleepless epidemic!

>30% of employees report sleeping fewer than 6 hours a night

40% admitted dozing off during the day once a month

23% report reduced concentration

18% report reduced memory



The impact of on-call on employee well-being



Research shows a positive correlation linking on-call work hours to **increased stress**, decreased energy, worsened mood, and greater anxiety



66% more **problems sleeping**



18% lower **sleep quality**



2x more likely to **wake up in the middle** of the night

It's **COSTLY** to schedule more people on-call than absolutely necessary. Burning out your best employees leads to significantly reduced productivity, and eventually increased turnover.



Part 5: TEAMWORK WINS CHAMPIONSHIPS

A lone superstar can only carry a team so far. And simply combining disparate talents can be even worse without a proper system in place. We all dream of being part of a **well-oiled machine**. But what's jamming up the gears and keeping our teams from operating efficiently?



Workplace **DRAMA** is real (who knew?!)

just 19%

of enterprise employees say they **have no conflict** with any group at the office



>63%

are stuck thinking "I'm **confused**, who's doing what?" and "There's too many cooks in the kitchen!"

40%

indicate they **lose productivity** as a result of workplace conflict



36%

said **lack of process** prevents them from getting things done

On-call is stressful enough. Don't let ad-hoc processes create conflict, burden your teams, and clog up the system!

Studies show that **happy, engaged employees**



get more done!



85% more productive with their time



67% less sick days and stay 2x longer on the job



67% regularly put in extra effort at work



58% more likely to help out at colleague



Pro Tip!

Use escalation rules to reduce fatigue and build stronger teams.

Nobody likes being woken up in the middle of the night, particularly for no reason. **By setting up escalation rules, secondary and tertiary on-calls are alerted only on a 'need-to-know' basis.** If your primary on-call's got it handled, there's no need to disrupt the rest of the team. Let your people sleep!



Trust and accountability are fundamental building blocks of any well-run team. But when incident alerts are routed to the entire team and handled in a free-for-all manner, resentment is bound to happen. *"Why am I always the one jumping in?"* **Escalation rules help establish clear and transparent accountability.** When everyone knows exactly who's the primary on-call, performance management becomes something you handle as a manager, not something the team is left bickering about.



Check your on-call reports to ensure the burden's evenly distributed. **And talk to your teams!** Usually the best ideas come from the people on the ground. If you foster an environment for open communication, your people will tell you if they're burning out.



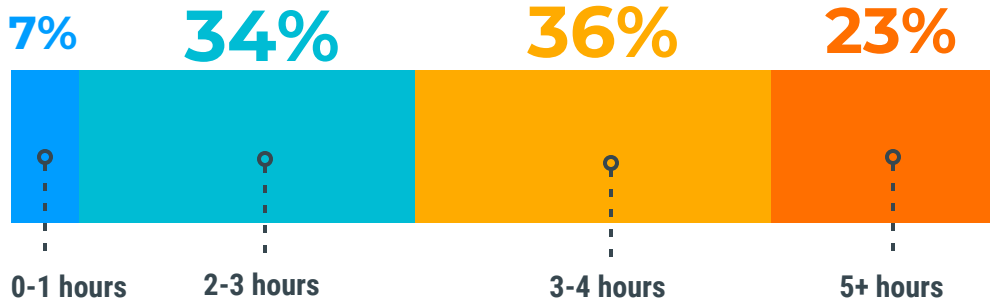


Part 6: BURIED BY ADMIN WORK

Over **55%** of managers find driving team and company success the most rewarding part of their job. But **49%** of managers agree that admin work leaves them **less time** for strategic activities.



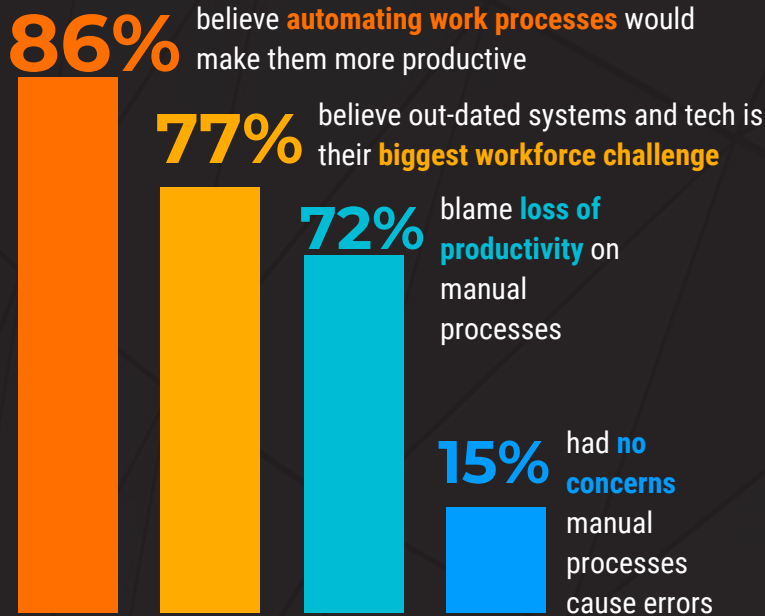
How many hours a day are managers spending on admin tasks?



On average, managers spend **15 hours**, or nearly **2 days a week** on admin tasks!!!



The impact of manual processes



Manual IT support processes are NO FUN!

60% say it's **time-consuming**

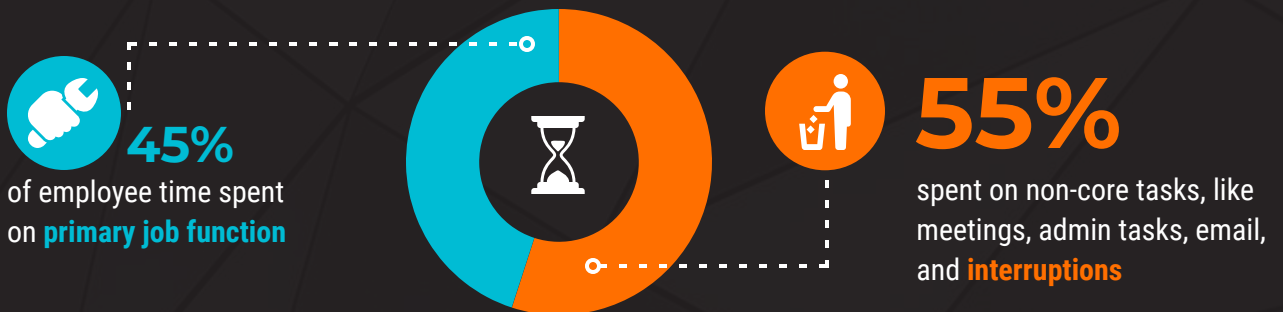
48% say it's **frustrating**

Better on-call means less time on admin tasks, and more time driving real change.



Part 7: PARDON THE INTERRUPTION

It's all too familiar. You block out two hours to get some real work done, but just as you jump in, something comes up, then another, and another. Before you know it, two hours are gone, and you've got nothing to show for it!



Just how often are employees interrupted?

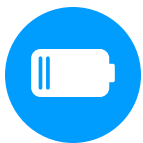
56 interruptions a day for the average employee



11 minutes on a project before they're interrupted



3 minutes spent working before **switching tasks**



2 hours spent **recovering from distractions** per day



The side-effect of interruptions

\$588 billion a year lost to workplace interruptions



23 minutes to **recover from an interruption**



2.8 seconds is all it took to disrupt concentration, leading to a **2x increase in mistakes**



9% higher **exhaustion rates** when regularly interrupted

What could your teams do with **two additional hours** of uninterrupted work?



Part 7.5: ALWAYS IMPROVING

On-call needs to be **monitored, measured, and managed**. When you're able to turn an unpleasant on-call process into a competitive advantage, you know you're on the right track.



What's your tolerance for error?

Lean Six Sigma standard means just **3.4 defects per million units**



55%

of IT professionals say they had a project **fail in the last 12 months**. How do you measure success?



Create a culture of continuous improvement

Engaged employees **outperformed** their disengaged counterparts by **202%**

Top **5 engagement drivers** in times of change:



1. Involvement in decision making



2. Clear career path



3. Co-workers make sacrifices to help the company



4. Company encourages professional development



5. Company provides two-way dialogue



39%

of employees say they enjoy the **ideation process**



31%

feel six sigma certification increases **career advancement opportunities**



29%

say ideation gives them the opportunity to **showcase their skills and abilities**



Pro Tip!

Use recurring schedules and smart escalation rules to increase efficiency.

As much as possible, use consistent schedules to minimize admin work - there's better things for you spend your time on. **By using recurring schedules, you only need to set your schedule once.** Sure, things come up and unexpected changes happen. But it's much easier to override an existing recurrence than it is to recreate a new schedule each period.



Don't let incident alerts interrupt your team during the work day. Similar to overnight shifts, **designating a primary on-call during the day and escalating accordingly frees up the rest of the team to focus on their primary responsibilities.** Alert fatigue not only ruins concentration, but it saps team morale as well. Rotate designated primary on-calls to maximize team efficiency.




When it comes to emergencies, every second makes a difference. **Make sure you have your emergency broadcast systems setup** well in advance so you can get critical information out to your teams quickly and efficiently. Broadcasts are the fastest way to get all hands on deck.





CONCLUSION: THE LAST WORD

So there you have it. **7½ reasons** better on-call makes a real difference.

-  1. Know Your Numbers
-  2. Customer Loyalty
-  3. The Hidden Costs of Downtime
-  4. Burnout: The Human Element
-  5. Teamwork Wins Championships
-  6. Buried by Admin Work
-  7. Pardon the Interruption
-  7½. Always Improving



On-call is too important to leave idle. Don't wait for customers to scream, employees to burnout, or processes to stall before you make a change. There are plenty of solutions out there, and the smallest change can make huge differences. Everyone deserves a better on-call experience, and **only YOU** can make it happen for your team!



About the Author

PagerTree is a privately owned software company located in Woodland, California. We exist to provide on-call management and intelligent alert routing solutions for modern teams, because we believe everyone deserves the right to better on-call.



SOURCES

Know your Numbers

1. <https://www.techradar.com/news/world-of-tech/management/why-downtime-is-more-than-just-an-inconvenience-for-your-business-1255411>

Customer Loyalty

1. <https://www.evolver.com/blog/downtime-outages-and-failures-understanding-their-true-costs.html>
2. <https://blog.internetcreations.com/2017/02/service-response-time-killing-customer-experience/#.WyrvcvdKg2w>
3. <https://blog.smile.io/essential-customer-loyalty-statistics-2017>
4. <https://www.onlinemoderation.com/social-media-customer-engagement-response-times-affect-business/>
5. <https://www.superoffice.com/blog/response-times/>
6. <https://www.customerservicemanager.com/customer-service-facts/>
7. <https://hbr.org/2010/07/stop-trying-to-delight-your-customers>

The Hidden Costs of Downtime

1. https://www.vertivco.com/globalassets/documents/reports/2016-cost-of-data-center-outages-11-11_51190_1.pdf
2. <https://www.evolver.com/blog/downtime-outages-and-failures-understanding-their-true-costs.html>

Burnout: The Human Element

1. <https://www.virginpulse.com/blog-post/infographic-employees-sleep-struggle-impact-business/>
2. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/ocp-ocpa0039602.pdf>
3. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/jsr.12519>

Teamwork Wins Championships

1. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/240076>
2. <https://www.gravitatedesign.com/blog/employee-happiness-as-a-business-tool-infographic/>
3. <http://goodthinkinc.com/project/happy-secret-to-better-work-the-infographic/>

Buried by Admin Work

1. <http://www.humanresourcesonline.net/managers-how-many-hours-a-day-do-you-spend-on-admin-tasks/>
2. <https://www.servicenow.com/content/dam/servicenow-assets/public/en-us/doc-type/resource-center/white-paper/sn-state-of-work-report.pdf>

Pardon the Interruption

1. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/240076>
2. <https://www.atlassian.com/time-wasting-at-work-infographic>
3. <https://www.zdnet.com/article/the-astonishing-hidden-and-personal-costs-of-it-downtime-and-how-predictive-analytics-might-help/>
4. <https://www.ics.uci.edu/~gmark/chi08-mark.pdf>

Always Improving

1. <https://www.qualitymag.com/articles/91986-reasons-organizations-do-not-use-lean-six-sigma>
2. <http://nwcpe.com/2015/12/03/six-sigma-solves-employee-satisfaction-problem/>
3. <https://www.100pceffective.com/blog/employee-engagement-important-infographic/>
4. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266461110_Six_Sigma_-_A_Strategy_for_Increasing_Employee_Engagement
5. <https://www.cio.com/article/3068502/project-management/more-than-half-of-it-projects-still-failing.html>