

Lead the Change

**A Service Desk Leader's
Guide to Automation, AI,
and Strategic Impact**



Welcome to your essential guide to leading a high-performing IT service desk in 2025 and beyond.

Today's service desk is more than just a support function - it's a strategic driver of change, innovation, and employee experience. This guide is designed to help service desk leaders, like you, navigate evolving expectations, embrace new technologies, and lead with confidence. Inside, you'll find practical insights, real-world stories, and actionable strategies to elevate your team and deliver measurable impact across your organisation.

What you'll find in this guide:

1. The Rise of the Strategic Service Desk Leader:
 - Why the service desk manager role is evolving
 - From operational to transformational: what's changed
2. Building a Culture That Embraces Change:
 - How to lead mindset shifts across your team
 - Overcoming resistance and legacy thinking
3. Automation with Impact:
 - Beyond cost-cutting: using automation to empower people
 - Identifying high-impact automation wins
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 - Putting employee experience at the heart of AI adoption
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 - Moving from reactive reporting to proactive insight
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The Rise of the Strategic Service Desk Leader

Once upon a time, the service desk manager role was all about keeping the lights on and fixing things fast. Today? That's only half the story. The modern service desk leader isn't just focused on tickets and turnaround times - you're driving digital transformation, shaping the employee experience, and creating measurable business value.

In short, the service desk has evolved from a reactive support function to a strategic enabler of organisational success. And leading that change is you.

Why the service desk manager role is evolving

Technology has shifted from being a background function to a central part of business strategy. The rise of automation, AI, and smarter processes means service desks can now do more than simply "keep things running" - they can innovate, adapt, and transform how the entire organisation works.

Key drivers behind this evolution include:

- **Rising expectations** – Employees expect workplace technology to work as smoothly as the apps on their phones. Downtime and clunky processes are no longer tolerated.
- **Digital-first cultures** – Organisations are adopting new tools and platforms faster than ever, creating opportunities for the service desk to be at the heart of change.
- **Data at your fingertips** – Service desk reporting now provides powerful insights into performance, trends, and opportunities for improvement.
- **Remote and hybrid work** – Supporting employees anywhere, anytime, requires both new technology and new leadership approaches.

Of course, the role hasn't lost all of its quirks. Many managers can recall the more unusual tickets that land in their queue, from requests to check a "faulty" kettle to troubleshooting microwaves that simply weren't plugged in. These moments might raise a smile, but they also highlight how far the role has come. The service desk is no longer just the place people turn to for everyday fixes, it's a driver of strategic change.

From operational to transformational: what's changed

The strategic service desk leader isn't just focused on metrics like resolution times or first-call fix rates. Those still matter, but they're part of a bigger picture, one that's all about driving business value and delivering an exceptional service desk experience.

Here's how the role has transformed:



Vision, not just visibility

Where managers once concentrated on monitoring queues and allocating work, leaders now set a vision for how the service desk contributes to company goals. It's about aligning the service desk strategy with the wider business strategy.



Innovation at the core

Automation and AI are no longer “nice-to-have” extras. They're tools for empowering teams, freeing them from repetitive work so they can focus on higher-value tasks and problem-solving.



Employee experience as a priority

The service desk is now a key driver of the employee experience. Every interaction matters, from how quickly an incident is resolved to how easy it is for staff to find answers themselves. A positive experience boosts productivity, morale, and retention.



Data-led decision making

Modern service desk leaders use data to influence decisions across the organisation. Reports and analytics don't just measure performance, they highlight trends, reveal improvement opportunities, and make it easier to show why new tools or changes are worth the investment.



Skills every strategic service desk leader needs

Thriving in this evolved role requires more than technical knowledge. You need a blend of leadership, communication, and business skills that allow you to lead the change.

- **Strategic thinking** – See beyond the day-to-day and identify how service desk improvements impact the bigger picture.
- **Change leadership** – Guide your team through transformation projects, making sure your team feels involved and motivated.
- **Tech awareness** – Stay on top of innovations like AI and automation to understand how they can enhance the service desk experience for your team and users.
- **Empathy** – Understand employee needs and frustrations to create better, more human-centred support.
- **Business communication** – Explain service desk needs in a way that resonates with leadership, showing how everyday challenges connect to wider business outcomes.

How to start your journey from manager to leader

The shift doesn't happen overnight, but you can start building your influence and impact now:

- 1 **Review your current service desk strategy** – Is it aligned with business goals? If not, map out where you can contribute to wider objectives.
- 2 **Identify quick wins** – Look for opportunities to introduce automation or self-service improvements that deliver immediate benefits.
- 3 **Engage with stakeholders** – Build relationships across departments to better understand their needs and priorities.
- 4 **Leverage your data** – Use reporting to highlight successes, identify trends, and make the case for investment in tools or training.
- 5 **Champion innovation** – Be the voice that introduces new ideas, from chatbots to proactive support models.

Building a Culture That Embraces Change

Change is inevitable. Whether it's adopting AI-powered tools, streamlining workflows, or rethinking how your team delivers support, transformation is part and parcel of running a modern service desk. But while new technology is exciting, getting everyone on board can be another story entirely.

As a service desk leader, your role isn't just to drive progress, but to champion it. And that starts with building a culture that welcomes change rather than fearing it.

Why mindset matters more than technology

Even the most innovative tools won't make an impact if your team's mindset is stuck in "this is how we've always done it" mode. Service desk transformation is as much about people as it is about processes and platforms.

By leading a mindset shift, you can:

- Encourage curiosity and experimentation rather than clinging to the familiar
- Make continuous improvement part of your team's daily habits
- Empower people to spot opportunities for innovation themselves

When change becomes a shared value rather than a top-down instruction, it sticks.

Overcoming resistance and legacy thinking

Let's be honest - change can be uncomfortable. Legacy processes feel safe because they're familiar, even if they're no longer effective. To break that cycle, service desk leaders need to address resistance head-on. Here's how:



1 Explain the 'why'

Don't just talk about what's changing - explain why it matters. Link changes directly to improved employee experience, better outcomes for end-users, and reduced workload.

2

Involve your team early

People are far more likely to embrace new ways of working if they've had a say in shaping them. Involve team members in planning and decision-making.

3

Celebrate small wins

Highlight quick successes that demonstrate the positive impact of progress. It's easier to champion a culture of innovation when the results are visible.

4

Provide support and training

Equip your team with the skills they need to adapt confidently. Change feels less daunting when people know they have the tools and knowledge to succeed.

Leading the change you want to see

Leading through change isn't about having all the answers. It's about showing confidence, clarity, and commitment to the bigger picture.

Practical ways to lead the shift:

- **Be transparent:** Keep communication open and honest, even if all the details aren't final yet.
- **Model adaptability:** If you show flexibility and positivity in the face of change, your team will follow suit.
- **Champion progress publicly:** Acknowledge and reward individuals or teams who embrace new processes and drive improvements.



From change to continuous improvement

A culture that embraces change doesn't stop at a single transformation project. The goal is to create an environment where innovation is ongoing, and progress is the norm.

By embedding continuous improvement into your strategy, you can:

- Keep up with evolving business needs
- Consistently enhance the service desk experience for both staff and users
- Maximise the impact of every innovation you introduce

Change can feel like a challenge, but it's also an incredible opportunity. By leading the mindset shift, overcoming resistance, and embedding innovation into your culture, you can transform your service desk from a team that reacts to change into one that drives it.

If you're ready to lead the change, start with your culture - because the right mindset makes any transformation possible.

Automation with Impact

When many service desk leaders hear the word automation, the first thought is often "time savings". And while streamlining processes and saving budget is great, automation can (and should) do so much more. The modern service desk isn't just about doing more with less, it's about using technology to empower your teams, free up time for value-add work, and deliver better experiences for your users.

Let's explore how automation can create genuine impact, and where to focus for the biggest wins.



Helping people do their best work

Automation isn't here to replace your team - it's here to take the repetitive, routine tasks off their plate so they can focus on what humans do best. By removing repetitive, time-consuming tasks from daily workloads, you're enabling your analysts to:

- Proactively resolve issues before they escalate
- Spend more time on complex, rewarding work
- Build stronger relationships with users
- Drive service improvements that wouldn't otherwise make it to the top of the to-do list

The result? A happier, more motivated team - and a better service desk experience for everyone.

Spotting the high-impact wins

Not all automated processes are created equal. Chasing every possible automation can waste time and energy, so it's important to identify those with the highest potential to improve efficiency, user satisfaction, and team wellbeing.

Here are some quick wins to consider:



Proactive notifications:

Keep users informed with automated updates when a ticket is logged, progressed, or resolved. Less chasing for them, fewer "just checking in" calls for you.



Automated ticket routing:

Direct incidents and requests to the right person or team instantly, so nothing sits in limbo and SLAs stay on track.



Onboarding and offboarding workflows

Trigger tasks automatically for accounts, permissions, and hardware requests - keeping everything consistent and compliant.



Self-service request fulfilment:

Enable users to trigger automated processes themselves for common tasks like password resets or software installs.

These changes may seem small, but their combined impact can be huge - cutting delays, reducing workloads, and improving the overall user experience.

Measuring success (and showing the progress)

Implementing automation isn't a one-and-done exercise. To keep making progress, you'll want to monitor the impact of each change and share the results with your stakeholders and teams.

Consider tracking:

- Reduction in ticket resolution times
- Percentage of tickets routed automatically
- Fewer tickets created for repetitive issues
- Improvements in customer satisfaction scores

Not only will this help you refine your automated processes, but it will also give you the evidence to show how automation is delivering real value, not just in efficiency, but in experience.

Making automation part of your culture

Automation works best when it's woven into the fabric of your modern service desk strategy. Encourage your team to suggest improvements, celebrate successful changes, and make it clear that automation is about progress and improvement, not replacement.

The service desk of the future is a partnership between skilled people and smart tools - and the leaders who embrace this balance will create a stronger, more efficient, and more engaging environment for their teams and users alike.



AI That Works for People

When you think about Artificial Intelligence in the service desk world, it's easy to picture a future full of flashy tools and clever automations. But the real win? It's when AI works quietly in the background to make life easier for your people - your team, your end-users, and ultimately, your business.

The best AI strategy isn't about replacing humans. It's about smoothing out the bumps, speeding up the dull bits, and giving employees a more personalised, satisfying experience every time they need help.

Employee experience: the true driver of AI success

If AI is just another tool in the kit, it won't change much. But when it's designed around employee experience from day one, it becomes a genuine driver of service improvement. That means:



Reducing friction so logging an issue feels effortless.



Analysing ticket trends to spot and solve recurring issues before they grow.



Powering intelligent chatbots that feel intuitive, responsive, and helpful.



Personalised support that adapts to what the user actually needs, not just what the system thinks they need.

Put simply, better experiences = happier employees = better business outcomes.

Smarter triage, faster resolutions

One of the biggest benefits of AI in the modern service desk is smarter triage. By learning from historic tickets and analysing common requests, AI can:

- Direct issues to the right team instantly.
- Escalate urgent matters without delay.
- Suggest resolutions based on similar cases.

This means less time wasted bouncing tickets around and more time spent solving problems that matter.

And it does not stop there. AI can also support continuous improvement, a principle at the heart of ITIL best practice. At Sunrise, we are working behind the scenes to make this even easier, from turning resolution notes into ITIL compliant knowledgebase articles to surfacing insights from ticket analysis that help fix issues at the source. Instead of just reacting, service desks gain the ability to see patterns, identify common root causes, and make changes that reduce ticket volumes in the long run.

This is where the real value lies. AI is not something we are adding just because everyone else is doing it. It drives measurable benefits across triage, resolution, knowledge, and ultimately self-service. It is about turning your service desk data into data gold that powers improvement and fuels business success.

Personalised support that meets people where they are

AI works best when it's embedded into the tools your employees already use every day. That's why chatbots within Teams are so effective: no switching screens, no hunting for forms, just quick, personalised support right where the conversation is already happening.

For one Sunrise customer, adopting our AI-powered Teams chatbot has completely transformed the way staff get help. The process is quick, efficient, and very easy to use, with requests logged in just a few steps. Users describe the experience as simple and seamless, with more than one calling it “a game changer”.



The feedback says it all: people are “very impressed at the speed and simplicity” and value how effortless it feels. And this isn’t just about convenience, it’s about making the whole support process approachable, efficient, and even satisfying. When support feels this straightforward, employees are far more likely to engage positively with IT, keeping service running smoothly and satisfaction levels high. Read more about this on page 16!

AI that reduces noise, not adds to it

We’ve all seen tech that promises the world but just creates more admin. The right AI strategy avoids that by focusing on:

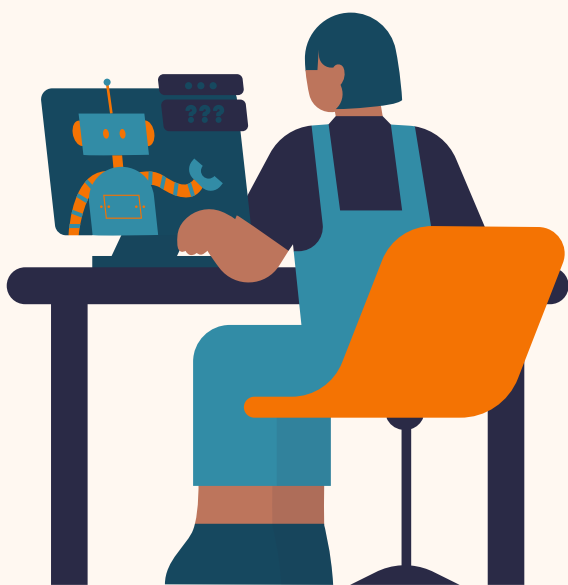
- Automating the repetitive so your team can focus on higher-value work.
- Providing relevant updates to users in real time, reducing “any news?” chases.
- Analysing data and historical content to uncover patterns, spot recurring issues, and proactively address root causes.

The result is a quieter inbox, fewer sticking points, and extra time for your people to add real value.

The bigger picture: business success through employee satisfaction

When employees get faster, more personalised support, they’re more productive and more satisfied. That ripple effect drives service improvement, strengthens your reputation, and contributes directly to business success.

AI isn’t the magic bullet - but when it’s designed to serve people first, it becomes one of the most powerful tools in your service desk arsenal.



Leading with Data: Turning Service Desk Metrics into Meaningful Insight

If there's one thing service desk leaders are never short of, it's data. Ticket logs, response times, resolution rates, user satisfaction scores - you could fill a spreadsheet (or ten) without even trying. But data alone doesn't prove your value. It's what you do with it that counts.

Getting issues resolved fast is important, but it's only part of the bigger picture. The real value of a service desk comes from showing the business how you're making a difference, spotting trends before they turn into problems, and using data to drive smarter decisions. That's where leading with insight, not just output, really sets you apart.

From reactive reporting to proactive insight

Many service desks are still stuck in the “reporting for the sake of reporting” cycle - producing end-of-month stats that tell you what happened but not why it happened, or what you should do next.

A proactive, data-driven approach flips that on its head. Instead of waiting for patterns to emerge by accident, you can actively seek them out and take action.

This means:

- 1 Analysing ticket trends** to see which issues keep cropping up and how they can be prevented.
- 2 Tracking response times and resolution rates** to spot where bottlenecks occur.
- 3 Identifying patterns in escalations** so you can refine your processes.

The goal? To move from “we fixed X tickets” to “we reduced ticket volume by 15% through targeted changes”. That's the sort of insight that shows real value to the business.

Proving your value with meaningful metrics

Numbers are only powerful if they tell a story. Reporting that your average resolution time is 3 hours is fine, but explaining that it's 30% faster than last quarter because you introduced automated ticket routing is even better.

Think about which metrics matter most for showing improvement and value:



First Contact Resolution (FCR)

The percentage of issues resolved without escalation. Higher FCR = happier users.



User Satisfaction Scores

A quick way to measure the impact of your service experience.



Repeat Incidents

Fewer repeats suggest root causes are being addressed.



Proactive Fixes

How many issues you've prevented through process changes.

When your metrics are tied directly to business outcomes - reduced downtime, improved productivity, better user experience - they become far more compelling.



Lessons from the Frontline: Real Stories of Service Desk Leadership

Being a service desk leader is never just about managing tickets. It's about guiding teams, balancing strategy with day-to-day demands, and pushing forward with changes that improve how IT support is delivered. While frameworks and best practices are valuable, some of the best IT service management insights come from hearing how other managers have tackled challenges in the real world.

We'll explore lessons from the frontline, including service desk success stories, what worked, what didn't, and how those leaders would approach things differently.

The Service Desk Leader's Reality Check

Every service desk manager knows the struggle: balancing an overwhelming workload while finding ways to innovate. Common goals include:

- Reducing routine calls to free up time for more complex work
- Improving self-service adoption
- Ensuring fast, consistent communication with users
- Proving value through meaningful service desk metrics

But knowing what should be done and seeing it work in practice are two different things. That's why real-world ITSM experiences can be so powerful.

How Mid Mersey Digital Alliance Transformed NHS IT Support with the Sunrise Teams Chatbot

One standout story comes from Andy Jones, ITSM System Developer at MMDA. His team faced a familiar challenge: too many routine calls reaching the desk, despite having other channels available. Their goal was simple - make it quicker and easier for staff to get support without overwhelming the service desk.

The solution? Embedding self-service directly into Microsoft Teams, a tool staff were already using every day. With D.A.V.E, their Sunrise Teams chatbot, MMDA empowered staff to:

- ✓ Log issues in under a minute
- ✓ Receive real-time ticket updates directly in Teams
- ✓ Approve requests faster than ever before



Adoption quickly picked up, with staff appreciating the speed and simplicity of logging issues in Teams. For the service desk, it meant fewer routine calls and more time to concentrate on higher-value work.

Here's what Andy had to say about the impact of D.A.V.E.:



It's no surprise that MMDA have secured an SDI 4-star rating and a place as a finalist for Service Desk of the Year at the SDI Awards 2025.



What Worked, What Didn't, and What's Next

Like all service desk transformation stories, there were lessons along the way.

What worked:

- **Meet users where they are:** Embedding tools in familiar platforms, like Teams, encourages adoption.
- **Start small and iterate:** Launch core features first, then expand based on feedback.
- **Communicate clearly and often:** Announcements, reminders, and visible updates help staff engage.
- **Automate routine tasks:** Freeing analysts from repetitive work allows focus on high-value activities.

What didn't work as smoothly:

- **User adoption takes time:** Even the most useful tools need reminders, encouragement, and ongoing promotion.
- **Mindset and habits matter:** Some staff prefer traditional channels, so changing behaviours requires patience and consistent messaging.

Takeaway Tips for Service Desk Leaders

If you're looking to drive similar change in your own organisation, here are some service desk leadership strategies to consider:

- 1 Start with the user experience -**
Make support available where staff already spend time, like Teams or other familiar platforms.
- 2 Invest in onboarding and training -**
Walk users through the new tools and demonstrate the benefits early.
- 3 Communicate clearly and often -**
Regular updates, reminders, and visible progress keep staff engaged.

- 4 Learn and iterate -**
Gather feedback continuously and refine processes or features gradually.
- 5 Measure impact -**
Track adoption, resolution rates, and response times to show value and guide your next steps.

By combining smart tools with thoughtful communication and iteration, service desk leaders can turn small wins into lasting transformation.

Real change on the service desk doesn't come from theory alone. It comes from leaders, like Andy, who are willing to experiment, learn, and adapt. These service desk innovation stories prove that with the right mix of strategy, communication, and user focus, you can deliver tangible improvements and inspire your team to embrace new ways of working.

If you're a service desk leader looking for inspiration, remember: the best insights often come from peers who've been in your shoes. Learn from their challenges, celebrate their successes, and apply those lessons to your own journey towards improving IT service delivery.

Is Your Service Desk Ready to Lead the Change?

Service desk leaders know that the world of IT support never stands still. Between digital transformation initiatives, rising user expectations, and the growing role of automation and AI, the pressure is on to ensure your service desk isn't just keeping up but driving change.

The big question is... how ready is your service desk for 2025?

Benchmarking Your Service Desk Maturity

Before you can set the direction, you need to know where you stand. That's where our new service desk readiness scorecard comes in. In just three minutes, you'll get a clear picture of your service desk maturity and discover how your organisation measures up against seven critical success factors for ITSM success.

Think of it as a health check for your IT support strategy, helping you:

- **Pinpoint gaps** in processes and performance
- **Identify strengths** you can build on
- **Receive tailored insights** that support your digital transformation journey

The scorecard is quick, easy, and designed specifically for service desk leaders who want to move from reactive to strategic.

Why It Matters

Your results don't just tell you how you're doing today. They'll also highlight what's needed to prepare for tomorrow. Whether it's improving reporting, adopting automation, or strengthening user experience, the assessment will guide you towards the areas of greatest impact for your service desk improvement.

By understanding your current level of service desk maturity, you'll be better equipped to make the right decisions and lead meaningful transformation across your IT operations.

Ready to Take the Test?

If you're curious about how your service desk stacks up, it's time to take the assessment. In just a few clicks, you'll have a tailored roadmap to help benchmark, improve, and transform your IT support strategy.

Take the "Is Your Service Desk Ready to Lead the Change?" assessment now



How Sunrise Can Help

At Sunrise, we've been helping organisations elevate their service desks for over 30 years.

No faff, no fluff, just one powerful service desk platform enabling you to focus on what really matters: helping people.

Whether you're looking to improve everyday processes, boost reporting capabilities, or build a future-proof ITSM strategy, Sunrise is here to help.

Discover how Sunrise can support your service desk transformation today!

 sunrisesoftware.com

 +44 20 8391 9000

 enquiries@sunrisesoftware.com

