



SkillSharpener Web Extra

Could your reps use a "quiet room"?

Stress is an ongoing and ever-present factor in most customer service centers. One of the ways companies are trying to help alleviate stress — or at least to provide a temporary haven from it — is by creating "quiet rooms."

Quiet rooms are meant to be a place that customer service reps can escape to for a short time during the work day when they need a few moments of quiet to "de-stress." And according to Barbara Burke, a customer service trainer and coach, and author of *The Napkin, The Melon & The Monkey*, a quiet room can be very beneficial in terms of stress reduction. "Having a place to go to get away from the noise and chaos, helps reps to clear their heads in a healthy way, without resorting to eating candy or smoking a cigarette," she says.

And if people know they have a place they can go, it is likely that adherence to schedules is going to be better because reps will have an alternative to staying at home or going home when they are feeling less than 100 percent. "And I am going to guess that overall the service center culture is going to be more positive," Burke says. "When management institutes a quiet room, it really sends the message to reps that 'we hear you and we care about you.' And I'm a big proponent of making reps feel valued, because the more the rep feels valued, the more he or she is going to make the customer feel valued. It's kind of a chain reaction."

Creating a "quiet room"

The ideal quiet room, Burke suggests, would be off the call center floor, but in a nearby area so that it is generally visible from the call center. In fact, respondents to a survey Burke conducted on quiet rooms said that when they moved their quiet room to a more visible location, they noticed a significant increase in usage.

The quiet room should have a window in the door and a window to the outside of the building, if that's possible. It should also have soft, soothing colors on the walls and a number of comfortable chairs. Burke's survey determined that, besides the chairs, standard furnishings might include a small table or two, lights or lamps with dimmers, a small clock, a rug, posters that are not work-related, an aquarium, and even a lava lamp.

In fact, you might want to involve customer service reps in planning and decorating the quiet room, and bringing in some furnishings from home, since it is for their use and comfort. "The more invested customer service reps are in creating the quiet room," Burke says, "the more use they will make of it, and the more people will kind of talk it up as an option."

Tips on creating a "quiet room"

If you want to create a great place to work for your customer service reps and show them that you care for their well-being, a "quiet room" is a great way to accomplish that, says Barbara Burke. Here are her tips on creating a quiet room:

- Involve your staff in the creation of the room.
- Locate the room as near as possible to the customer service center.
- Focus on comfort and soothing colors when furnishing the room.
- Avoid using the room for other purposes.
- Keep rules about using the room to a minimum.





While it's best to have a separate room for the quiet room, not every customer service center will have a room available. "But some people have tricked out unused offices for a quiet room, and others have even converted large closets or storage rooms into quiet rooms," Burke says. She adds that some more advanced companies are even including quiet rooms in their plans for new service facilities.

One might try to segregate a corner of the call center or break room as a quiet area, Burke says, "but there is nothing like having the safety of being able to go into a room and hear the door shut behind you, to know that it is your space, and you are not going to be disturbed for a period of time."

How to use a "quiet room"

According to Burke's survey, the primary reasons that companies create quiet rooms are, 1) to help combat employee stress, 2) because employees made it known that they wanted a quiet room, 3) because it seemed like the right thing to do for employees, and 4) because employees with stress-related health issues like headaches and migraines needed a place to go during work hours.

With "quiet" and "relieving stress" being the primary reasons for creating the room, it goes without saying that there should be some guidelines about how the room is to be used. And the first rule might be to avoid using the room for other, unrelated purposes. "Resist the temptation to use the room for a break room, a meeting room, or a place to make phone calls or go online," Burke says.

Other rules that came up in Burke's survey included things like respecting others, entering and leaving quietly, no cell phones, no talking, no eating or drinking. Burke suggests that you want to keep rule-making to a minimum. You can even put together a committee of customer service reps

to be in charge of creating any rules that may be necessary.

Burke warns, however, "You don't want to micro-manage people, because so much of that goes on in the call center anyway. So treat people like adults and, in general, they are going to respect one another and use the space for its intended use."

On the other hand, if there is a problem with some individual, "it's the manager's or the supervisor's job to take that person aside and have a chat with him."

Alternatives to a "quiet room"

Not every customer service organization will have the room or the resources to create a quiet room, but customer service managers do have some alternatives to help reps deal with stress.

In particular, managers can make it easier for reps to take a break from the phones when necessary.

Encourage people to take the breaks that they are entitled to and encourage them to take a walk to get away from the call center.

Burke says that managers can even have walking meetings — or have a meeting at an outside picnic table, if the weather is cooperative. "Anything you can do to get

your reps outside, or just away from the call center, is really helpful," she says.

She also reports on one company whose employees just walked around the warehouse during their breaks. "They just got together and walked around and didn't talk about business, but talked about whatever else they wanted to talk about," she says.

Finally, companies can try to keep the noise down and provide softer lighting in their cafeterias and break rooms to give reps a place to go, but she adds again, "there's nothing like being able to shut a door behind you."

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