



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."

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."

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.

One might even 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." ■

