



Becoming the Best: Assessing your Facilities

By Lori Fraser, Consultant and Steve Suhn, Consultant

The National Association of Call Centers | Volume 5, Issue 2, January 29, 2010

Whether your contact center facility was purpose-built, redesigned, or you are making the most of what you have, you can optimize your plan for using any available facilities improvement budget through a focused assessment. Facilities are more than just space for people to handle calls, emails or chat. They are a critical tool to support business goals, ensure employee health and safety, optimize productivity and ideally attract and inspire agents.

Defining the Scope of the Assessment

When assessing your facilities, the scope can vary based on the age and condition of your facility, the contact center size and functions (agents and support staff), and the available improvement budget. We recommend you include the following categories in your assessment, at a minimum:

- Design/layout – for both call center teams and support/management functions to enable efficient communication, collaboration or quiet, as appropriate.
- Ergonomics – in agent work space including lighting, sound, chair and workspace design, chair to work surface alignment, access to drawers for personal possessions, and glare free monitors
- Location(s) – easy access to public transportation, abundant parking, and safe/secure access to the building
- Amenities – such as onsite day care, meal and snack options, fitness facilities or walking paths, and personal communication space and tools

Assessing and addressing each area enables call center management to attract and retain skilled agents, improve schedule adherence, bolster employee morale and ultimately improve customer satisfaction.

Facilities Issues and Opportunities

There are five areas we most often see contact center managers target for improvement.

Agent workstation Ergonomics

Adjustable desktops, keyboard drawers which can raise or tuck away, and ergonomic chairs or balance balls for sitting are increasingly common, as is training focused on appropriate chair and work space alignment.

Lighting is more than what you see

Natural lighting through windows or skylights is ideal within the center. Centers located in the building interior can still get some of the benefits of a view to the outside world by posting large pictures of outdoor scenes and using special lighting to match the natural light spectrum. As an example, a large utility center altered lighting and found a positive impact on agent moods and energy.

Collaboration

In today's world, your first thought with collaboration may be technology, but facility layout can enhance collaboration, too. In a large center in the healthcare industry, teams worked in an open environment to optimize first call resolution. The open work space was bordered by meeting and collaboration rooms which ranged in size to support anything from special project team meetings to agent quality feedback and coaching.



Fun break rooms

Agent-focused break rooms offer more than coffee, a fridge and microwave. A top competitor for a Call Center of the Year award provides three separate areas adjacent to their break room. One room is for active entertainment with Foosball and ping pong tables. Another provides a quiet area with couches and bean bags for power naps or relaxation. A third room provides television, Internet access, and additional media capabilities. Creative break options result in inspired staff.

Positive reinforcement

Repurpose your walls into Customer Kudos Centers, Employee Appreciation Centers or consistent reminders of team mission and goals. One center with a mission to shift from a cost center to a profit center used their walls to rotate an executive statement of agent value with quarterly goals and monthly/quarterly performance winners. The successful change to a profit center was worth the investment in a few changes to wall design.

Apply Best Practices to your Facilities and Physical Environment

While walls, cubes and desks may seem the most immovable of contact center resources, a little creative energy goes a long way in finding ways to optimize your facilities. Use these best practices to assess your facilities and physical environment and undoubtedly you'll find some improvements that are worth the investment.

- Sites are easily accessible to employees by public and private transportation, and ample, well lit parking is provided. Amenities (food, exercise facilities, daycare, etc.) are available on-site or nearby.
- The facility is well-maintained and ensures employee safety and security.
- Work areas reflect ergonomic design to promote teaming and resource management while avoiding disruptions.
- Staff has ready access to bathrooms, copiers, faxes, mail rooms, break rooms, etc. to minimize time away from their desks.
- Training, quality review, huddle and break areas provide ample room for employee education, coaching and development at convenient locations. Conference rooms and/or small offices support collaboration as needed.
- Appropriate space is provided for display of operational feedback and recognition.