

Does the Help Desk Help?

Depending upon whom you ask, you will find that help desks can be either an asset or a hardship. Help desks are what companies make of them. Have you positioned your help desk to be a “helpless desk”? Or have you positioned your help desk to perform as a valuable asset for your company?

Over the past 15 years I have had opportunities to create, manage, evaluate and outsource companies’ help desks, call centers and support desks. Chances are, your company has either an internal help desk, an outsourced help desk, or at least is dependent upon a vendor’s or supplier’s help desk. No matter your initial thought, you should be encouraged by the fact you have managed to read to this point. The first step in solving a problem is admitting you have a problem (hope you’re laughing!).

Differentiate Yourself

Let’s face it: No matter what business you are in, you are going to have problems. A friend of mine says, “How a company delivers when things are good is not as important as how a company delivers when there are problems.” Just think about how you feel when someone helps you solve a problem or find an answer to a question. This person has the opportunity to spin you from an angry or frustrated client (customer, user) to a satisfied client. They can also move a client from being satisfied to being a raving fan. That help-desk employee has a lot of power!



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For companies willing to manage a help desk as it would any other valuable asset, it can serve as a positive differentiator. Managed improperly, a help desk can affect your bottom line even more than your fiercest competitor. Companies often staff help desks with anyone who can warm a seat. That is a major reason for an annual turnover rate of 25% to 35% in help-desk organizations.



Properly managing a help desk requires a commitment to training. Training plays a large role in retaining employees as does avoiding overwork and burnout. New help-desk employees typically receive two to six weeks of training. This training often includes lessons in “soft” skills. There are many other factors to consider when positioning a help desk as a valuable asset.

Build a Foundation

Twelve cornerstones for a solid help-desk foundation:

- ▶ Hire the right people.
 - ▶ Pay your people what they are really worth (remember, these people are dealing with “troubled” customers).
 - ▶ Train, train and train.
 - ▶ Provide the right tools (technology, documentation, clearly stated objectives, etc.)
 - ▶ Focus on problem resolution, not just “fixes.”
 - ▶ Schedule enough staff and do not “scrimp.”
 - ▶ Offer short-term and long-term incentives.
 - ▶ Resist managing only by statistics.
 - ▶ Spend time meeting with your help-desk staff.
 - ▶ Create a fun environment where staff can relax (these positions can be stressful).
 - ▶ Include the help-desk staff in career-planning activities.
 - ▶ Benchmark your help desk against best-practice help desks.

Remember that your help desk will be whatever you make of it. Are you prepared to do what it will take to make your help desk a valuable corporate asset? ■