

Tilting the Balance in Favor of Healthy Lifestyle in the Contact Center Industry

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Over twenty years ago, a few intrepid companies like Accenture, Teleperformance and E-Telecare began providing outsourced business process services to clients based in the United States in the Philippines. The Philippines contact center industry was born. This business sector now accounts for over 800,000 full time employees [1], most of which are millennials. The contact center sector in the Philippines is just one segment of the larger IT business process management (IT-BPM) industry. It slowly became the number one source of revenue for the country and is now deemed to achieve \$25 billion by the end of 2019, \$16 billion of which will come from the contact center industry.

Careers in the contact center sector are a popular choice for newly graduates and professionals who earn \$500-\$700 monthly in an environment where they are serving global customers. The almost never ending demand for workers in the contact center industry produces very positive impact on the economy. It is estimated that for every contact center employee, 2-3 jobs are created in other industries supporting the needs of contact center workers (foodservice, transportation, health, etc.)

The major downside of the contact center economic boom in the Philippines has been the employee health and well-being issues. Since 85% of Philippine based contact centers provide services to US clients (as of 2014 [2]), the contact center employees work mostly during night time. This leads to a certain number of health risks such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, urinary tract infection, peptic ulcer, pharyngitis and other lifestyle related diseases. These risks are later translated to ever rising annual attrition rate, on average at 48.3% (as of end of 2015).

I conducted a study entitled "Factors Associated to Life-Style Diseases among Call Center Agents in Metro Manila" [3] due to a curiosity whether the job of call center agents may affect their health and what factors contribute to diabetes, hypertension and obesity. Their profile was collected and analyzed based on their age, BMI, waist-hip ratio, years on the job, diet and physical activity. I found that of the 310 respondents, 8.7% were diabetic while 18.4% were hypertensive and 34.2% were as overweight to obese. In relation to the national level (8th National Nutrition Survey [4]), among the Filipino adult population, 5.4% were diabetic, 22.3% were hypertensive and 31.1% were overweight or obese. The respondents suffer these health risks either close to or over the national level which is worrisome because 85% of them are below 29 years old.

If health risks are not addressed and taken into action, it will result to a higher absenteeism and attrition rate which will in turn give no revenue to the country. In order to mitigate any potential health risks, employees should adopt more healthy lifestyles like exercising and practice eating balanced meals.

Contact centers can do a lot by investing on nutrition and wellness programs for their employees. This can include programs that offer employees with healthy food options, holding nutrition and healthy lifestyle counselling, providing in-house medical staffs, and offering financial and other incentives to encourage healthy lifestyle.

Contact center jobs will continue to increase as more and more foreign clients choose the Philippines for their outsourced works. As such, health risks to employees but not when both companies and employees work together to tilt the balance in favor of healthy lifestyle.

Bibliography

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2. CCAP (2018)
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