

"Night birds: The booming Call Center Industry"
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Call centers are a booming industry and today's youngsters are merrily lapping up the opportunity to earn a good buck while still in college. Nazia Khan reviews the social structure of such young execs.



The image of the average call center employee brings about the image of someone who works nights, sleeps during the day, makes good money, but doesn't get time to play. How do call center employees manage their high-stress work-life to include a comfortable social life? What makes the social life and habits of a call center employee different? Let's try to find out.

The purchasing power that the average call center executive possesses, thanks to the impressive starting salaries, is what is leading to a different social order. The social order that makes Sanpada-based Vivek Kumar, working with Spanco Systems as a customer service associate, get into the Richy Rich mode, soon after he got his job. Clothes and perfumes are 20-year-old Kumar's passion, and he says his salary "allows to splurge on the very best there is," attire and fragrance wise. The fact that the very best there is often translates into the most expensive there is bothered him earlier but not anymore. "I have always wanted these things. Now that I have the means, I am getting them. So I go a little overboard spending, but I can afford it," he reasons. Kopar Khairane resident Divya Mewani turned into somewhat of a shopaholic when she got her first job with Intelenet Global, formerly located at Vashi. All thanks/no thanks to a really good paycheck. Usha Krishnan, working with a call center at Powai, feels, "The first few months people do tend to crazily overspend. My friends from work and I bought so many things we didn't need, just because we could. But gradually moderation comes in.

The spending habits of those in the prevailing profession generally seem to reach higher peaks before settling at lower peaks. But what about habits of a different, more addictive nature? Do smoke clouds cover the atmosphere at call centers? Raashi Sharma, working with a call center in Vashi, goes through almost twenty cigarettes a day, like a lot of her friends at work. "I have a high-pressure job, I eat at odd hours, my weight keeps yo-yoing and I find that smoking helps me relax," Sharma explains, adding that she might just kick the habit once she's permanent in the job.

Nehha Sangani, working with the IYG call center in Borivali, has never smoked and doesn't plan on starting, though she does see many co-workers go through the injurious to health routine. Sangani believes it is all a matter of personal principles and choices. Naresh Kurien, team leader at a call center in Santacruz, says, "I smoked even before I started working at a call center. This work doesn't encourage smoking. I have observed some colleagues and subordinates try smoking since they don't want to feel left out. But that situation isn't particular to call centers."

Being part of a work group does expand the social circle. For call center employees the circle often tends to constitute other call center employees. Sudhir Kadam, who works as a back-office agent at the Emmay call center, offers his take on why there is more employee bonding taking place at call centers, saying, "You complete your initial training period with a group, you complete some more training with the group,

then you work with the same group. You face the same work pressure, and generally an understanding develops.”

Aalia Naqvi, Vashi resident working with Wipro Spectraminds, provides another answer. “People on a team get their holidays together, sometimes on weekdays. So it is easier to make plans for socialising with them.” She doesn’t think working with a call center adversely affects an ordinary social life. “ If someone isn’t very social to begin with, then it really doesn’t make a difference,” she adds. And if someone is very social to begin with, then one adapts one’s social schedule, at least that’s what Kiran Upadhyay, Nerul resident who’s recently joined a call center in Andheri, would have you believe. The days he gets off work in an earlier shift, he is off disco darting with his friends in Mumbai. “People find time for things they really want to do,” Upadhyay avers. They also find time to celebrate festivals, with their extended call center families, when they don’t get holidays to spend at home. “ We had a lot of fun celebrating Diwali and Independence Day at work and a party is on the cards for Christmas too,” says Preeti Chhokera, working at GTL Limited, Mahape.



So do call center executives, in their own time zones, lead normal and healthy social lives? There are those like Aditya Joshi, working with the Reliance domestic call center, who believe that working at a call center doesn’t hamper any aspect of social life. “ It is like any other job. Once you’re out of there, you forget about it,” Joshi feels. Then there are those like Geeta Chandarkar, working with a call center in Mulund, who laugh when told the brief of the story. “Social life of a call center executives? That’s a contradiction in terms.” The answer to the question at the beginning of the paragraph probably lies in individual balancing of work and play. Meanwhile, at the call centers, the argument continues.