

RACIST ATTACKS ON CALL CENTER WORKERS

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Racist tirades made by Radio host STAR, morning DJ on Power 99, on an Indian call center worker has raised the issue of racial abuse against call center workers outside the United States. Until this incident, this issue was largely underreported; people chose to ignore it, calling it a natural outcome of outsourcing. But the rising number of incidents and their serious effect on the workers has made this issue hard to ignore.

As reported by Mike McPhate, Debalina Das, 22, a computer helpline agent in the city of Hyderabad, was greeted by a caller from the United States with a torrent of racial and sexual slurs, accused her of "roaming about naked without food and clothes" and asked, "What do you know about computers?" The diatribe ended with the comment: "This company is just saving money by outsourcing to Third World countries like yours." Surprising as this attack may sound, this kind of attack is becoming more and more common. Many young college graduates who join call centers looking for great pay and advancement opportunity are getting an impression of America as a country of rude people. Some of them have even said that they don't want to visit America or would not consider working for an American company.

For an Indian call center worker being insulted with rude words like "roaming around naked" is traumatizing and hurtful. It only adds to the hurt when the manager advises them to forget the incident, take the incident as a job hazard and move on. Instead of being asked to "turn the other cheek" the worker should be counseled about the reasons why the other person on line is behaving in such a way. For example, telling them about how Americans feel about their

jobs being outsourced, what Americans feel about India and its people, and also that their verbal abuse is not a personal attack against them. Writing from personal experience, Americans by far have respect for Indian culture and the people. Although many are against shipping off American jobs to India, they don't hold this personally against the people, they are against the companies who are doing this.

Of course all the burden is not on the call center operators; American callers should also be sensitive. Although this is a much tougher task, companies that outsource their service can do this by being honest with their customers. They have to be honest as to why they chose to outsource certain jobs, explain the economic hardships that forced them (or the reasons may be related to technical issues). In this way, the customers will have more understanding of why the service is being outsourced. They will slowly understand that the people in India did not come to steal their jobs and don't mean any harm to America. For now, this seems to be an easier course to end this cycle.

Reference:

McPhate, Mike (2006). Call-center workers in India endure American abuse. <<http://www.mcall.com/business/local/all-indiajan15,0,493314.story?coll=all-businesslocal-hed>>