

# POST GUILD forum



Local 32035 The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild

July 29, 2004

## Guild Takes Classified Advertising Call Center Issues to Post

A Guild Committee met with Post management on July 22 to present a long list of problems experienced by Telephone Sales Reps in the Classified Advertising Call Center. Sales Reps Brenda Jackson, Caroline Edwards, Linda Beach and Dolphine Williams along with Stewards Ann-Marie Ditchey and Darlene Meyer and Local Rep Rick Ehrmann laid out in stark detail the hostile work environment that has evolved in the Call Center. The Telephone Sales Reps on the Guild Committee average 29 years of employment at the Post. Their sales achievements have won them countless awards, and, collectively, they have brought in millions of advertising dollars for the Washington Post. In the meeting, they spoke eloquently about their current working conditions, calling their experiences the worst in all their years at the Post.

Management representatives Larry Keating, Goli Sheikholeslami, Trish Dunn, and Jay Kennedy listened attentively as the Guild committee members cited incident after incident and policy or practice after policy or practice that contributed to this hostile work environment. These were grouped into two categories: lack of respect and dignity and system problems. Some specific examples of lack of respect and dignity cited at the meeting are:

1. Employees being called "slackers" at a meeting
2. Telephone Sales Representatives being disparaged by a supervisor in the TV room in the cafeteria.
3. Supervisors admonishing employees in front of other employees in the work area
4. Poor communications with employees
5. Disregard for important employee time off requests, such as doctor's appointments, weddings, and emergency home repairs
6. Requiring a doctor's certificate after only one day of sickness, when it would not be appropriate or even possible for the employee to get a same-day appointment
7. Discrimination in the distribution of faxed ad orders
8. Employees cutting their lunch time and not taking needed bathroom breaks for fear of being penalized by losing required work time

Some examples of system problems cited were:

1. A statistical matrix that measures and tracks every minute of a TSR's time turns human beings into machines
2. Goals have become requirements; weekly goals have become daily requirements.
3. Employee statistical performance scorecards are suspect and not transparent.
4. Daily statistical reports are no longer available to employees
5. Phone system clock was set to be 5 minutes fast, leading to employees being told they were late for work
6. Phone system does not fairly distribute calls, causing some employees to receive more calls than others, even though the others are available and next in line. This renders the statistical matrix performance measuring system grossly discriminatory.
7. 30 minutes per shift of non-phone time was taken from employees when new phone system came online.
8. The 3<sup>rd</sup> 15 minute break was taken from 10 hour shift employees.
9. Lack of confidence in the accuracy of financial data used for incentive payouts due to observed irregularities with Sales Reps' own recordkeeping as well as the lack of transparency / confidence in the accuracy of the data.

The Guild Committee left the 90 minute meeting with the belief that management will seriously review its practices in the Classified Advertising (Consumer to Consumer) Call Center in order to create a more positive and worker-friendly environment. Management will meet with the Guild Committee again on Wednesday, August 4 to respond to the Guild Committee's presentation.

--- Darlene Meyer, Co-Chair