

Quiet Rooms

Getting Started

What is a Quiet Room? A Quiet Room is a space in the workplace designated for prayer, relaxation and reflection for all employees. It provides a temporary sanctuary in which employees can escape the fast pace of the work environment, while not interrupting general operations. Such a room can be tailored to the needs of each company's workforce, and changed to accommodate new employees' needs over time.

How does creating a Quiet Room further my diversity efforts? Without advocating or endorsing any particular religion or belief system, a Quiet Room provides a dedicated, comfortable space for individual or communal worship, or simple reflection during the workday. This is meaningful to employees who practice a religion requiring prayer at specific times (e.g. Muslims and Orthodox Jews) as well as to non-religious employees who simply seek time to meditate or reflect.

Why call it a Quiet Room? Tanenbaum recommends calling the room a "Quiet Room" (as opposed to a "Meditation Room" or a "Prayer Room") in order to be inclusive of both believers and those who may wish to use the room but do not consider themselves religious or spiritual.

How much will it cost? A thorough internal assessment of existing and potential employee needs will affect cost. A company may wish to designate an existing space (such as a conference room) as a Quiet Room, and expend minimal financial resources in renovations. Alternatively, a company may opt to create, decorate and furnish a brand new space as a Quiet Room.

Why Quiet Rooms Are Important

Employee Benefits: By creating a space for required practice of an employee's religion, personal meditation, or simple silence, a Quiet Room recognizes a need of many employees and offers them the option for relaxation and improved mental health. The existence of such a space makes a statement to employees about the commitment of the company to the needs of its employees, directly impacting satisfaction of workplace culture. Quiet Rooms can also provide an employee the opportunity to collect their thoughts and recharge.

Company Benefits: Creating a quiet space encourages employee well-being and can foster creative thinking, the result being a more motivated, innovative, and productive workforce. Paying attention to employees' religious needs can boost recruitment and retention in a competitive global market marked by increased immigration and diversity.

Changing Workforce: Several trends are changing modern workplaces. Immigration to the U.S. is resulting in greater numbers of previously underrepresented ethnic, racial, and religious groups. These immigrants bring a wide variety of cultural norms, customs, and preferences. Additionally, Baby Boomers, Gen-

eration X, and the Millennials are all represented in today's workplaces, with Generation Z not far behind. These different generations bring a wide variety of expectations, habits and needs to a company. Creating quiet space in the workplace will help an organization adapt to these trends, enabling them better to satisfy a diverse workforce and remain competitive and current.

Creating Your Space

Employee Input: Get to know your staff and what their needs might be. Assess the general needs of religious traditions or groups represented in your workforce by seeking recommendations from each. If your company has a wellness, interfaith, or faith-specific employee resource group, their leadership is a great place to start. If you conduct a cultural audit in your organization, you can include questions that ask about the needs employees have of a Quiet Room (or not). Throughout the planning process, be sure to encourage contributions from all employees equally so everyone has a hand in the results. It is often helpful to create a consulting committee, consisting of a diverse group of potential users, who can provide opinions and input. Collaboration is key.

Location: A Quiet Room should be easily accessible to all employees and placed away from high-traffic or noisy areas of the office. If possible, avoid placing the room in a basement or other unattractive spot, as this can give the impression the space is not valued. As members of some religions pray facing a certain direction, it is ideal that the door not be located on that side of the room. For example, Muslims orient themselves to face Mecca during prayer, which is to the east when one is in the Northeast United States. A U.S. company would therefore make sure that the Quiet Room door is not located on the eastern wall. Also, situating the room near a bathroom area with low-lying sinks or where basins can be provided for foot cleaning is useful for those who wash before or after prayer and have to observe particular cleansing rituals.

Multi-Purpose Locations: When space and funds do not allow for the establishment of a separate space, an existing area, such as a conference room or employee lounge can be designated for multiple uses. This option is cost-saving, but does require a much greater commitment to management and maintenance. A detailed schedule must be kept to ensure the varying uses of the room do not overlap. Be aware of events, such as meetings and conference calls that may run late and avoid scheduling such activities close to designated prayer times. In this situation, communication, negotiation and time management are critical.

Design: The goal is for a Quiet Room to be an oasis within a busy workplace. It is very important to liaise with Facilities in the planning of the location of the Quiet Room. To the extent possible, fluorescent light should be avoided, with natural or low light ideal. Adequate ventilation, heat, and cooling are essential. Avoid religious imagery and stick to neutral colors in paint and fabric. Religious materials, books and supplies can be kept in a Quiet Room for worship purposes, but should be stored respectfully in closed cabinets when not in use. These can be provided and maintained by individuals or groups. Strive for flexibility in design to accommodate everyone. Large, unmovable furniture is best avoided, but chairs, mats, cushions, shoe racks, dividing screens and low tables are practical and adaptable to multiple uses.

Varying Needs: Use of the room will be different between and among varying religious groups and those who do not practice a religion at all. Buddhists may meditate or chant while seated on a cushion on the floor. Christians may want to engage in Bible study. Sikhs prefer using a room that is quiet, clean and carpeted. Many Muslims pray five times a day while lying prostrate facing Mecca, and several of

these times may occur during the workday. Muslims must also perform ritual ablutions, the washing of the hands, feet and face, before prayer, hence the desirability of a nearby washing facility. Some (but not all) Muslims and Jews partake in group prayer while divided by gender, making rolling screens necessary. Employees not wishing to pray may want to access the room to have a place to sit quietly, perform yoga, or read a book.

Guidelines: It is important that, through consultation with managers, employees and representatives of the varying groups, clear guidelines for use of the room are established. Will group worship, faith based meetings, or Bible study be permitted? Is the area reserved for individual prayer only? Is there a limit to how often individuals can utilize the space? Can the room be restricted from being used to individually prepare for a meeting or presentation? The answers to these questions will vary based on the needs and policies of each organization. However, it is crucial that any rules are developed at the start, and disseminated among all employees. Of course, these guidelines are subject to change over time.

Management Over Time

Publicity: An unused Quiet Room is a space – and a management opportunity – wasted. Be sure employees, new and old, are made aware of the space, how it can be utilized, and where it is located. It's important to communicate to your workforce how the establishment of the Quiet Room supports the diversity and inclusion initiatives for all employees. Mark the room clearly and leave space for notices encouraging quiet, listing the terms and conditions of use, and outlining any schedule that has been established. Incorporate the room into diversity and wellness initiatives, perhaps using it for workshops on stress relief or educational seminars on religious inclusivity. With religious groups, discuss if they are willing to open their worship, meetings or ceremonies to the other employees. Inform the workforce about these opportunities through the company's usual means of communication, including e-mails and bulletins.

Scheduling: Take care to ensure that the room is not used exclusively or excessively by any one group. Some groups might require more time in the space to fulfill their religious needs, which is acceptable as long as it is not to the detriment or exclusion of others. Schedule times according to need and preference, but leave an ample amount of time unscheduled and available for personal and general use. Any schedule established should be made available to all workers and clearly visible on the door of the room or a nearby wall or bulletin board. Be aware of the religious holiday calendar, and how they may alter scheduling needs.

Feedback: While the person or department tasked with overseeing the room will vary by company, it's important to ensure that employees know who to turn to with questions and that there is a clearly defined feedback mechanism in place. Inquiries will likely arise around the room's use or scheduling and management needs to be prepared for unanticipated questions. A comment box for anonymous feedback might be helpful. Some companies may wish to continue consulting with any representatives from various religious groups who had been involved in the planning phase, as they will be able to provide ongoing insight as to their personal needs and seasonal concerns.

Maintenance: A Quiet Room should be kept clean and all materials and furniture well-maintained. Floors and carpets should be swept or vacuumed regularly, as many religious individuals perform prayers while on the ground. Any texts or objects used during prayer, meditation or reflection

should be stored in the closed cabinets when not in use, so that new patrons will find an uncluttered, inclusive space.

Adaptation: The composition and needs of a workforce are constantly evolving and yours will change over time. New employees, changing preferences of existing employees, generational shifts, and immigration trends could all necessitate alterations to the purpose, design and use of a Quiet Room. By remaining alert and reaching out to employees for input, any company will be able to successfully maintain and develop their Quiet Room.

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