

The moral of the story is that sometimes even people who should know better (a.k.a. *me*) don't follow the instructions and end up needing help. I needed the help desk.

One of the most important functions of an IT administrator is supporting your users. The best way to do that is to set up a help desk.

If you work at a small company where you're pretty much the entire IT department, you probably *are* the help desk. In a small organization (say, less than 40 people), it may be possible for one person to manage the entire IT infrastructure, including setting up and maintaining server hardware and software, as well as network equipment and application software, and still manage to field occasional calls from users who need help. But as more employees are brought on, you'll eventually need to set up a formal help desk with staff dedicated to solving users' problems.

In this chapter, I give you a brief overview of what to consider when setting up and managing an effective help desk.

Establishing the Help Desk's Charter

Whether you're starting from scratch or evaluating the effectiveness of an existing help desk, the best place to start is to create a charter for the help desk. Without a clear charter, you'll never be able to measure your help desk's effectiveness.

The charter should spell out the core mission of the help desk, which certainly includes solving IT problems encountered by users of your organization's computer systems. The charter should also address considerations such as the following:

- » How does the mission of the help desk fit in with the company's core values?
- » Where does the help desk fit within the company's overall organization? Who does it report to?
- » Does the help desk seek to solve *all* IT problems, or does it have a more limited scope? In other words, if a user doesn't understand how to create and use a Microsoft Excel PivotTable, is it within the scope of the help desk to provide that training? Or is the help desk's mission limited to helping users when Excel is broken, not when the user doesn't know how to use it?