**When Life Gives You Team Rooms – Have Fun!**

**Your Team Room Survival Guide**

Several years ago, I had a beautiful cubicle with one of the walls being a window. Then tragedy struck. My group moved into a team room. Perhaps you, too, are living the dream.

I am sure you’ve all read articles about the detrimental effects the arrangement has, how people can’t multitask (estimates are that 2% of the population can effectively multitask), how illness is more easily shared throughout your group, etc.

**How’s your Vitamin D?**

Going from a window to a cave-like team room, I developed a vitamin D deficiency. Get yours checked and if low, see what you doctor recommends. I now take a daily dose of vitamin D to correct for that.

**Noise Suppression**

One of the most common complaints about team rooms is the noise. There are several options for dealing with that.

* **Headphones**

Probably the most attractive solution, there are a variety of headphones from which to choose. Noise suppression is an excellent option found in both over-ear and in-ear headphones.

Over-ear headphones serve another function: They advertise your availability. When most people see you with them on, they are somewhat reluctant to disturb you. The rub is the “somewhat” part of the equation.

In-ear headphones do a worse job of advertising availability. Many people don’t realize you have them on and come up and start talking.

Both types are useful if listening to music helps you concentrate. Studies have found that listening to nature sounds may be a better way to focus. Here is one site that offers sounds that you may find effective: <https://www.noisli.com/rain-background-noise-for-working>

* **Over-Ear Protection**

You may already have this if you wear something when mowing your lawn. Over-ear protection is a cheaper solution than headphones and if silence is your highest priority, may be the answer for you. The problem is the same as with over-ear headphones; they may not stop people from approaching you when you are busy.

* **Ear Plugs**

Possibly the cheapest solution if silence is your goal. Again, like in-ear headphones, many people will not realize you have them in, so their effectiveness as a deterrent to interruptions is low.

**Availability**

How do you signal availability to your colleagues? As discussed above, simply wearing ear protection is not a total solution. Over-ear headphones or ear protection are binary indicators: available or unavailable. What if you are interruptible? How does a team member know?

**Here’s the Fun Part!**

I recommend a visual status indicator, and you get to let your imagination run wild with this. You want something that visually indicates your availability.

There are at least three states to display: Go Away, Brief Questions, Let’s Talk. Brief Questions is the toughest. The problem with brief questions is that the answers are often long. This state is more accurately described as “available for five minutes.” It could indicate that you are about to transition to the “Go Away” state.

**No-Tech Solutions**

You need something to display your availability. A simple solution is a device like this mesh document holder: <http://amzn.to/2n0erb0>. Other easels are small white boards or chalk boards, but for ease of use and reliability, I think this device is best.

The advantage here is you define your states and can quickly change from one to another in a simple motion. Create your indicators on separate pieces of paper, and you can flip from one page to another as circumstances dictate. You get to be creative in what image and text you want to describe your availability. Have fun but try not to make the messages too obnoxious.

But wait, there’s room for more fun. You can find magnets or pins that you can attach that are funny but convey your message. That part is up to you.

Miniature flags, in appropriate colors, can be fun: <http://www.miniatureflagshop.com/index.html>

This site has race flags and historical ones that may be what floats your boat.

**Stop Light Solutions**

Little USB traffic lights are a possibility.

eBay has a variety of stop light solutions that may be of interest, from low to higher cost.

**How Do You Contact Your Colleague?**

If a colleague indicates availability, often just entering their field of vision is sufficient to gain access. Sometimes colleagues are situated in such a way that this is difficult. Here are some ways you may gain their attention without totally freaking them out.

**Flashlight**

Get a cheap flashlight and shine it somewhere (keyboard, screen, etc.) that attracts their attention.

**Projector Flashlights**

Here are a bunch of projector flashlights that could be fun: <http://amzn.to/2nllNDl>

**Laser Pointers**

You may already have one of these. Be careful with your colleague’s eyes if using these.

**When in Doubt, Ask**

Colleagues may have different contact preferences. Find out what they prefer and use a method that doesn’t freak them out.

**What About Hard to Train Colleagues?**

Colleagues can catch on slowly. When your best efforts fail, you can add supplementary visuals that may assist in your fight to protect your concentration. A favorite of mine is the bear trap. Print a few images of a bear trap and spread them on the ground around your location to further emphasize your unavailability: <http://bit.ly/2nwgPTn>

**Final Words**

Management has put you in an awkward situation. You can be bitter and outraged, or you can choose to handle it with grace and humor. The choice is yours to make. Until, or unless, the pendulum swings back in your favor, make the best of your situation.

You can rise above the bad hand you’ve been dealt. Try to have fun with it and remember always to play nice.

