

# The World is Flat

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To Matt and Kay and to Ron

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sure that there are call centers that are operated like sweatshops, 24/7 is not one of them.

Most of the young people I interviewed give all or part of their salary to their parents. In fact, many of them have starting salaries that are higher than their parents' retiring salaries. For entry-level jobs into the global economy, these are about as good as it gets.

I was wandering around the Microsoft section around six p.m. Bangalore time, when most of these young people start their workday to coincide with the dawn in America, when I asked a young Indian computer expert there a simple question: What was the record on the floor for the longest phone call to help some American who got lost in the maze of his or her own software?

Without missing a beat he answered, "Eleven hours."

"Eleven hours?" I exclaimed.

"Eleven hours," he said.

I have no way of checking whether this is true, but you do hear snippets of some oddly familiar conversations as you walk the floor at 24/7 and just listen over the shoulders of different call center operators doing their things. Here is a small sample of what we heard that night while filming for Discovery Times. It should be read, if you can imagine this, in the voice of someone with an Indian accent trying to imitate an American or a Brit. Also imagine that no matter how rude, unhappy, irritated, or ornery the voices are on the other end of the line, these young Indians are incessantly and unfailingly polite.

Woman call center operator: "Good afternoon, may I speak with . . .?" (Someone on the other end just slammed down the phone.)

Male call center operator: "Merchant services, this is Jerry, may I help you?" (The Indian call center operators adopt Western names of their own choosing. The idea, of course, is to make their American or European customers feel more comfortable. Most of the young Indians I talked to about this were not offended but took it as an opportunity to

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have some fun. While a few just opt for Susan or Bob, some really get creative.)

Woman operator in Bangalore speaking to an American: "My name is Ivy Timberwoods and I am calling you . . ."

Woman operator in Bangalore getting an American's identity number: "May I have the last four digits of your Social Security?"

Woman operator in Bangalore giving directions as though she were in Manhattan and looking out her window: "Yes, we have a branch on Seventy-fourth and Second Avenue, a branch at Fifty-fourth and Lexington . . ."

Male operator in Bangalore selling a credit card he could never afford himself: "This card comes to you with one of the lowest APR . . ."

Woman operator in Bangalore explaining to an American how she screwed up her checking account: "Check number six-six-five for eighty-one dollars and fifty-five cents. You will still be hit by the thirty-dollar charge. Am I clear?"

Woman operator in Bangalore after walking an American through a computer glitch: "Not



















































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































