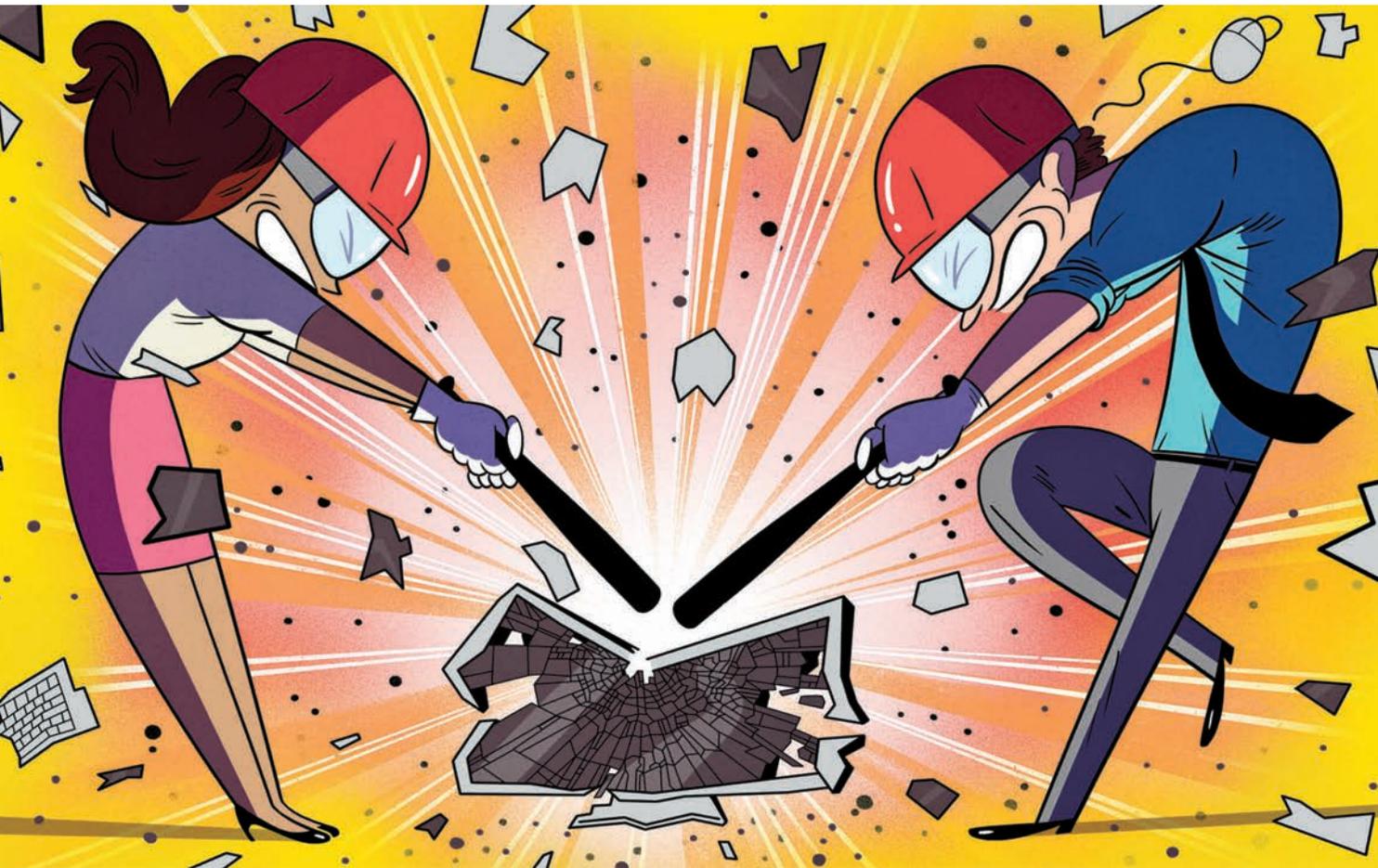


**“What if there was a place where people could go and release their anger in a safe way?”**



## Smite Club

A Dallas-based entrepreneur has created a venue where clients can kick, punch and bludgeon their frustrations away



**DONNA ALEXANDER** grew up on Chicago's South Side, and her neighborhood was a tough one. People she knew went to prison,

sometimes for serious offenses and sometimes for minor acts of vandalism.

At age 16, Alexander had an idea: “I thought, ‘What if there was a place where people could go and release their anger in a safe way; a place where they could go punch holes in a wall and not have to go to jail for doing that?’”

The teenager's follow-up notion was even more audacious: What if you could make a business out of such a place — a den of destruction where people would pay money to blow off steam? “I didn't act on that idea because I thought it was too good,” says Alexander, who is now 33. “I thought someone else would come out with the same concept before I could.”

A decade after the thought first occurred to her, the pay-as-you-break business model had yet to be realized. So she asked a few friends if they'd pay to smash stuff, like old printers and fax machines,

in her garage. Many said yes. Soon, her friends were bringing their friends to the garage. Then strangers showed up asking, “Is this the place where you can break stuff?”

“That's when I knew,” Alexander says, “that I really had a legit business.”

In 2011, Alexander expanded her enterprise, opening what she called Anger Room, an unfurnished, nondescript space inside an equally nondescript office park in suburban Dallas. In the years since, hundreds of people have come here to dress in layers of protective gear and,



**“YOU GET TO DO THINGS THAT ARE COUNTER TO WHAT WE’RE TAUGHT GROWING UP.”**

**MAD MEN (AND WOMEN)**

**Three Strategies for Dealing with Anger**

**Don’t Channel Your Inner Hulk**

“Therapeutically speaking, when it comes to dealing with frustration, which frequently leads to anger, what we try to do in therapy is encourage the patient to first acknowledge, experience and then channel or redirect his or her rage into some kind of constructive activity.” — Clinical and Forensic Psychologist Stephen A. Diamond, author of *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic*

**Don’t Wallow in Your Grudges**

“Obsessing and ruminating about injustice or resentment about something you cannot change is unhealthy.” — Suzanne Degges-White, author of *Toxic Friendships: Knowing the Rules and Dealing with the Friends Who Break Them*

**Don’t Ignore the Root Causes**

“Everyone is in a hurry to make the anger go away. Few have the courage to look for the source and remedy.” — Constance Dierickx, a clinical psychologist and founder of CD Consulting Group.

armed with bats, golf clubs or just their own hands, pummel everything from fax machines to big-screen TVs to refrigerators, as well as assorted other bits of junk. Clients range from high-level executives to small-business owners’ managers to soccer moms, all happy to pay anything from \$25 (for five minutes) to \$75 (25 minutes) to vent their frustrations.

The price goes up for clients who want a customized setup. One Anger Room client, a stockbroker, ordered a room set up to resemble his office so he could scream at an imaginary client on a phone that was connected to nothing, then bash the phone to bits. A woman who’d recently broken up with her sommelier boyfriend wanted to take a golf club to some wine glasses. Corporations have brought groups in for team-building (or, rather, team-destroying) exercises, in which workers level their fabricated workplaces.

“We’ve had some big guys come in here and get pretty tired out before the time was up,” Alexander says. “They’re breaking a lot of stuff, using a lot of muscles. It’s rare for someone to last a full 25 minutes.”

The concept has now gone global. Copycat companies, inspired by the media attention garnered by Anger Room, have set up their own lairs of workplace ruin. In Buenos Aires, Argentina, they call it Break Club. In Toronto, it’s Rage Room. In

**ABOVE:** A room is waiting for — and then destroyed by — a rage-filled customer. The room is refurbished for every new client who comes in wanting to take out their frustrations.

Belgrade, Serbia, it’s Soba Besa, which also translates to Anger Room (though there’s no affiliation between the Serbians and the Dallas business). Alexander, for her part, plans to branch out domestically in 2016, taking Anger Room to Chicago and New York.

Tim Cheung, the co-founder of Toronto’s Rage Room, says that most of his clients come not to rage but just “for the fun of it. You get to do things that are counter to what we’re taught growing up,” he says. “That is: to not break stuff and to not show negative emotions when you’re out in public.”

While pulverizing stuff is undoubtedly fun, Alexander insists there is also something therapeutic to the experience. “We do get people who come in angry,” she says. “We get people who are having relationship issues, or family issues, or issues in the workplace. Then they go in and break stuff and come out extremely exhausted physically. But they’re always smiling. I’ve never had a frown come out of here.”

**JOSEPH GUINTO** is a very quiet freelance writer whose only sign of anger is when his forehead turns bright purple. He writes often about business for *American Way*.

PHOTOS PETER ENDIG/AFP/GETTY IMAGES