

Addressing Annoying Employee Behaviours in The Workplace



With today's multi-diverse workplaces there are plenty of opportunities to gain benefits by embracing and learning from the individual differences of your co-workers. However, there are also many opportunities for co-workers' individual differences or 'quirks' to get on one another's nerves. While it is important to be tolerant of other people's individual differences, there can be some behaviours and/or habits that, while not rising to the level of a disciplinary offence, can impact the workplace negatively.

The Messy, Invasive, Way To Relaxed, Friendly and Annoying Co-worker

Many organizations are taking steps to create workspaces that are more flexible, liveable and casual. In some workplaces 'shared' desks and comfy chairs and sofas are replacing cubicles and office chairs and the kitchen has pinball machines and free, healthy food and drinks. While there are benefits to this workplace style it can also lead to blurring of the lines for some employees about what are acceptable workplace behaviours. Even if your workplace follows a more traditional workplace environment, some of your employees will simply fail to see the impact of their behaviours on their co-workers.

Some of the bad habits and annoying behaviours your employees may find distracting include employees who:

- Fail to clean up after themselves, especially in the kitchen or at a shared workspace
- Invite friends into the workspace to 'hang out'
- Take personal phone calls or have personal conversations in shared spaces
- Visit co-workers to chat too frequently or for too long
- Dress much too casually for the work place
- Works flexible hours and does not appreciate co-workers 'work times'
- Bring their issues and/or their illnesses into the workplace

- A “State of Workplace Distractions” survey by BambooHR found 42% of employees surveyed listen to music at least 30 minutes per day while at work. 34% of employees say listening to music while working makes them more productive. While music may uplift some employees it may have a different impact on others.

3 Types of Annoying Employees

The Messy Employee

Not only may messy employees fail to clean up after themselves in the kitchen they may leave a workspace unkempt, dress in clothes that are not clean or may not take proper care of their personal hygiene. However, messy can also be in the eyes of the beholder.

The Lack of Boundaries Employee

When asked, many workers, in particular your millennial employees indicate that if is appropriate and even desirable to have friendships and romantic relationships with their co-workers. In addition employees who are used to sharing their lives on Facebook may be quick to discuss or share personal information while in the workplace including not thinking twice about having a personal conversation on the phone within earshot of co-workers and clients.

The Thoughtless Employee

Regardless of age if people are not aware of the feelings or concerns of others they may exhibit thoughtless actions towards others. These thoughtless actions can take several forms. The employee who hordes information or office supplies, who comes to work sick and spreads illness, who does not complete projects on time or who does not respect the time of co-workers and much more.

Sometimes you only need to open someone’s eyes to the impact of their actions on others and other times you need to take concrete steps to address annoying workers.

Addressing Annoying Workplace Behaviours

Some of your employees will believe it is inappropriate to bring these minor issues to a supervisors or HR’s attention, and some will take it upon themselves to complain or even take actions to deal with the situation themselves. Before your employees resort to anonymous notes, dirty looks, sabotage or even look to change jobs take a look around at your organization and see what you find.

5 Steps to Begin The Process Of Addressing Annoying Workplace Behaviours

- **Assess and Ensure the Issue Is An Issue:** Sometimes the issue is a matter of perception. Generational, lifestyle and cultural differences can result in misunderstandings and require more education and awareness. What one employee perceives as a ‘messy’ co-worker or inappropriate clothing another employee may not. It is important to both gain perspective and give perspective when managing your employee relationships.
- **Identify Root Causes:** It important to consider if there are other factors in play. Observe and ask questions to determine if any annoying behaviours are a result of cultural, lifestyle, generational or other differences. A

messy employee who seems to have bad hygiene may be a person from a different culture whose different food preferences mean he has a different body odour or you may have an employee who does not have a stable home and lacks regular access to laundry or showers. Consider if the concerning behaviours represent a physical or mental illness or other stressors that you may need to address first.

- **Clarify Who Needs An 'Intervention'**: Do not send a message to the entire team that will single out one clearly identifiable person. Sometimes the entire organization or team needs to be included in a conversation, sometimes a limited number of employees and sometimes only one. At times the person who needs the intervention is not the person who is engaging in the behaviour but the person who is complaining.
- **Keep Things In Proportion**: Often sharing information on appropriate workplace behaviours, company culture and individual responsibility, even in a light hearted discussion or a brief, well written messaging is enough to address many common annoying behaviours. Sometimes people just need a reminder or to be shown the perspective of another person. When this is not enough you can sit down with an employee and have a non-judgemental conversation.
- **Manage your Workplace Culture**: A workplace culture that is open and inclusive with ongoing conversations can build into the process opportunities to address small issues before they become problems. Asking employees to share different practices, discuss their workplace style and preferences, share their frustrations, without judgement, can help catch problems early. If you want to create a casual, coffee shop workplace do so and ensure everyone knows what they means and looks like. The chances are it does not mean wearing pyjamas to work or inviting friends to hangout at the foosball table at the end of the day.

Your employees are people first, people who bring to the table their own issues and quirks. Pay attention and be proactive in discussing the value of open dialogue, thoughtfulness and tolerance.