

March Madness Fever @ The Workplace: Much Ado About Nothing?



March Madness is back again at a workplace near you and maybe even at your own. With 27 Canadians participating in this year's tournament, public interest on this side of the border will be at an all-time high. Canadians have been exposed to teams like the Jawhawks, Orange and the Wolverines on Canadian networks and in Canadian media thanks to Andrew Wiggins, Tyler Ennis and Nik Stauskas.

Last year this time, Darren Heitner wrote *March Madness Employee Productivity Problem is Overstated, Yet Influences Corporate Change* in which he reported that a survey of 500 IT professionals disclosed that one-third were preparing to block, ban or slow down streamed March Madness content and 29% of those surveyed believed that content policies would get stricter over the next couple of years. Only 4% reported that policies will become more relaxed with time.

Heitner went on to say panic over productivity during March Madness might be "grossly inappropriate", overstated and much ado about nothing:

In reality, the concern about a diminishing amount of productivity may be much to do about nothing. Challenger Gray & Christmas has made a name for itself through its annual study, but admits (at the end of its report), that 'many will simply get a little more work done before or after the tournament to make up for any slowdown when games are on during office hours. In the end, March Madness will have little if any impact on employers.'

In a recent article in the Washington Post, *Don't worry about the March Madness productivity loss too much*, Jena McGregor's bottom line is:

But here's the thing: Many people taking time to fill out their office bracket or surreptitiously catch the last two minutes of a game while at work are also answering e-mail while they sit on their couches at home. Worrying about how much productivity is lost a few weeks every spring ignores how much productivity is gained when employees do work while watching sports at home the rest of the year.

So let's cool it a little on the March Madness productivity panic. The intertwining of our professional and personal lives is not really news. And it's not going to change anytime soon.

Some workplaces latch onto the so-called “benefit” of allowing employees to participate in March Madness activities in the name of increased employee morale. Charlise Dewey suggested *March Madness shoots for employee morale* that companies should allow staff to wear their favorite teams’ apparel or decorate their workspaces (within reason) to get in the spirit. Hopefully your workplace is not filled with fans of Oregon.

The Bottom Line

Whether March Madness is an issue or not at your workplace is something only you know given your particular workplace and employees. Regardless of whether it’s really much ado about nothing or whether you intend to increase employee morale, March Madness is a good time to review your workplace rules so that everyone knows what’s expected including the following policies:

- Appropriate computer and internet use
- Attendance
- Workplace solicitation
- Gambling
- Harassment

While there may also be other relevant policies, these four seem to be the ones most vulnerable to March Madness breaches. Remember, as Charlise Dewey suggests and as we have said from time to time, there is ALWAYS room for fun in the workplace. Putting an unwieldy damper on an opportunity that could increase employee morale should always be well thought out beforehand. Look for, and explore, opportunities and solutions that are appropriate for your workplace before taking too restrictive an approach to March Madness.

Good luck with your brackets, live streaming and evading IT block attempts!