

Cubicles May Be Disastrous to Employee Productivity

Why do some employers think that having employees work in cubicles is a good idea? That's a question that many employees, managers, and HR professionals ponder as they wrestle with the distractions and interruptions of working in cubicles. Cubicles are often poorly designed workspaces that provide 4- to 5-foot walls with no office doors, and sometimes one or more officemates sharing a pod of computer workstations.

These work areas provide little privacy or quiet needed to perform tasks such as writing, analysis, or just plain thinking. However, Ken Zeigler, author of *Organizing for Success* (The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.) and productivity and organizational expert, explains that there are ways to make work time more productive, even if you are in the midst of a cubicle crisis.

Zeigler suggests that workplaces may need to create a cultural change in order to develop group consciousness and respect for one another, which will lead to greater productivity. Heightened employee productivity helps everyone engage in less overtime work, so they experience less stress and have more time to spend with family and friends.

Zeigler recommends getting started by garnering consensus regarding the possibility that there are more effective ways to work than the current processes and practices. HR professionals and senior management can first meet with managers to identify the types of productivity problems that exist and ask the managers, in turn, to meet with their department or division employees to do the same.

According to Zeigler, some of the problems that may be identified include:

- * People talking on speaker phones without regard for those around them
- * Loud office machines or intermittent noise that distracts employees from their work
- * "Drive by shootings"—other staff members (e.g., co-workers, supervisors, or even senior managers) who just drop in unannounced through the open doorway of a cubicle and start shooting [talking] without warning

Zeigler notes that any of these events can act as a facilitator for procrastination. Most people will gladly use distractions as an excuse for being late with a work assignment or tackling a new project with an impending deadline.

Once employees and managers agree that there are problems and identify them, solutions will be more likely to be acted upon. Here are a few solutions proposed by Zeigler to provide you with a starting point:

- * Designate a quiet hour, generally either at the start of the day or sometime in the morning, when no one interrupts anyone else in the work environment. It's surprising how much can be accomplished without interruptions.
- * Become comfortable in agreeing to assist a "drop-in" visitor at your cubicle by setting a specific appointment time later.
- * Use some sort of symbol to let people know you are working on something important and do not wish to be disturbed. He suggests adopting an organizationwide symbol—

a “Veggie” poster—for example, a vegetable on a sign that people can see as they approach your cubicle doorway.

The key to minimizing distractions for you and your employees is to develop a work culture sensitive to the negative impact that interruptions have on your productivity and to the increases in stress levels when you and other employees can’t accomplish work tasks in a reasonable amount of time.

For more information, visit www.kztraining.com.

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