



Ideas and Information for Human Resources Professionals

## EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

### The Killjoy of Office Culture

One of the latest things trending right now in business is the importance of office culture. When everyone in the office is working well together, productivity rises and efficiency increases. Naturally, the opposite is true when employees do not work well together and the corporate culture suffers. So, what are these barriers and what can you do to avoid them?



According to an article titled, "[8 ways to ruin an office culture](#)," in *Employee Benefit News*, the ways to kill corporate culture may seem intuitive, but that doesn't mean they still don't happen. Here's what organizations SHOULD do to improve their corporate culture.

Provide positive employee feedback. While it's easy to criticize, and pointing out employees' mistakes can often help them learn to not repeat them, it's just as important to recognize success and praise an employee for a job well done. An "attaboy/attagirl" can really boost someone's spirits and let them know their work is appreciated.

Give credit where credit is due. If an assistant had the bright idea, if a subordinate did all the work, or if a consultant discovered the solution to a problem, then he or she should be publicly acknowledged for it. It doesn't matter who supervised these people, to the victor go the spoils. If someone had the guts to speak up, then he or she should get the glory. Theft is wrong, and it's just as wrong when you take someone's idea, or hard work, and claim it as your own.

Similarly, listen to all ideas from all levels within the company. Every employee, regardless of their position on the corporate ladder, likes to feel that their contributions matter. From the C-suite, all the way down



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to the interns, a genuinely good idea is always worth investigating regardless of whether the person who submitted the idea has an Ivy League degree or not. Furthermore, sometimes it takes a different perspective – like one from an employee on a different management/subordinate level – to see the best way to resolve an issue.

Foster teamwork because many hands make light work. Or, as I like to say, competition breeds contempt. You compete to get your job, you compete externally against other companies, and you may even compete against your peers for an award. You shouldn't have to compete with your own co-workers. The winner of that competition may not necessarily be the best person and it will often have negative consequences in terms of trust.

Get rid of unproductive employees. One way to stifle innovation and hurt morale is by having an employee who doesn't do any work while everyone else is either picking up the slack, or covering for that person's duties. Sometimes it's necessary to prune the branches.

Let employees have their privacy – especially on social media. As long as an employee isn't conducting personal business on company time, there shouldn't be anything wrong with an employee updating their social media accounts when they're "off the clock." In addition, as long as employees aren't divulging company secrets, or providing other corporate commentary that runs afoul of local, state, or federal laws, then there's no reason to monitor what they post.

Promote a healthy work-life balance. Yes, employees have families, they get sick, or they just need time away from the workplace to de-stress. And while there will always be times when extra hours are needed to finish a project, it shouldn't be standard operating procedure at a company to insist that employees sacrifice their time.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Yes, Boss/HR/Your Honor, That's My Email

Ever hear of the acronym "CLEM"? That stands for career-limiting email and is a reminder to reconsider sending anything out in writing when a phone call may be the better option. If you have to think twice about hitting that send button, then you shouldn't hit it.



In an article titled, "[For God's Sake, Think Before You Email](#)" on the website of *Workforce*, it says that unlike diamonds, email messages aren't forever, but they are pretty darn close. Remember that whatever you say in an email – and I mean anything in electronic text – could come back to haunt you because there's always a trail. By electronic text, I mean email, mobile text, social media post, etc.

## EMPLOYER WEBINAR

### What Employers Need to Know About Taxing Benefits

**Tuesday, June 13, 2017**  
**2:00 p.m. ET / 11:00 a.m. PT**

When an employer offers employee benefits, there are requirements to tax certain benefits. While most employers may be familiar with using a cafeteria plan for employees to pay for health insurance on a pre-tax basis, there are taxation rules that apply to voluntary plans, life insurance coverage exceeding a certain amount, long-term disability or short-term disability, fringe benefits, and wellness rewards.

This webinar will:

- Review basic employment tax laws that apply to health and welfare benefits
- Describe general taxation rules that apply to fringe benefits
- Describe the taxation rules that apply to voluntary plans, including fixed indemnity plans
- Discuss the taxation of employer-provided group term life insurance coverage over \$50,000
- Discuss the pros and cons of paying premiums pre-tax or post-tax for long-term or short-term disability
- Discuss the taxation of wellness program rewards
- Discuss the potential consequences of evading employment taxes
- Describe best practices when offering voluntary plans, fringe benefits, and wellness rewards

This 60-minute intermediate level webinar will help employers

Everything from tasteless humor, opinions about a boss, employee, or the company, and definitely an angry reply or threat of violence should be an instant no-no. You can't put the genie back in the bottle once it's out and don't assume that an email to a close friend or confidant is private because even if that person doesn't forward it, there's always a record somewhere of that email. Furthermore, you can't always recall, or "unsend" an email.

You'd hate to have to explain to your boss, HR representative, or even a judge and jury why you sent that email or posted that message. You don't just run the risk of losing your reputation, but also your job, and potentially being sued, or even going to jail. These are not pleasant prospects over a seemingly innocent email. Which is why you must review your electronic messages with a discerning eye.

Emails and social media posts have become commonplace and the norm for communications. Yet, despite the ease in which you can send them, you must be aware that the freedom of speech doesn't mean freedom from consequences.

## WELLNESS

### Dear Brain, Please Let Me Sleep

There are alarms to help people wake up, but there isn't anything similar to help people fall asleep. It seems that no matter how much you zone out just before going to bed, the minute your head hits the pillow your brain kicks into overdrive. Thoughts of every decision made that day, things that need to be done tomorrow, or that stupid song just heard continue to flood the brain with activity.



Often, when this happens to me, I'm reminded of the time Homer Simpson said, "Shut up, brain, or I'll stab you with a Q-Tip!" because I feel like the only way I'll stop thinking about something is to kill my brain. Fortunately, there are other ways of dealing with this problem. An article on *CNN's* website titled, "[Busy brain not letting you sleep? 8 experts offer tips](#)," reveals a few clear tips to try and lull your brain to sleep.

A few that have worked for me are to think about a story I've read or heard, or to make one up. It may seem counterintuitive to think about something so that you'll stop thinking, but the story tends to unravel as I slowly drift off to sleep. Another favorite is to get out of bed and force myself to stay awake. While the chore of getting out of bed, especially on a cold night, may seem daunting, there's nothing quite like tricking your brain with a little reverse psychology. If that doesn't work, write down what's bothering you, take a few deep breaths, or even do some mild exercise. If all else fails, there's always warm milk or an over-the-

understand their obligations when they offer benefits that are subject to income tax withholding and employment taxes.

#### Registration

[Register here for the webinar](#). The presentation will be posted on the [UBA website](#) the day before the webinar.

#### About the Presenter

[Lorie Maring](#) is Of Counsel in the Atlanta, Georgia, office of Fisher Phillips. She focuses her practice on helping employers navigate Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) and other state and federal laws impacting the design, implementation and ongoing compliance of their employee benefit plans and programs. Ms. Maring regularly advises clients on the Affordable Care Act, health and welfare benefits, qualified plans, executive compensation, Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangements (MEWAs) and multiemployer plan issues.

#### Certification

This webinar event has been submitted to the [Human Resource Certification Institute](#) and the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) to qualify for one recertification credit hour.

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counter sleep aid, but really this should be used as a last resort and not your first “go to” item.

Ideally, your bedroom will be conducive to sleep anyway. Light and noise should be kept to an absolute minimum and calming, muted colors promote a more restful ambience. Also, make sure that the bedroom is your ideal temperature because it’s more difficult to sleep if you’re too hot or cold.

Don’t let your brain win the battle of sleep! Fight it on your own terms and equip yourself with as many tools as possible to win. Your brain will thank you in the morning by feeling refreshed.

## IN BRIEF

### Don't Put Up with the Bull of Bullying

There's no place for bullying and that's especially true in the workplace, yet many employees bully their co-workers. So, how does this happen? It used to be that bullying was confined to the schoolyard, but now it's spread to cyberbullying and workplace bullying. Now, if there's a culture of bullying at an organization, often it's repeated as people climb the corporate ladder even though they were bullied themselves when they held lower positions.



An article on the website *Human Resource Executive Online* titled, “[How to Bully-proof the Workplace](#),” says that “80 percent of bullying is done by people who have a position of power over other people.” Let that number sink in. That means four out of five people in positions of power will bully their subordinates.

One possible reason for the high number is that bullying may be difficult to identify and the person doing the bullying may not even realize it. Either the bully, or the victim, could view the action as teasing, or workplace banter. However, when one person is continually picked on, then that person is being bullied. Likewise, if a manager picks on all of his or her subordinates, then that person is a bully.

It's important for organizations to have policies in place to thwart bullying and not just for the toll it takes on employees. It also begins to affect productivity. Those being bullied often feel like their work doesn't matter and their abilities are insufficient. Worse is that bullies tend to resent talented people as they're perceived as a threat. So, bullies tend to manipulate opinions about that employee in order to keep them from being promoted.

Eventually, talented employees decide to work elsewhere, leaving the employer spending time and money to find a replacement. But the bully doesn't care. It just means they get to apply their old tricks on someone who isn't used to them.

At some point, someone will fight back. Not physically, of course, but through documentation. An employee who is being bullied should immediately document any and all occurrences of workplace bullying and then present those documents to someone in HR. Most likely, this will result in identification of the bullying, stoppage of it, counseling for both the bully and the victim, and, if not already enacted, policies to prevent it from happening again.

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