



Ideas and Information for Human Resources Professionals

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Moments of Clarity: Being Transparent

Aristotle was right when he said, "Nature abhors a vacuum." Companies and politicians like to say that they're transparent, when in fact, they're often the opposite. And, as in nature, in the absence of facts, people will often fill their minds with what is perceived.

If you're working at a company, rather than being one of its customers, and you've been told by senior management that they're transparent about what goes on, then make sure you take a close look at what they're willing to share.

In article titled "[The Price of Secrecy](#)" in *Human Resource Executive Online*, employers are quick to cite company policy, yet are reticent to share if and how those policies are being enforced. This has a huge impact on employee trust and can quickly have the opposite effect on employees following said policy.

Basically, employees want to know that if they follow the rules, others will also follow them, or there will be consequences for not doing so. Companies can hide behind the mantra of "it's being handled," or "it's an employee issue," but what the employer may forget is that gossip will sometimes fill in the unknown. Compounding matters is that employees want to know that if a colleague violates company policy, the appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.

Employers seldom reveal any disciplinary process or policy enforcement simply because it may violate privacy, or it might embarrass either the employee or employer. For example, an employee has been stealing company property for months. Eventually, the employee is caught, but it may reflect poorly on the employer that it took a long time to realize this was happening, or that safeguards were not in place to prevent the theft in the first place. So, while the employer wants to inform its employees about this violation and how it



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was handled, they also don't want to expose vulnerabilities that could undermine the employee's trust in the company.

Another benefit of policy transparency is that it keeps the enforcers honest. That is, if a company employee is responsible for doling out punishment, then that person is more likely to do it fairly and impartially if they know everyone is watching.

TECHNOLOGY

Shhhhhh!

There are places where you expect things to be noisy, such as a rock concert, and places where you expect it to be quiet, like an office. And while nobody likes being "shushed," there are few things more annoying than trying to work when someone else is talking in the background.

The '80s music group 'Til Tuesday said it best: "Hush hush, keep it down now, voices carry." An article in *Human Resource Executive Online* titled, "[A Not-So-Quiet Little Problem: Noise!](#)," points out the current problem of modern, open offices—NOISE. When offices had doors, or at least cubicles, along with sound-absorbing carpeting and ceiling tiles, background noise wasn't such a problem. Now, however, offices are wide open with nothing to block sound waves. Combine that with hardwood, or concrete floors, lots of glass and tall, echoing ceilings, and you've got the perfect storm for noise pollution.

Forward-thinking, or technology companies especially like open offices, and you can imagine what it sounds like with people talking on the phone, banging away at their keyboards, and conversing with each other. According to the article, nobody considers the acoustics of a room. They look at how beautiful, modern, and spacious it is. Then, once the room is filled with busy employees, the shock of its lack of tranquility sets in.

Employees become distracted by the noise, which in turn leads to reduced productivity. You can tell a lot about the noise level of an office by how many employees are wearing headphones. For workers to feel "healthy" at work, noise is a major factor, along with air quality and temperature.

There are many ways to fix a noisy office if you follow the A, B, Cs—absorb, block, cover. Materials can be placed to absorb noise, walls or furniture can be positioned to block noise, and there are electronic devices that use counter-measures to cover noise. The industry, office layout, and other factors will influence the choice of the best solution to mitigate noise. One thing is certain: when choosing a new office, or remodeling an existing one, it's best to factor in a room's acoustics along with its aesthetics.

WELLNESS

EMPLOYER WEBINAR

What Employers Need to Know about Wellness Program Administration

Tuesday, October 10, 2017
2:00 p.m. ET / 11:00 a.m. PT

This webinar will cover what to consider when sponsoring a wellness program.

In this webinar, we will:

- Describe wellness programs
- Briefly describe the laws and regulations that govern wellness programs
- Discuss how employers should approach different levels of wellness program involvement, such as engaging with the carrier's wellness program, offering a health risk assessment, and administering payroll deductions
- Address how an employer can be compliant with wellness program regulations when an employer uses a carrier-provided wellness program
- Discuss the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's regulations regarding spousal consent when the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act

Get Moving... To Live!

The phrase: "If I'm lying, I'm dying" should be changed to: "If I'm sitting, I'm dying" even though it doesn't rhyme. If you haven't heard by now, sitting for long periods of time increases the chance that you'll die early, regardless of your race, gender, age, body mass index (BMI), or even if you exercise. The longer you sit, the higher your risk of dying sooner rather than later.

Every morning, people get ready for work and then sit in their cars (or public transportation), then sit when they get to work, then sit again in their cars, then sit in front of the TV when they get home. It's time everyone breaks that cycle and starts moving around more during the day and not just when they're at the gym, assuming they even go.

Fortunately, in an article on CNN's website titled, "[Yes, sitting too long can kill you, even if you exercise](#)," reveals that taking "movement breaks" every 30 minutes basically cancels out this health problem. But it's not as simple as just standing, there are two factors impacting this—frequency and duration. How often you sit during the day, and how long you sit each time, have an effect. The article references the American Heart Association's message of "Sit less, move more," but admonishes them for not telling people how they should move around, or for how long.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has specific guidelines and recommendations for exercising, but none for sitting. For example, if you sit for 30 minutes, you should probably walk around for at least five minutes before sitting down again. And don't assume that a "standing desk" is healthier than a traditional desk where you sit down. There isn't enough evidence to say that a standing desk is better. It's all about actual movement, which is why simply standing up isn't enough.

Age is another factor that would seem to make a difference, but actually doesn't. The article discusses age, yet the same principles apply. Older adults who sat more often and for long durations were far more likely to die earlier than those who sat less.

The message is clear. Regardless of who you are, what you do for a living, or how "fit" you may be, if you're not moving around during the day and sitting for fewer than 30 minutes, you'd better get used to the fact that you may not be around as long as you expect, so get moving!

IN BRIEF

Stop Handing Out Your SSN Like Candy

Social Security numbers (or SSNs) used to be tied just to your Social Security benefits. Now, that number is tied to just about everything used to identify you. In this age of identity theft, your Social Security number is one of the most valuable, if not THE most valuable, identifiers you have. Yet, people frequently hand this number out to anyone requesting it without even a second thought as to how it will be

of 2008 (GINA) applies to a wellness program

- Discuss the importance of having a bona fide wellness program if an employer implements a tobacco surcharge
- Provide sample language for a tobacco surcharge affidavit
- Discuss payroll deduction administration, such as applying a discount to an employee's premium, changing premium amounts, and giving money back to employees based on their participation in the wellness program

This 60-minute intermediate level webinar will help employers understand how to administer wellness programs.

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. She regularly advises clients on the Affordable Care Act, health and welfare benefits, qualified plans, executive compensation, Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangements

protected. Is whatever product or service you want at the time worth risking your identity?

An even more egregious habit I've seen is people carrying their Social Security card, and their children's cards, in their purse or wallet. If you're doing this, please stop right now and put those cards in a safe place at home!

An article titled, "[5 times you don't need to give out your Social Security number](#)" in *Yahoo Finance* said that there were more than 15 million cases of identity theft in 2016. In order to limit your risk, consider whether someone requesting your SSN truly needs it. The five places we think should have our SSN really don't need it. Those are prospective employers, doctors, schools and colleges, retailers, and when booking travel.

Each of the reasons you don't necessarily have to provide your SSN, is detailed in the article. What's important to consider for anyone requesting your SSN is why they need it, how they will use it, whether they accept another form of identification, and what will happen if you don't provide it. I consider it even more important to ask how they plan on safeguarding your SSN and what will they do for you should there be a data breach and your SSN is stolen.

Obviously, there are many other places that offer products and services where you must supply your SSN. Typically, those involve government agencies or financial institutions such as credit card companies, applying for a loan, filing your taxes, state and federal benefits, etc.

The important thing to remember is that just because someone asks you for your Social Security number doesn't necessarily mean that you have to provide it. Before handing it out, take your time and think about whether they truly need it, or just want it. Then, decide if you're willing to risk giving it to them so that you can avoid being another statistic of identity theft.

(MEWAs) and multiemployer plan issues. Lorie also represents employers in managing Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Department of Labor (DOL) audits, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance and fiduciary obligations. She serves clients in the public and private sector, including non-profit organizations and trade associations.

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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