

Workplace Distractions Hurt Your Employees and Business

Workplace distractions are ever-present, posing risks of lost productivity and even injuries.

Employees who are interrupted while working with machinery or dangerous materials may see their concentration lapse, resulting in an injury, or worse. And productivity can be hit when office workers are regularly distracted, interrupting their workflow.

Following an interruption, it may take a couple of minutes or longer for your employees to return their concentration to work. These short, but regular interruptions and recovery periods add up to large amounts of lost productive time.

There are a multitude of workplace distractions that can affect employee safety and productivity that employers need to be aware of.

Smartphones — Smartphones and tablet computers are a major distraction, especially in office environments. Text messages, alerts, and the urge to check Facebook and news — not to mention game apps like Candy Crush and Words With Friends — can pull employees' attention away from the task at hand.

E-mail — Misuse of e-mail can be another productivity sapper. This includes strings of e-mails sent to arrange a time for a meeting or conference call when scheduling software could accomplish the same thing with one or two messages.

It also includes clicking the "reply all" button, sending a thank-you intended for one person to a group of ten. Again, these small interruptions compound over time.

Old-fashioned interruptions — Examples include:

- A co-worker who stops by to ask a quick question and sticks around to chat for a few minutes.
- Meetings that are held because they've always been held, regardless of whether they accomplish anything.
- The colleague who sits three cubicles away and is incapable of having a quiet conversation.

Personal issues — In some cases, a worker's distraction may come from themselves. Their job may be boring, causing their mind to wander while they use a tool or pour a hot drink. They may have problems at home: financial difficulties, family members who are ill, elderly parents, or a child going through a rough time.

Work pressures — This includes perceived pressure to finish a job quickly. Manufacturing or warehouse employees may feel pushed to fill an order in a hurry, or construction workers may face short deadlines.

Complacency — Sometimes, employees have done a job for too long and have grown complacent in their knowledge. This can lead to their missing crucial steps in the process, resulting in faulty work, and worse.

The fallout

To a certain extent, some distractions are unavoidable, but they can be reduced.

One thing you can do is to encourage frequent breaks. There is a limit to how long someone can focus intently on a task. Occasional stretch or walk breaks can help workers clear their minds, relax a little, and take care of personal phone calls and messages.

If necessary, your managers can block employees from accessing certain websites or limit the use of smartphones to break times. They can also model and encourage the proper use of e-mail.

Meetings can be scheduled only when a group discussion is necessary to accomplish work results. To keep meetings on track, they should be time-limited and have stated agendas.

If it doesn't interfere with customer service, employees may wear earbuds or headphones to muffle loud conversations. Employees subject to frequent interruptions from gossipy co-workers may be permitted to hang up "do not disturb" signs when necessary.

It is possible to reduce distractions without burdening the workplace with excessive rules. Employers who do so will raise morale, prevent injuries, improve quality, and boost profits.

*This material was created by Insurance Newsletters and authorized for use by Brown & Stromecki Agency

###