

Creating a healthy workplace

One of the most important indications of a psychologically healthy environment is laughter. Colleagues who laugh together tend to work well together. Laughter is a sign of comfort within the work place and a bit of fun should be encouraged. Open-door policies that encourage free sharing of ideas are an important element in creating a healthy and positive culture in your business. Employees who are listened to feel valued, and also feel that they can make a tangible difference to the business, which enhances job satisfaction. We all know how important the work environment is in terms of productivity, creativity and job satisfaction. All businesses strive, or should strive to achieve a healthy work environment for their employees. But what constitutes a healthy work environment? Literal health, as in good ventilation, natural lighting and lots of plants? Psychological health, as in job security and respect for employee values? Or is it supplying the means to get healthy, such as an onsite gym and a cafeteria serving healthy food?



Air Flow

Optimize air flow in your office by removing as many obstacles as possible. That means that partitions or cubicles should be raised slightly off the floor and occasionally rearranged to shift air flow. Keep ventilation systems in good working order, have them serviced regularly and keep the filters clean.

Go Green

Go green, literally, and invest in a few plants in and around the office. Placing a plant near your computer will help to absorb some of its emissions. It will also soothe your eyes when you look away from your screen (which you should do every 20 minutes), as well as brighten up the office a bit.

Fitness Facilities

A growing trend is for businesses to provide facilities for employees to improve and maintain their physical health. Often this means that they install a gym on the premises for employees to work out before or after work, or even during lunch. An alternative for businesses that are too small to install an entire gym is to subsidize gym membership for staff. Another option is to have meetings on the move. Instead of sitting around a table in a stale room to discuss ideas, take the meeting for a walk in the (comparatively) fresh outdoors or perhaps try a standing meeting with a cup of coffee.

Google ChromeBook

What is it?

A Chromebook is a laptop running Google Chrome OS as its operating system. The devices are designed to be used primarily while connected to the internet, with most applications and data residing in the cloud. They are not designed to be full featured laptops like Windows or Apple machines.

Are they any good for business users?

Chromebooks are an interesting option for businesses because they are cheaper to buy and service than typical laptops running Windows. In addition, they are set up to use cloud computing which works well for businesses wanting staff to keep their files on a server rather than on their laptop. Chromebooks also offer the prospect of radically reducing the amount of time IT staff spend 'keeping the lights on' for devices, and they offer high uptime, low service costs, and scalable deployment of new web-based applications and content. There are other advantages - quick start-up times (they use flash-based storage rather than traditional hard disks), excellent battery life and optional 3G/4G connectivity for go-anywhere mobile working. Crucially, Chromebooks require (almost) zero maintenance. There are no lengthy patch / update cycles, upgrades, antivirus or anti-malware installs.

They are very secure

These days, security is paramount. On a Chromebook, files are safely stored in the cloud and the file system on a Chromebook is locked down with encryption.

There are some disadvantages

Working with a Chromebook requires a mindset shift away from localised storage and applications. If your staff are not prepared to embrace corporate Gmail and Google Apps, then one of the biggest arguments against using a Chromebook is its reliance on an internet connection to do anything useful. In addition, they are not as powerful as Windows or Apple machines for intensive tasks like graphic design.

Which one should you buy?

Most of the major laptop manufacturers such as Acer, Toshiba, Dell, Asus, Lenovo and Samsung make Chromebooks. You can buy them with Core i5 or even Core i7 processors and plenty of storage too. You can have a screen size from 10.1 inches right up to 15 inches and can even have a touch screen. Prices start from about £160 for a basic model and go right up to about £1,000 for a top of the range Chromebook such as the Google Chromebook Pixel. For businesses that want to equip a few team members with cost-effective laptops which encourage staff to save files to a central server, the Chromebook is a viable option. For businesses, a model priced at around £250 should have a good enough specification to do the job. However, you need to ask is the Chromebook right for your firm; do you need more traditional based machines?

Email Etiquette

These days, everyone is under pressure. We respond to email from computers, tablets and Smartphone's. We are all working harder and sometimes we can fall into bad habits when it comes to our email etiquette. Here are a few tips to help counter this:

Open emails quickly and respond

It is very frustrating to send emails and not get a single response. The sender will begin to wonder if the emails even went through or whether they have been delayed. You can respond to communicate that you have received the message and you will read it in greater detail at a later time. It gives the sender peace of mind.

Communicate clearly

Long-winded emails never get the attention of the reader. Get to the point quicker to ensure people read and understand your message. However, avoid slang and shorthand in your email, as that will come across as unprofessional. Your subject should match what you have typed in the message body and attachment. Double check for any typos before you send and don't trust spell checker as it doesn't pick up every mistake.

Address people properly

One of the dangers of communicating via email is that it is quite casual. However if you are addressing someone in a formal email, do so properly. For example, use "Dear Mr Smith" if you are responding to a customer complaint email.

Be careful with forwarding messages

Assess the benefit or usefulness and validity of an email before forwarding to others. Always take the time to type a personal comment to accompany the forwarded email so that the person receiving knows you have read it and what you want them to do.

Manage attachments

If you are sending an attachment with an email message, try to keep the number of attachments to a minimum. If you send 10 attachments there is always the danger that one of them could be missed. In addition, people tend to use smart phones a lot for email. They may not wait to download large attachments if they are rushing around. As such, make sure that your attachments have fairly small file sizes.



Formatting

Email formatting and accuracy are important, especially in a business context. Email has essentially replaced the handwritten letter in modern society. As such, format your text so that it looks tidy. With email, it is attention to detail that makes all the difference when it comes to conveying a professional image.

How to write a perfect press release

A well-written press release should be short, to the point and contain all the essential information in the first paragraph. Most importantly, it should be a story that be published without too many changes as, all the facts are there and the content is well structured. Here are a few tips to help you to put together a good press release:

Put in the most newsworthy information

Who, what, when, where should be at the top, with the least important information at the bottom - this is called the inverted pyramid model and it is how journalists are trained to write.

Facts and photos

Boost your story with relevant data and good photos (ideally taken by a professional photographer, not taken on a Smartphone). Include one photo and say "more available" rather than clogging up journalists' inboxes with big files.

Call a spade a spade

A journalists' job is to untangle professional jargon before it reaches the press. You can make their life a bit easier by avoiding technical terms and writing in plain English.

Quotes

Quotes are important but they need to add something to the story without repeating information contained elsewhere. Try to avoid being "thrilled" "honoured" or "excited".

Don't attach your story, put it in the body of the email

Don't send one line emails saying "See Attachment". It may not be opened. Always paste the press release directly into an email so it can be easily read on a Smartphone or tablet.

Give it a good headline

Your headline should tell the story even if a person doesn't actually read the rest of your article. If you want ideas on how to write a good headline, just pick up a newspaper and have a read. Which headlines catch your eye and why? Now try to write a similar headline for your press release.