

Workplace Distractions Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Some workplace distractions and interruptions are unavoidable but others – if not properly controlled or regulated – could lead to injuries, lost productivity, and a decrease in employee morale.

Work interruptions are a distraction that can result in work errors or accidents. Before addressing or responding to another person, workers should shut down or disengage any work tool, equipment, or processes. Job training should include instructions not to interrupt others during a critical job phase or process. Instruction manuals and procedural guidebooks should be kept on-site to answer frequently asked questions and eliminate the need to distract other workers.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

THERE ARE 2 TYPES OF DISTRACTIONS:

Internal distractions – these are the distractions that come from your own mind, and they include:

- Fatigue
- Illness
- Personal problems and worries
- Daydreaming about what you would rather be doing

External distractions – these are the distractions that come from outside of your mind, and they include:

- Some types of music
- Phone calls
- Emails
- Text messages and notifications

- Social Media news feeds and notifications
- Anything that can visually distract your attention
- Background noise of any kind

CAUSES OF WORKPLACE DISTRACTIONS

- General lack of ability to pay attention to your desired area of focus – people suffering from ADHD, chronic fatigue syndrome, or insomnia may find it more difficult to concentrate because of their chronic conditions. Lifestyle changes that cause anxiety, excessive stress, or hunger may also affect your general ability to pay sufficient attention to your work.
- General lack of interest in your desired area of focus – boring, menial tasks may trigger such an effect, but also any type of task you are not naturally inclined to or interested in.
- The seemingly irresistible call of the distractions around you – trying to work when there is something else, you'd rather do or while everyone else is having fun in one way or another can be challenging.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

WORKPLACE DISTRACTIONS REDUCE EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

- Open offices are all the rage these days. Low-walled cubes, open meeting areas, bench-style seating – even “hoteling” instead of assigning desks – are all supposed to contribute to teamwork and collaboration in the office. While there's no doubt being able to stand up and talk to a coworker over a wall leads to more discussions, it can also lead to more distractions at work.
- Studies have demonstrated that not only are people distracted at work, but these distractions negatively impact worker productivity.
- A decrease in productivity, in turn, can negatively impact worker health, with many employees suffering in silence.

1. Employees feel less productive.

When something distracts an employee, their attention is directed elsewhere; at some point, they have to shift their attention back to the task at hand. They may ultimately feel less productive because they haven't been able to complete a task promptly.

1. Relationships with co-workers can deteriorate.

Things are further complicated if an employee's unfinished work becomes a bottleneck, preventing co-workers from completing their tasks and leaving them feeling frustrated and resentful. If one team member is perceived as a "slacker," their reputation can take a hit, and co-worker relationships can suffer.

1. Unresolved distractions impact company culture.

Employees and managers may not be talking about their distractions during the workday, but they should. Leaving distractions at work unresolved can cause tension and resentment to build throughout the company. An employee's job satisfaction can plummet, relationships with co-workers can be impacted, and the overall company culture can be affected.

In some situations, remote workers are more productive than those in an office. If an employee is a suitable candidate for remote work and it works for your business, consider implementing some remote work options.

RECOGNIZE DISTRACTED BEHAVIOR AND TAKE ACTION

Policies and procedures can be implemented to solve the problem. These include:

- Blocking certain websites
- Banning personal calls and cell phone use
- Setting lunch and break times
- Monitoring email and internet use
- Limiting meetings
- Adopting an open-space layout instead of cubicles
- Allowing employees to telecommute on certain days of the workweek

TAKEAWAY TIPS TO PREVENT DISTRACTIONS FOR EMPLOYEES

- **Schedule breaks.** Encourage employees to take breaks and make sure they set a definite ending time.
- **Work near productive people.** Seeing how co-workers stay productive can be an inspiration to others.
- **Be publicly accountable.** Try having them post their goals for the day on social media, making themselves publicly accountable.
- **Take a walk.** If workers are having trouble concentrating, have them step outside for a 10- or 20-minute walk.

FINAL WORD

Workplace distractions and interruptions are common, but training can help you remember to keep your mind on the task at hand. Speak up about repeated and/or unsafe distractions and take responsibility for not interrupting or distracting others.