

9 IDIOTIC RULES

THAT DRIVE EVERYONE INSANE

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COMPANIES need to have rules—that's a given—but they don't have to be short-sighted and lazy attempts at creating order.

I understand the temptation. As my company has grown, so has our difficulty maintaining standards. There have been many instances where someone crossed a line, and we were tempted to respond with a new rule that applied to everyone.

But that's where most companies blow it.

In just about every instance, upon closer inspection, we realised that establishing a new rule would be a passive and morale-killing way to address the problem. The vast majority of the time, the problem needs to be handled one-on-one by the employee's manager.

When companies create ridiculous and demoralising rules to halt the outlandish behaviour of a few individuals, it's a management problem. There's no sense in alienating your entire workforce because you don't know how to manage performance. It makes a bad situation *that* much worse.

Here are nine of the worst rules that companies create when they fall into this trap:



3 DRACONIAN E-MAIL POLICIES

This is a newer one that's already moving down a slippery slope. Some companies are getting so restrictive with e-mail use that employees must select from a list of pre-approved topics before the e-mail software will allow them to send a message.

Again, it's about trust. If you don't trust your people to use e-mail properly, why did you hire them in the first place? In trying to rein in the bad guys, you make everyone miserable every time they send an e-mail. And guess what? The bad guys are the ones who will find ways to get around any system you put in place.



4 LIMITING BATHROOM BREAKS

If you're going to limit people's trips to the bathroom, you might as well come out and tell them that you wish they were a bunch of robots. When you limit basic personal freedom by counting people's trips to the bathroom, they start counting their days at the company. The day you have to bring in a doctor's note to prove that you warrant additional trips to the bathroom is the day you need to find another job.



5 STEALING EMPLOYEES' FREQUENT FLYER MILES

If there's one thing that road-weary travelling employees earn, it's their frequent flyer miles. When employers don't let people keep their miles for personal use, it's a greedy move that fuels resentment with every flight. Work travel is a major sacrifice of time, energy, and sanity. Taking employees' miles sends the message that you don't appreciate their sacrifice and that you'll hold on to every last dollar at their expense.



6 PATHETIC ATTEMPTS AT POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Maintaining high standards for how people treat each other is a wonderful thing as we live in a world that's rife with animosity and discrimination. Still employers have to know where to draw the line. Going on a witch-hunt because someone says "Bless you" to another employee that sneezed (real example) creates an environment of paranoia and stifled self-expression, without improving how people treat each other.



7 BELL CURVES AND FORCED RANKINGS OF PERFORMANCE

Some individual talents follow a natural bell-shaped curve, but job performance does not. When you force employees to fit into a predetermined ranking system, you do three things: 1) incorrectly evaluate people's performance, 2) make everyone feel like a number, and 3) create insecurity and dissatisfaction when performing employees fear that they'll be fired due to the forced system. This is yet another example of a lazy policy that avoids the hard and necessary work of evaluating each individual objectively, based on his or her merits.



8 BANNING MOBILE PHONES

If I ban mobile phones in the office, no one will waste time texting and talking to family and friends, right? Yeah, right. Organisations need to do the difficult work of hiring people who are trustworthy and who won't take advantage of things. They also need to train managers to deal effectively with employees who underperform and/or violate expectations (such as spending too much time on their phones). This is also hard work, but it's worth it. The easy, knee-jerk alternative (banning phones) demoralises good employees who need to check their phones periodically due to pressing family or health issues or as an appropriate break from work.



9 SHUTTING DOWN SELF-EXPRESSION (PERSONAL ITEMS AND DRESS CODE)

Many organisations control what people can have at their desks. A life-size poster of a shirtless Fabio? I get it; that's a problem. But employers dictate how many photographs people can display, whether or not they can use a water bottle, and how many items they're allowed to place on their desks. Once again, it's the ol' "If I could just hire robots I wouldn't have this problem" approach.

Same goes for dress codes. They work well in private high schools, but they're unnecessary at work. Hire professionals and they'll dress professionally. When someone crosses the line, their manager needs to have the skill to address the issue directly. Otherwise, you're making everyone wish they worked somewhere else because management is too inept to handle touchy subjects effectively.

1 RESTRICTING INTERNET USE

There are certain sites that no one should be visiting at work, and I'm not talking about Facebook. But once you block pornography and the other obvious stuff, it's a difficult and arbitrary process deciding where to draw the line.

Most companies draw it in the wrong place.

People should be able to kill time on the Internet during breaks. When companies unnecessarily restrict people's Internet activity, it does more than demoralise those that can't check Facebook; it limits people's ability to do their jobs. Many companies restrict Internet activity so heavily that it makes it difficult for people to do online research. The most obvious example? Checking the Facebook profile of someone you just interviewed.

2 RIDICULOUS REQUIREMENTS FOR ATTENDANCE, LEAVE, AND TIME OFF

People are salaried for the work they do, not the specific hours they sit at their desks. When you ding salaried employees for showing up five minutes late even though they routinely stay late and put in time on the weekend, you send the message that policies take precedence over performance. It reeks of distrust, and you should never put someone on salary that you don't trust.

When companies are unnecessarily strict in requiring documentation for bereavement and medical leave, it leaves a sour taste in the mouths of employees who deserve better. After all, if you have employees who will fake a death to miss a day's work, what does that say about your company?

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

If companies can rethink their policies and remove or alter those that are unnecessary or demoralising, we'll all have a more enjoyable and productive time at work.

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