

How to tackle the World Cup (and other sports) in the workplace?

Productivity doesn't have to be shown the red card if employees watch major sporting events in the workplace.

It's going to be difficult to avoid sport throughout the next few months but whether you're a football fan or not, watching sport at work is something we can all benefit from, particularly with a busy sporting summer ahead.

A study by The Institute of Leadership & Management revealed that 77 per cent of workers said watching sporting events in the office is good for morale and three-quarters of managers would allow staff to watch or listen to sporting events in the office. Happier staff ultimately lead to a more positive and motivated working environment, which can affect productivity. Even England boss Gareth Southgate is planning to help on this front by saying he *"hopes to send people to work the following day having enjoyed our matches."*

So how can managers tackle this in the workplace?

Set the goal posts and trust your team

It's a tough balance to get right. Ensuring productivity isn't affected at the expense of downtime can be difficult to manage, so it's important to agree the boundaries before kick-off and trust the team. People really value autonomy and enjoy having some control over their working lives. If they can reassure managers that their performance won't be affected and can still meet agreed deadlines or targets, then managers should celebrate and encourage that.

Trusting staff to manage their own workloads can strengthen the manager-colleague bond. Workers can see that their bosses trust them enough to remain productive by planning ahead. This trust makes them less likely to leave and more likely to go the extra mile.

Warming up is key

Employers need to recognise that work doesn't have to suffer and it's all down to planning. When it comes to motivating staff during the long summer months, particularly during major sporting events, flexibility plays a key role too. The fixtures are published well in advance and sports fans will know the games that will generate the most interest. People can plan their workloads around the matches.

Playing extra time

Of course, remember that flexibility works both ways – it's not unreasonable to expect that time spent watching sports during working hours can reasonably be made up at the end of the day. As the 'referee' at your place of work you can always signal that extra time needs to be played at a later date. People could also arrange cover with colleagues if necessary. This ensures the work still gets completed on time and to the required standard, without any distractions.

Use of the yellow card

Playing by the rules is important in sport and in business, so managers should follow their company policy to tackle any unexplained and conveniently timed absenteeism. If your players go down

‘injured’, always consider whether they really do need medical attention or whether they’re just running down the clock and taking advantage of your flexible approach to team management.

Know your players and get involved

It’s important for managers to know their staff and recognise what’s important to them, as their productivity and morale is ultimately important to the business’ bottom line. If many workers want to watch or follow a sporting event, then managers should consider giving them the chance to do so, if the business or job allows.

Looking after the subs bench

There will be members of your team that couldn’t care less about football or other sporting events. They’ll just want to get on with their work and not be distracted. It’s vital these people are recognised and looked after too. You don’t want them feeling that they’re being treated unfairly and they shouldn’t be picking up extra work as a result of their colleagues taking time away from their desks. Flexibility isn’t just about accommodating sports enthusiasts, be equally understanding of non-sporting interests and special occasions.

If there are lots of fans across the business, then there’s a high possibility they’ll be distracted, call in sick, book holiday or monitor social media during working hours if they’re not officially allowed to follow the tournament. If this sounds like your organisation and you know your staff will want to tune in, then it’s worth considering giving them the opportunity to watch it at certain times, as their performance and morale is important – not only to your organisation but also to the team.

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