

Shared Space

Avoiding Conflict & Seeking Harmony

Most employees spend at least a portion of their day working within shared space. Having coworkers nearby can create a sense of teamwork and camaraderie, but it also has a tendency to magnify minor irritants and disagreements. At its worst, operating in close quarters can create an environment in which petty conflict escalates to all-out interoffice warfare.

Maintaining a friendly and respectful environment requires heightened self-awareness of the effect our actions have on others. Take a moment to study these tips and ask yourself how you can help make your shared work space as pleasant as possible.



Properly dispose of foods with strong odors.

Don't toss the remainder of your lunch in an office wastebasket. Food smells can foul a room after sitting only a few hours at room temperature. Instead, put your refuse in a cafeteria trash can or an outdoor dumpster.

Freshen your breath after eating strong foods.

Working in tight confines can make unpleasant odors hard to bear. Most of your coworkers won't be comfortable telling you that your breath is offensive, so it's important to be proactive. Keep a small toothbrush and a package of breath mints in your desk, and use them after every meal, cup of coffee, or cigarette.

Be aware of your phone conversations.

You may be unwittingly causing distraction. It's sometimes difficult to monitor the volume of your voice relative to your environment when talking on the phone, so make phone calls in a private area whenever possible.

Avoid talking loudly about personal matters. It can be uncomfortable for coworkers to overhear, and difficult to tune out.

Keep a clean work area. A sloppy desk can be an unbearable eyesore, particularly for the more compulsive types at your office. Spend a few minutes tidying up at the end of the day, and wipe down exposed surfaces with a sanitizing product to prevent the spread of germs.

Pitch in on cleaning and maintaining community areas.

Brew more coffee when the pot is low, clean the microwave in the cafeteria, and refill the copier daily. Performing these small courtesies is a way of showing respect and good manners toward your coworkers.

Keep music volume to a minimum.

Better yet, wear a headset. Musical tastes tend to be widely divergent and often unexplainable. One person's masterpiece "stress-buster mix" may be another's source of irritation.

Leave that thermostat alone.

Thermostat wars create unnecessary hostility. Ask your supervisor to set and maintain a consistent temperature. Then dress accordingly. Accept that not everyone will be completely satisfied - including you.

Be aware of the stress levels of others.

Few jobs distribute workflow evenly. Some days are busier than others. While one of your slower days might allow for a bit of afternoon playfulness, keep in mind that the person next to you may be swamped with work. Look before you act, and avoid goofing off in a loud, boisterous manner if you suspect someone nearby is having a tough day. Otherwise, your attempt to lighten the mood may unknowingly create hostility.

Getting along with coworkers is a lot like dealing with family. There are bound to be occasional squabbles, flare-ups, and coworkers who remind you of some of your family's more "colorful characters." While you may be irritated with one another sometimes, you do have to find a way to get along.