



SMOKE SIGNALS

If you're a smoker I suggest you turn the page

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If you're a smoker I suggest you turn the page because you're only going to get riled. If you're not, you're probably going to be doing a lot of smug nodding. The very fact that I have felt compelled to say this only highlights the issue that in the workplace there are two different groups of people, not management and workers but smokers and non smokers.

Smoking has been a nationwide past time in the UK as soon as Sir Walter Raleigh brought back a tab or two along with his potatoes from his world travels. Since then it has had quite an impact to say the least. Multibillion pound companies have sprung up profiteering from it, people have died from the effects of it in their thousands if not millions, kids have done it behind the bike sheds, and it has in more recent years driven a wedge into the workplace.

It didn't take much research to discover that smokers are apparently less productive than non smokers. In fact there have been so many studies that have concluded this

that I wouldn't know where to begin with disclosing my sources. The facts are clearer than smoke: smokers take more time off sick, not just for the serious stuff but even for simply feeling under the weather. In fact 3 times more sick leave than non smokers. That costs business. Health insurance premiums can cost smokers as much as 30% more than their non smoking counterparts. That costs business. Smokers are 6 times more likely to seek early retirement. The premature loss of their contribution to the business along with their experience and skills can cost the business dearly.

Smokers who are allowed to smoke at work (and increasingly they have to go outside) take more breaks. Now this is where the problem amongst staff really comes to the fore. Non smokers can really get cheesed off when they are working away and their smoking colleagues are taking yet another break and getting paid the same money for effectively less hours work. Put it this way. If an employee smoked 9 cigarettes a day and took 10 minutes for each

one that would equal nearly one work day a week! Get the picture?

But it's not just that. Passive smoking is really bad news. The American Cancer Society states that smoke which is emitted from a burning cigarette carries greater levels of carcinogens and toxins than the mainstream smoke actually inhaled by the smoker. Now if that's not a frightening thought. So even if smokers go outside (argh another break!) their smoke can in some offices sneak its way back into the offices either through the door, window or air vent. And the fact is as I said earlier that smokers take more time off work and are therefore less productive. So, now we have smokers doing it and affecting their non smoking counterparts to boot!

Now, smokers this is going to make you scream, but again it has come up time and again in studies so don't shoot me, I'm only the messenger. Smokers, by their very nature, knowing that they are indulging in a life threatening activity, are more prone to take risks and therefore take riskier jobs.

The weird twist is that they are also more likely to have an accident than their non smoking workmates and so are therefore less productive. Added to this, apparently smokers are more likely to drink and gamble (Ashes to Dust magazine, Australia) which means they can be tired, hungover and even suffer from money problems (OK so can we all). The money issue in fact is very relevant. Non smokers have greater disposable income allowing them a better quality of life and thus contributing to a happier, more contented and more productive work environment.

So this has been a one sided argument. But in my mind it is. So, trying to present both sides here goes: Nicotine apparently enhances performance. Um, when smokers smoke at work they often go with other colleagues and are able to discuss, and perhaps even solve, issues. Frequent breaks are encouraged by Healthy and Safety policies to prevent all sorts of nasties like RSI and deep vein thrombosis. Er that's it. ■