

Administrative Support Associates™

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Office Aromas Cause A Stink

By Shawn E. Gilleylen

Recently, I received a phone call from an excited colleague inviting me to visit his newly renovated office decorated with imported Italian furnishings, state-of-the-art technology, and Parisian art. WOW, sounds posh!

Beaming with enthusiasm peering into the glass doors checking out the new digs, I could feel my nose twinge and forehead wrinkle. As I pulled the brushed chrome door handle, my face paralyzed with a frown. Oh my goodness, it smelled like spicy, microwave salmon and Chinese broccoli mixed with garlic sauce and cumin!

The pleasant, smiling receptionist greeted me inquiring, “Are you okay?” Attempting to wipe the grimace from my face, I replied, “Good afternoon, do you smell that aroma?” She laughed saying she was used to it. Well, I’m not. Fishy odors don’t make a winning first impression in any office, not even a fish market.

There should be rules for employees who dine in the office. Rancid odors are disruptive to the workplace and reduce productivity. Employees complain, lose concentration, and leave the office to escape the smell.

During a five-year workplace incivility study conducted by Christine Pearson of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill’s Kenan-Flagler Business School, more than half surveyed said they were distracted by rude behavior at work and got less done while fuming or worrying about it...22% said they purposely quit doing their best work due to incivility.

Food odors are part of the etiquette crisis in the workplace but can be mitigated if employees are more aware of the adverse effects caused by scents and employers effectively communicate, preferably in writing, an office dining courtesy policy.

While sitting in my colleague’s picturesque office, I gave him five simple office dining courtesy tips to help solve his odor problem and create a pleasant, comfortable, productive environment for employees and guests. The tips were posted immediately.

Office Dining Courtesy Tips:

- When eating at your desk or in shared spaces, avoid foods with a strong pungent scent and lingering aromas that travel throughout the office. Eat and dispose of your food right away.
- Clean up after yourself. Wash your dishes and wipe microwave after usage. Remove food from the refrigerator at the end of the week.
- Be sensitive to co-workers who might be allergic or sensitive to scents. Perfume and cologne should be subtle. Ask before spraying air fresheners, potpourri or lathering with heavily scented lotions.
- Respect co-worker's property and ask permission prior to taking or borrowing items and never take someone else's food from the refrigerator.
- Leave equipment in good condition and straighten up shared areas. Restock supplies.

Be courteous and build a healthy, stress-free work environment by treating others as you want to be treated.

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