

OCTOBER 16, 2019

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## HRMORNING

### Keep Up To Date with the Latest HR News

With HRMorning arriving in your inbox, you will never miss critical stories on labor laws, benefits, retention and onboarding strategies.

HRMorning, part of the Catalyst Media Network, provides the latest HR and employment law news for HR professionals in the trenches of small-to-medium-sized businesses. Rather than simply regurgitating the day's headlines, HRMorning delivers actionable insights, helping HR execs understand what HR trends mean to their business.

## Keep your sanity: 6 self-care ideas for overworked HR pros

### ■ Making time for yourself during busy workdays

**B**etween dealing with terminations, conducting workplace investigations and putting out fires, HR pros have their hands full ... every single day.

And when you're constantly busy tending to the needs of everyone else, from the top down, it can be easy to forget about your own needs.

### A natural part of your day

Workplace burnout is rampant, so HR self-care isn't a luxury anymore – it's crucial to staying inspired and successful.

Since you spend far more time at work than you might like, self-care simply can't be squeezed in during

your free time. To be effective, experts say, self-care practices need to be woven naturally into the routines of your workday.

Here's how author Amy Jen Su, of leadership development firm Paravis Partners, helps managers maintain their sanity.

1. *Go easy on yourself.* Often, we're our own harshest critic. Every HR pro feels that intense need for perfection and accountability, but this can be quite harmful.

When you feel that you're in danger of being too hard on yourself, ask what

*(Please see Self-care ... on Page 2)*

## DOL finalizes new \$35K OT threshold

### ■ Rule makes 1.3 million additional workers eligible for overtime

**A**fter a long wait, the DOL finally announced the highly anticipated new overtime exemption threshold: \$35,568. The new rule will go into effect Jan. 1, 2020.

This new threshold is a big jump from the previous \$23,660 and will make roughly 1.3 million additional employees eligible for overtime.

### Long overdue

While the threshold increase is a win for a million workers, almost 3 million more would've become eligible if the

Obama administration's proposed threshold of \$47,476 went into effect.

Along with the updated threshold, the new rule allows employers to count a portion of certain bonuses (and commissions) toward meeting the salary level.

The increase was long overdue in light of wage and salary growth since 2004. Nearly every person who commented on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking agreed the threshold needed to be updated for this reason.

*Click: [bit.ly/threshold543](http://bit.ly/threshold543)*

# Self-care ...

(continued from Page 1)

advice you'd give a friend or colleague in your situation. Odds are, you'd be much more understanding of their shortcomings.

If you stop your inner critic from getting in your head, you'll be able to overcome periods of self-doubt much more easily.

2. **List your priorities.** As requests come in throughout the day, it's very easy to get distracted and not get certain tasks accomplished. To combat this, take fifteen minutes each morning and list three things you'd like to achieve that day.

Then, as your day inevitably gets interrupted by those needing your assistance, consult the list before saying yes. This will help you get in the habit of valuing your own time as much as others'.

3. **Celebrate all your wins.** When you overcome a big hurdle at work,

it can be easy to forget to appreciate it since you've likely moved on to the next important task.

But celebrating victories is important. Take the time to hit pause and congratulate yourself for your accomplishments. Otherwise, you'll forget why you're working so hard in the first place.

Not to mention, taking the time to review successes will let you and your team know what strategies worked.

4. **Keep good people around.** Those you surround yourself with have a major impact on your mental health, which is why it's so important to have kind, supportive people on your team.

Take the time to evaluate who supports you and your goals and who drains your energy. Set boundaries with the people who bring you down, and invest in those who inspire and support you.

The same goes for your relationships outside of the office. Don't let work interfere with family and friends – use your break time to keep in touch, and carve out plenty of time after work for them.

5. **Reorganize your workspace.** Your physical environment has a big impact on your mental state. Start by straightening up your desk and throwing away excess clutter.

Hang photos and artwork that'll remind you of what matters. Your workspace should be a reflection of your best self.

6. **Rest and recharge.** Getting a full eight hours of sleep a night is nearly impossible for busy HR pros, but it's important to try. Designate a night or two each week to go to bed early.

You can build restorative breaks into your workday, as well. Try going on walks to get some fresh air, or make it a point to eat lunch away from your desk.

Another important aspect to HR self-care is realizing when you've slipped out of your best practices. In hectic or stressful times, it's just as essential to make time for yourself.

Info: [bit.ly/selfcare543](http://bit.ly/selfcare543)

## Sharpen your JUDGMENT

*This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.*

### ■ Worker's disability flares up after weekends: FMLA abuse?

HR manager Lynn Rondo was putting some small decorative pumpkins on her desk when company attorney Eric Bressler walked into her office.

"Aren't you festive," Eric remarked as he sat down.

"I love Halloween," Lynn said. "But something tells me you're about to kill my good mood."

"Unfortunately, yes," he said. "Zane Anders is suing us for FMLA interference."

### Having fun during leave

"Are you kidding me?" Lynn asked. "He was caught on camera golfing while supposedly out on FMLA leave – twice!"

"I know you hired an investigator," Eric said. "When did you get suspicious?"

"Zane was approved for intermittent FMLA leave when his joint condition flared up," Lynn explained. "But the flare-ups always seemed to happen after the weekend or his vacation time. We weren't buying it, and sure enough, he was out having fun during his alleged flare-ups."

"Zane's saying he needed extra time to recover from the workweek sometimes," Eric said. "And golfing didn't worsen his joint condition."

"This is classic FMLA abuse," Lynn said definitively. "We had to terminate him."

Zane sued for FMLA interference, and the company fought to get the case dismissed. Did it win?

■ *Make your decision, then please turn to Page 6 for the court's ruling.*

HR MORNING'S

What's Working in  
HUMAN RESOURCES

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# 6th Circuit: Firms can't reduce statute of limitations on civil rights lawsuits

### ■ Employer tried to put 6-month time limit on filing suit

**A** warning for employers: Don't try to put restrictions on an employee's ability to file a lawsuit against the company that impinges on their rights.

The 6th Circuit recently reviewed a case in which an employee had agreed to the restrictions, but sued her company after the agreed upon time limit anyway.

### Infringes upon Title VII rights

Barbie Logan was a culinary worker at the MGM Grand Casino in Detroit.

When she was hired, Logan signed a policy agreeing not to sue the company more than six months after the incident in the lawsuit occurred.

She was employed by the casino for several years before ultimately

resigning. Logan then filed a discrimination claim with the EEOC 216 days after parting ways with MGM Grand.

The casino tried to get Logan's claim dismissed since she filed after the six-month cutoff she agreed to in her contract, but the 6th Circuit sided with Logan.

The court said under Title VII, employees have the right to file claims with the EEOC up to 300 days after the incident occurs, no matter what an employer may request. MGM's six-month cap infringed upon Logan's Title VII rights, it said.

However, it's important to note that MGM's six-month time limit against private, civil suits is lawful.

*Cite: Logan v. MGM Grand Detroit Casino, 9/25/19.*

# 'Handful of incidents' aren't enough to prove hostile work environment claim

### ■ Court rules employee's complaints weren't severe enough

**W**hile previous rulings have shown a few racist or sexist incidents can be enough to establish a hostile work environment, a new case demonstrates those events still need to be severe and pervasive.

Here's a rundown of a recent employee lawsuit.

### Didn't interfere with job

Matthew Perkins worked at a paper mill in South Carolina for 30 years. But Perkins, an African-American employee, alleged race-based discrimination and a hostile work environment.

Perkins claimed he was mistreated compared to white employees and was denied promotions based on his race.

Concerning the hostile work environment charge, Perkins claimed he heard stories of a colleague wearing a "KKK hat" to work. He added another employee heard someone use a racial slur once, too.

But the court wasn't convinced these incidents were severe or pervasive enough to constitute a hostile work environment. It said these were only a "handful of incidents" over the course of Perkins' long tenure that didn't interfere with his ability to do his job.

Not to mention, the two major incidents Perkins mentioned didn't happen directly to him.

*Cite: Perkins v. International Paper Company, 8/27/19.*

### ■ Retailer out \$85K for rejecting wheelchair-bound candidate

One employer made a snap judgment about an applicant's ability to do a job, and the EEOC made it pay for that mistake.

According to a recent EEOC lawsuit, clothing retailer PacSun refused to hire a disabled candidate at its St. Augustine, FL, store.

When a wheelchair-bound candidate inquired about a job, the manager allegedly told them the store wasn't hiring. However, that same manager then told applicants without disabilities the store was in fact currently hiring, the EEOC said. This is a violation of the ADA.

"The manager saw an applicant who was in a wheelchair and made a rushed determination that the person could not be qualified for the position," the EEOC stated.

PacSun will pay \$85,000 to settle the lawsuit and must train all of its managers on ADA procedures.

*Info: bit.ly/ADA543*

### ■ Employer asked worker for medication list, owes \$50K

This company implemented a policy for safety reasons, but it ended up violating the ADA instead.

Oncor Electric Delivery Company, located in Dallas, fired an employee of 13 years after she refused to disclose medical information, according to the EEOC.

The company required all employees to sign a policy stating they'd report the medications they were using that could have an impact on job performance. This policy also requested dosage information, the EEOC said. An employee wouldn't sign and she was fired.

The EEOC said the "broad requirement violated the prohibition against medical inquiries of employees" under the ADA.

Oncor Electric will pay \$50,000 to settle the lawsuit.

*Info: bit.ly/meds543*

# Experts give their solutions to difficult workplace problems

*HR professionals like you face new questions every day on how to deal with workplace conflict and employment law. In this section, experts answer those real-life questions.*

### Can we have a code of conduct for social media?

**Q:** Is it legal to have provisions for employees on what they may or may not post on social media while they work for us?

**A:** The NLRB just addressed this in a recent memo and warned employers to be cautious when it comes to social media policies.

One company had a policy prohibiting employees from posting any false information or rumors about it, and the NLRB ruled this to be unlawful.

The board said this provision was too broad, and employees are allowed to make inaccurate statements about the company as long as they aren't defamatory.

Another provision of this company's policy was deemed unlawful, too. It forbid employees from posting about policies, procedures and internal business matters.

This, however, would infringe upon an employee's right to discuss the terms and conditions of their employment.

Employers need to ensure that social media policies don't run afoul of employee protections under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

### How can we best handle third-party harassment?

**Q:** We're concerned a customer is sexually harassing an employee. How can we stop it?

**A:** Title VII protects employees from sexual harassment from

colleagues as well as clients or customers, says employment law attorney Amy Epstein Gluck of the firm FisherBroylesLLP. So employers have a responsibility to put a stop to this type of harassment, too.

It might seem like there's not much you can do, since you can't control a customer's behavior, but there are solid steps you can take:

- Investigate allegations ASAP
- Ban the offending customer if the allegations prove to be true, and
- Include bystander intervention training with the rest of your harassment training.

### How should we prepare for the new OT threshold?

**Q:** With the DOL's new overtime threshold taking effect in January, what should we be doing now to prepare?

**A:** The thing you need to decide now is whether you're going to pay your newly eligible workers overtime, or give them a salary increase that bumps them above the new threshold of \$35,568, says Tammy McCutchen, shareholder at Littler Mendelson.

While going through this process, keep your eye out for any employees who may be incorrectly classified as exempt or nonexempt.

*If you have an HR-related question, email it to Rachel Mucha at: [rmucha@HRMorning.com](mailto:rmucha@HRMorning.com)*

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

### ■ Don't let email get you down: 5 ways to set boundaries

Nearly every employee is familiar with the constant email interruptions they face each day.

Being slowed down by a flooded inbox has just become accepted as normal – but it doesn't have to be.

There are a few tricks you can try to get you out of the endless cycle of putting in extra hours to catch up on all the emails.

### Autoreply is your friend

Here's what author and startup advisor Sarah Peck suggests you do to make answering emails less of a priority, allowing you to focus on more pressing tasks:

1. **Put a disclaimer in your signature.** Here's your chance to let senders know what your office hours are, and how long a reply may take. Being transparent about this will decrease the number of follow-up emails.

2. **Use your autoresponder often.** If you need to turn all your attention to a weeks' long project, don't be afraid to use auto-reply to share this with anyone trying to contact you.

3. **Put contact instructions on your website, social media.** If you have a certain way you'd like people to contact you, add these directions to your website or social media. This will let senders know what to expect and help them understand your schedule.

4. **Be upfront about what you'll ignore.** In your contact instructions, it's also helpful to tell people what kind of emails will be deleted immediately, e.g., unsolicited requests.

5. **Set guidelines with your team.** Especially when bringing new people on board, tell them about your communication habits and what your preferred channels are. Do you prefer instant messages over email? Let them know.

**Info:** [bit.ly/emails543](http://bit.ly/emails543)

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## WHAT WORKED FOR OTHER COMPANIES

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Our subscribers come from a broad range of companies, both large and small. In this regular feature, three of them share a success story illustrating ideas you can adapt to your unique situation.

### 1 **This tactic kept our meetings short & sweet**

Nobody likes to be stuck in meetings, but sometimes they're a necessary evil in the workplace.

And at our company, we end up having meetings frequently.

We try to keep them as brief as possible so our employees can get back to work quicker, but that can be easier said than done.

There's always those people who have questions or comments, which can really tack on a lot of extra

time to the meeting – much to the annoyance of our other staffers.

Of course, we want to make sure we address people's questions and concerns, but we wanted to think of a more efficient way to do it.

#### Save all questions

We decided to shift the way we ran our meetings. Instead of making them interactive, we started conducting our meetings as informational sessions.

We'd tell our people what they needed to know, and if anyone tried to ask

a question, we'd encourage them to find us afterward.

This change saves us a ton of time and still allows employees to get the clarification they need.

People are happier to spend less time in meetings, and those with questions appreciate the individualized attention.

And if someone asks a question we think everyone should hear, we begin next week's meeting with it.

*(Ashley Jordan, HR manager, Atlanta Diabetes Associates, Atlanta)*

**REAL  
PROBLEMS,  
REAL  
SOLUTIONS**

### 2 **Generous PTO boosts employee retention**

As a business owner, it's incredibly important for me to be able to grow benefits for our staff each year.

We survey employees annually to gauge their needs and satisfaction with our current offerings.

Our goal was to entice talented workers to stay on longer. While looking at the cost of adding benefits can be intimidating for some, it's always proved its worth to us.

Offering robust benefits was always

something we felt strongly about, so we decided to really go for it.

#### Puts us at an advantage

We began offering paid time off for hourly workers because it puts us at an advantage with a labor pool that never really seems to keep pace with the high demand.

It also helps employees have the flexibility to take time off to care for themselves or their family.

Employees begin accruing paid time off immediately. If they work

full-time, they're eligible for up to a week of PTO the first year, up to two weeks after a year and up to three weeks after six years or more.

Offering PTO to hourly workers helps us attract employees and keep them longer.

While the extra expense might seem difficult, we've found it provides our staff with peace of mind, helps with work-life balance and has resulted in a stronger company.

*(Katie Button, owner, Katie Button Restaurants, Asheville, NC)*

### 3 **How we assess workers' leadership potential**

Like most companies, we looked to our best and brightest employees when expanding people's duties and filling leadership roles.

Problem was, some of them didn't succeed once they were there.

Despite strong training and excellent experience, many people struggled when asked to lead their former co-workers and handle more responsibility.

We needed a better way to gauge

employees' potential before actually moving them into bigger roles.

#### A short trial period

So, we started using absences to our advantage.

When managers or supervisors are out of the office, we can assign workers as the "manager on duty" for that day or week.

This position goes to workers who have shown interest in moving up the ranks, who want to take more initiative or who we think would make good leaders.

We're able to see how they handle the situation – where they succeed, where they flounder.

And, employees get a feel for a higher-level role and taking on additional duties.

It gives both sides an idea of when a certain position or leadership role is right for them and the company.

By testing the waters beforehand, we can make better decisions on our employees' advancement.

*(Amber Krueger, operations manager, Bancorp Fund Services, Milwaukee)*

### Study: 3 out of 5 workers would quit their jobs today

Here's an alarming new statistic: 59% of employees would leave their jobs right now for a similar position elsewhere.

This number has increased by 4% since last year, according to a new report by O.C. Tanner, a firm specializing in workplace culture.

So why would the majority of employees quit today? Burnout and poor company culture are the top culprits. Workers' frustrations especially spike when employers neglect to fix glaring issues.

To help retain top people, some cultural shifts are likely necessary.

*Info: [bit.ly/burnout543](http://bit.ly/burnout543)*

### Health insurance costs at record high

Employer-provided health insurance coverage for the average American family now costs \$20,000 a year – the same as a small car.

A new study by the Kaiser Family Foundation revealed employees pay about a third of that cost for premiums deducted from their salaries. And that \$6,000 doesn't include what they're paying out of pocket for deductibles and co-pays.

Many workers can't afford these

premiums and are choosing to forgo the coverage altogether – 48% of employees are under financial stress, and 40% wouldn't be able to cover an emergency \$400 expense.

*Info: [bit.ly/premiums543](http://bit.ly/premiums543)*

### NLRB proposed rule: College TAs can't unionize

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) recently issued a stance stating that undergraduate and grad students who work for their colleges can't unionize.

The board recognized that though these teaching assistants are often paid, their work has a "primarily educational, not economic, relationship with their university."

An example the NLRB used to back up this claim is that teaching assistants often do this work as part of their academic programs, and they typically receive a flat rate regardless of how many hours are worked.

*Info: [bit.ly/undergrads543](http://bit.ly/undergrads543)*

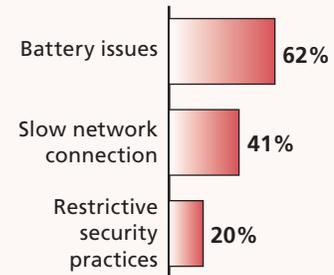
### Lighter side: Worker has emotional support clown

You've heard of emotional support animals becoming more popular in the workplace. But you probably never had to deal with someone requesting an emotional support *clown*.

## WHAT COMPANIES TOLD US

### Remote work struggles

What are telecommuting employees' top frustrations? (More than one response accepted)



*Source: NetMotion Software*

More employees than ever before are working remotely, but employers still have some catching up to do – the majority of remote workers are experiencing basic technical difficulties.

*Each issue of WWHR contains an exclusive survey to give executives insight into what their peers nationwide are thinking and doing.*

Joshua Jack, a worker from New Zealand, got word he was being let go. He was encouraged to bring an emotional support person to the meeting, so he brought a clown.

To amuse Jack, the clown made him several balloon animals throughout the ordeal. He also mimed crying when the employee signed separation documents.

*Info: [bit.ly/clown543](http://bit.ly/clown543)*

## Sharpen your judgment...

## THE DECISION

(See case on Page 2)

Yes. The company won when a judge dismissed Zane's FMLA interference claim.

Zane's attorney argued he wasn't abusing his intermittent leave – Zane would often be in pain after a long workweek, and sometimes required a long weekend to recover. His attorney also claimed golfing didn't aggravate his joint condition.

But the court rejected Zane's argument. It said his FMLA leave was only supposed to be used for joint condition flare-ups and medical appointments, not extra rest from a tiring workweek. If Zane truly needed long weekends in

order to help his disability, he needed to amend his FMLA leave request.

The court also watched the footage of Zane golfing and ruled he seemed to be pain-free at a time he told his employer he was incapacitated. Case dismissed.

### ■ Analysis: Evaluate evidence carefully

While the company came out on top in this case, things could've gone differently if it hadn't thoroughly investigated Zane's leave.

If you discover evidence of an employee potentially abusing their leave, it's crucial to thoroughly evaluate their FMLA leave request and medical information before making any employment decisions.

**Cite:** LaBelle v. Cleveland Cliffs, U.S. Ct. of App., 6th Circ., No. 18-2444, 9/13/19. Fictionalized for dramatic effect.

# Boosting paid family leave became a culture change in our industry

■ *Workers now get 8 extra weeks of paid bonding leave*

**P**aid family leave has been a hot topic for a while now. Employees have been calling on employers to offer more time to bond with their newborns.

We always try and listen when our people tell us what they want, so we decided to improve our family-friendly benefits by increasing paid leave following the birth or adoption of a child.

### Innovative and new

We wanted this to be more than a program. We wanted it to be a culture change for us.

While we weren't the first to come up with and offer this benefit, it was innovative and new within our industry.

In addition to the already offered six to eight weeks of maternity leave, we now give workers eight weeks of fully paid bonding leave, or a two-week payout in lieu of the leave.

We included a payout option for new parents to have flexibility of choice in what works best for their family.

### Flexible options

Prior to this, we only offered straight maternity leave. Now, employees have 12 months from the date of childbirth or finalized adoption to fully utilize the additional eight weeks of leave.

The paid bonding leave benefit can be used consecutively or broken up into increments throughout the following 12 months.

We assumed this would go off without a hitch, but not everyone was excited when we announced the new benefit.

Operations leaders were concerned that multiple people would want to take leave at the same time. These were legitimate concerns we had to take into consideration.

### Support from the top down

To ease managers' fears, we added provisions about blackout dates to avoid impacting highly requested time-off periods, such as around the holidays.

We were fortunate to have a CHRO who initiated and drove this program. This helped build support for the change from the top down.

Program communication and education were also key. We sent both an email and a postcard to employees that outlined the details of the program.

We also published FAQs and training documents.

### Shift in company culture

Since we started this program, the bonding leave has been the preferred benefit, with the majority of the employees choosing to take time off instead of the payout.

We wanted something that resonated broadly with our employees. It was a privilege to bring this benefit to workers because it demonstrated a shift in our culture.

We say we're family friendly, and now we can back that up.

The use of the paid bonding leave shows our acceptance of and support for our workers who should be with their families during this special time.

*(Jennifer Mericle, global benefits manager, Halliburton, Houston)*

### ■ Culture issues? 6 steps to repair a broken workplace

Sometimes, things at work can become toxic. When they do, avoid trying to fix everything at once.

Instead, tackle the problem behaviors that have the biggest impact first, and smaller issues will likely begin to right themselves.

### Listen and communicate

Here are six strategic approaches to the most common workplace problems.

**1. Listen to your employees.** Hear their grievances, validate their experiences and make the changes necessary to address their issues.

This can come in the form of one-on-one conversations, a town hall meeting with HR, or simply anonymous surveys.

**2. Assign realistic deadlines.** This means taking the time to learn what your employees actually do. What are they responsible for, and how long do those tasks take?

**3. Communicate transparently.** Having the information to do one's job reduces confusion and frustration, making employees happier and more efficient.

**4. Acknowledge good work.** Tell employees what they're doing well – they'll feel appreciated, and be more likely to continue doing it. Build a supportive environment by sharing employee successes and make positive encouragement a group activity.

**5. Apply rules evenly.** Playing favorites breeds resentment. Examine your company policies – do they unfairly benefit one group over others? Be open to feedback; employees may see problems you don't.

**6. Foster emotional intelligence.** Banish bullying, disrespect and dismissive behavior. Provide resources to help employees understand themselves and their co-workers better.

**Case Study:**  
**WHAT**  
**WORKED,**  
**WHAT**  
**DIDN'T**

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Companies face competing agendas when dealing with their employees. They must find ways to inspire their people to excel, while controlling costs and staying within the law. Here we present a challenging scenario and ask three executives to explain how they'd handle it.

### A quiet place: What should HR do about the dead silence of the office?

#### The Scenario

As HR manager Stu Capper walked to his desk for the morning, he became overtly aware of the squeaking of his shoes and the jingling of the car keys in his hands.

*I feel like I'm in a library or a church,* Stu thought to himself.

He saw nearly every employee at their desks, ear buds in, typing away on their keyboards – no chatting or walking around.

*It's nice to see everyone hard at work,* Stu thought, *but this isn't the most cheerful thing to walk into in the morning.*

#### Encouraging socialization

Later in the kitchen, Stu ran into department manager Lana Winters.

"Hey, Stu," she said quietly.

"Hi, Lana." Stu walked over to get

some coffee. "Why are we whispering?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said with a little chuckle. "It's just so quiet in here I feel like I have to."

"Yeah, the silence is really noticeable today," Stu replied. "It's kind of creepy."

"I mean, I know that everyone is focusing," Lana said. "But I'm a little concerned. People should be socializing every now and then. All this quiet is a little depressing."

"I guess the big office and all the cubes don't help," Stu said.

"Everyone's so used to the quiet, I'm not sure what we can do to encourage a little more activity," Lana replied. "But I think people would be much happier with a healthy amount of chatter."

*If you were Stu, what would you do next?*

will work together, strengthening their relationships with each other, and morale will get a boost. Not to mention, getting everyone together right as they come in will ensure we don't interrupt anyone's work.

#### 3 Amanda Flee, HR director, Wellnecessities, Shreveport, LA

*What Amanda would do:* I'd work to make the breakroom into a place where employees could socialize and relax. We could set up games or snacks. And, I'd make sure managers were letting workers know that socializing with each other during work is completely fine as long as things get done.

*Reason:* This seems like a culture issue. The employees either are introverted and don't want to speak to each other, or they feel like they aren't allowed to. Having managers make it clear that socializing is permitted is an important step. Setting up the breakroom as a social area will also help employees get away from all the silent, concentrating workers in the main office whenever they want.

#### Reader Responses

##### 1 Melissa Waters, finance director, New River Solid Waste, Raiford, FL

*What Melissa would do:* I'd start organizing small social events during lunchtime to get employees interacting more.

*Reason:* If everyone is being quiet at their desks, it's likely they need the silence in order to concentrate on their work. By having get togethers during lunchtime, employees can socialize with each other without distracting anyone.

##### 2 John Johnston, HR manager, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Baltimore

*What John would do:* I'd start gathering everyone first thing in the morning for some huddle sessions. We could liven up the start of the work day by doing company history and trivia and giving out prizes.

*Reason:* Playing games with prizes is a great way to get everyone engaged and excited first thing in the morning. Employees

#### QUOTES

Happiness is like a butterfly, which, when pursued, is always just beyond our grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you.

*Nathaniel Hawthorne*

You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.

*Abraham Lincoln*

The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.

*Maya Angelou*

Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.

*Warren Buffett*

Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.

*Mother Teresa*

The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.

*Ernest Hemingway*