



Are You Ready For Some Football problems? Fantasy Football Can Cause Lost Productivity

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Autumn has arrived in San Diego. The nights are cool and the Chargers are hot. Unfortunately, for an ever-growing segment of your workforce, football season is one of the most distracting periods of the year. Sports have long been distracting novelties for much of the workforce, but the advent of the Internet and the prevalence of email communications have led to a mushrooming of this trend. Twenty years ago, the worst an employer would probably face is Monday morning water cooler talk about the weekend's games and a Super Bowl pool in late January. Now, employers need to be concerned about employees spending work time and company computers to manage their fantasy football teams throughout the week; employees accessing offshore gambling Web sites with work computers to lay bets; and money being exchanged on Monday mornings because of office pools, fantasy teams, and other wagers. How worried should employers be? And what can be done about it?

Employers can decide to take a hard line "old school" approach, or try to be more flexible and accommodate their employees' football fixation. Employers have the right to strictly enforce a non-recreational Internet use policy and monitor employee usage to ensure that workers stick to work while at their desks. Employers have every right to expect employees to devote 100 percent of their energies to the job between 9 and 5, and as long as they act consistently, can fire employees who play fantasy sports instead of working. However, a newer breed of flexible manager recognizes that employees will inevitably spend work time handling personal business or surfing the Internet. According to this manager's philosophy, you shouldn't be so worried about the estimates of lost work time due to fantasy football season, because employees rarely spend their entire 40-hour workweeks strictly on work. And while the flexible manager prohibits the viewing of offensive Web sites, this manager ignores fantasy football activity so long as work objectives are being met.

Either way, companies should decide how to handle the new football season so that it can be addressed in a consistent manner, and should outline their expectations clearly for all employees.

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