

Create a Positive Organizational Culture to Reduce Internet Misuse

by Mike Foster

Effectively managing your employees' Internet use and ensuring that they're using the tool for business purposes only requires a balanced blend of technology, policy, and culture. Of these three components, your organizational culture is the most important.

While technology solutions, such as monitoring and filtering software, and Internet usage policies are great deterrents to Internet misuse, the bottom line is that employees will conform to the established organizational culture. In fact, of all the components present in your company, it's the organizational culture that breeds the employees' attitudes, dictates how they behave at work, and instills in them a distinct work ethic. When your organizational culture is positive, employees are naturally more productive and less apt to waste their time surfing the Internet for non-business related materials. On the other hand, a negative organizational culture makes the employees feel as if they are being treated poorly, mismanaged, and/or taken advantage of, so therefore they feel no loyalty. As a result, they see no harm in using their at-work Internet connection for personal use. In some instances they may even revel in misusing the office connection to retaliate against their (perceived) mistreatment.

Unfortunately, this "casual" misuse costs your company thousands of dollars each year. A recent survey about Internet usage conducted by IntelliQuest Information Group found that the average amount of time a user spends online for personal use has grown from an average of 6.9 hours per week to a current average of 9.8 hours per week. Also, 46% of the online population of 57 million adults accessed the Internet from work at least some of that time. The percentage of time your employees spend on the Internet that is not business-related is the amount your company loses in salary expenses due to lost productivity.

To put it in better perspective, if an employee who earns \$35,000 annually is spending 20% of his or her time being unproductive on the Internet, that equals \$7,000 lost out of your payroll. Add to that 20% of your organization's share of Social Security payments, unemployment taxes, and worker's compensation insurance, and the true amount lost can be staggering.

Even if you've implemented employee monitoring, filtered traffic from "off limits" web sites, and had every employee sign an Internet usage policy, you are still likely to have an Internet misuse problem.

That's why it's time to work on your company's organizational culture to break employees of this destructive habit. The following four tips will help you strengthen your company's culture so you can regain those lost productivity profits.

1. Reward Productivity

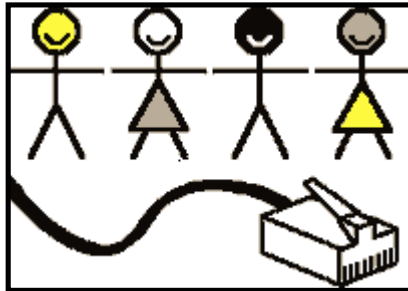
All employees want to feel as if their work truly matters in the big picture. They want a sense of purpose for their job and to know that they're making a difference to the company's bottom line. When employees don't feel this kind of job satisfaction, they quickly become disgruntled and resort to non-productive work habits, such as misusing the Internet.

In order to combat this challenge, reward your employees for their productivity while instilling a sense of teamwork in the office. One way to accomplish this is by measuring each department's production and posting the results in charts and graphs. Update the chart either daily or weekly so employees can track their progress. When you do this, be sure to create one chart or graph per department, not employee. The idea is to foster a team environment, not one-to-one competition. As each department's productivity increases, the employees will feel proud to see their productivity "written on the wall" in your charts.

Though many times the charted recognition alone is reward enough, you may also choose to reward your employees with salary bonuses, paid time off, a department luncheon, or any other way to show your appreciation. Ask them what they would enjoy most, and pay attention to their responses. You don't have to agree to give them what they ask for, just be willing to listen. The more you show your employees that you value them and their contributions, the more positive your organizational culture becomes and the less apt your employees will be to misuse their time online.

2. Encourage Training and Goal Setting

The more knowledge your employees have about their job, the more willing they are to put that knowledge to work. If your employees are opting to surf the net for recreational use rather than complete their job duties, determine whether or not they have the necessary skills to complete the tasks at hand. Sometimes employees are



reluctant to admit their shortcomings for fear of being let go. Instead they choose to “look busy” in order to please the boss. The “flip-side” of this is that the employees may actually be bored, feeling a severe lack of challenge. In this case, you want to find a way to help them feel more challenged. To do so, allow them to suggest tasks they feel they could perform to serve the organization’s needs.

To ensure that you have the most skilled employees, provide training options for each department. This training could involve on-the-job skills training, off-site seminars, and classes at a local college or training center. Encourage your employees to seek out the training they need so they can become more productive and better contribute to the company’s bottom line. The best approach is to have the employees invest in their own training, and then you can reimburse them when they earn their certificate. When employees pay for their own training they will learn much more than those who are on a “free day off.”

Once your employees are adequately trained, help them develop a crystal clear idea of what they are to accomplish at work. Also, require them to write out professional goals for themselves so they can be accountable for their progress. By doing this, you’re enabling your employees to develop their skills and ambitions while reducing the chances for Internet misuse.

3. Hire Efficiently

When employees are bored, unmotivated, unchallenged, or unappreciated, they’re more likely to use their at-work Internet connection for personal activities. So as a business owner or manager, it is imperative that you hire key people and continually develop them so they won’t feel the temptation to misuse the Internet during company time.

During the interview process, be sure the person you’re interviewing is truly capable of doing the job at hand. In addition, question the candidate about his or her Internet philosophies. If you use monitoring and/or filtering software, inform the candidate of that fact and note his or her reaction. A dedicated employee won’t mind being monitored. In fact, a PC World Online survey found that 94.2% of employees believe their employer has the right to monitor how they use the Internet at work, provided they are informed first.

If a candidate becomes concerned or defensive about your monitoring practices, truly question whether or not you want that person on your team. To eliminate Internet misuse in your office, strive to hire only those people with a sense of responsibility, a strong work ethic, and a commitment to teamwork.

4. Lead by Example

A company’s organizational culture tends to filter down. It rarely filters up. Employees “catch” what managers have. So in order to create a positive organizational culture, make sure you and your upper managers display the attitude and work ethic you want your employees to have.

If employees routinely see their supervisors misusing the Internet at work, chances are they’ll follow that example. The rationale is that if the upper managers don’t care about productivity or their time spent online, then why should anyone else. And since most employees who aspire to higher positions imitate what their company “role models” do, then you need to be sure your managers are sending the right message. If not, your profits will suffer.

The difference between winning and losing is often a tiny amount. Just look at the time differences between first and second place in the Olympic races. When your team realizes that their extra effort at work can make a huge difference, they’ll be more apt to display appropriate work ethics.

But it can’t stop there. Business owners and organizational leaders today have a responsibility to provide a positive culture in their organization, to lead by example, and to educate their employees about Internet misuse. By directing their employees’ energy to more productive tasks and keeping them continually challenged and motivated, employers everywhere can create the kind of organizational culture that fosters measurable results and deters Internet misuse.

In the end, company owners and managers must realize that Internet misuse is a cultural and human resources issue that cannot be solved by technology or policy alone. Instilling a positive organizational culture is the only sure way to guarantee that your employees will be productive and that your company’s goals will be met.

About the Author:

Mike Foster's history as the CEO of a computer company for 12 years, and as an international technology consultant and speaker, makes him an expert at both technology and management skills. Mike Foster is a frequent presenter of keynote speeches, seminars, and workshops. His message about how to use technology to increase profits and productivity is welcomed by small business owners and Fortune 10 executives alike. For more information about Foster's programs, call 800-657-7107 or visit www.fosterinstitute.com or www.internetmisuse.com.