

We can handle Chatty Cathy, but what do we do about Whistling Willie?

Question: "We have a co-worker who is cooperative, personable, cheerful and a great employee. But his whistling is driving our office up a tree. Some people find it extremely irritating when they are trying to concentrate. Subtle and direct remarks have been made to him regarding the whistling, but he says it helps him relax and perform his duties better. Any suggestions on how to curb the whistling but not hurt his feelings?" —
No longer whistling Dixie

Comments

I too was a whistler, and it drove my boss insane! She cheerfully reminded me that she did not hire a songbird and smiled while she said it. I got the hint right away!

Posted by: Laurie Bedell | July 18, 2008 at 03:08 PM

It may be time for a "Crucial Conversation".

"Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High", is a book by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Al Switzler, and Ron McMillan. It introduces you to the skills you need to handle crucial conversations—conversations that occur when the stakes are high, emotions run strong, and opinions vary.

There is another book titled, "Crucial Confrontations: Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations, and Bad Behavior", by the same authors as Crucial Confrontations.

Also, check out the website <http://www.vitalsmarts.com/> On the website, there is a free newsletter. Additionally, there are seminars, web seminars, and books, etc.

These references may be helpful for many of the issues that appear in The Admin Pro Forum.

Posted by: Mary - Stillwater, MN | July 18, 2008 at 03:35 PM

Sit him down and just say that you would like to have a casual conversation with him about something that is bothering you. Tell him that he is appreciated around the office for being so helpful and friendly but that it has become very difficult to concentrate while he whistles. That it is a positive thing to add to a work environment but it even though it relaxes him it does need to stop. Not that you want to change his work atmosphere but maybe he could whistle at only times like lunch time etc. Maybe he will take the advise knowing that it makes it hard for others to relax or work. Good luck, but he needs to know it will stop not it should. Who's the boss there anyways?

Posted by: | July 18, 2008 at 03:38 PM

Someone does need to speak to him and let him know it may help him concentrate, but unfortunately it does the opposite for others around him and it would be great if he can be considerate to others. Ask him if there is anything else that can help him concentrate that won't distract others. Maybe earphones or a desk radio so that he can listen to music WITHOUT whistling?

Good luck.

Posted by: Sandy | July 18, 2008 at 05:03 PM

Has management said anything to him about his little habit? If not maybe its time they say something. If it affects others in the workplace that is not good. I know it may relax him but if others are annoyed then he will need to learn a new habit for the sake of the other co-workers.

Posted by: | July 18, 2008 at 05:05 PM

Many people would say being able to have a drink or two at work will help them relax and work better, but does that make it acceptable at work? I don't think the "it helps me relax" rationale should be acceptable when it is something that results in annoying other people. I would have a supervisor sit down with him and first bring up all his good points, but then say there is one thing he is doing that is causing problems with others. The whistling is helping him to concentrate, but it is ruining the concentration of others. I would tell him, not ask him, that it would help the entire staff if he could find a less intrusive way to relax.

Posted by: Mark | July 19, 2008 at 09:33 AM

I have very sensitive hearing and most whistling sounds like fingernails scraping across a blackboard to me. I don't know what I'd do if I had to put up with whistling in the workplace. This person's method of "relaxation" makes everybody else within earshot less relaxed and more stressed. I think that those of you who are adversely affected should write a memo to the supervisor (with all of your signatures) or have this issue discussed at a staff meeting along the lines of "whistling is having a negative effect on office productivity, so the focus is on the workplace rather than the worker. The supervisor should then speak to this employee to TELL him to STOP whistling at work, along with a written note in his personnel file, which could be removed one year after the whistling stops.

Posted by: Anon | July 21, 2008 at 12:12 PM

I've got music running through my mind all the time, so I can empathize with this whistler, but there is something you might suggest to him that he get in the habit of doing. Just as we can shout, talk or whisper, you can easily control the volume of your whistling to a "whisper." Only you can hear yourself, unless you are 18" from your co-worker, and it should satisfy that musical urge that calms you, without bothering others.

Posted by: Karen in Seattle | July 25, 2008 at 01:23 PM

I think a man who whistles is a sign of a happy, content man. These days you don't see a lot of people who seem happy and content with their lives, so I suggest you lighten up.

Posted by: DJ | August 08, 2008 at 12:53 PM