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## Sharing a hotel room on a business trip - is it ok?

Despite an exhausting day of business travel, Ariana cannot sleep. Instead, she sees the clock in her hotel room slowly progress from 1:02 to 3:57 without her catching any ZZZs. While jet lag and an unfamiliar environment certainly contribute to her inability to get comfortable, the main problem is her colleague Patricia. Wearing a CPAP for sleep apnea, Patricia sounds exactly like Darth Vader.
"Didn't this Sith in Curlers already cause enough trouble today?," Ariana thinks as she readjusts her pillow. Earlier, Patricia "came across" Ariana's birth control pills in their shared bathroom. (Ariana remains convinced they were at the bottom of her travel tote). This discovery led Patricia to offer some grandmotherly advice about not waiting too long into a marriage to have children. "I came here for a trade show, not a family planning conference," Ariana thought as she held her tongue.

As sunshine starts creeping through the curtains, Ariana knows one thing for certain: She will never again share a room on a business trip. And if her company is too cheap to provide a private room, she will just stay home or maybe even look for a new job.

From a managerial perspective, room sharing may sound like a good idea (or at least not a big deal). The measure cuts travel-related expenses, which benefits the company financially. Or, it keeps extra money in the business travel budget. Dollars are available to attend a greater number of events or bring along more staff members.

Some leaders claim to see shared hotel rooms as a team-building experience. Colleagues receive the opportunity to hang out and learn more about each other. Managers reason that having a roomie on a work trip cuts down on loneliness when away from home.

As Ariana's experience shows, however, employees may view the travel policy to share rooms quite differently. Here, we look at why a company policy to provide each person with his or her own room might be in everyone's best interest.

## Separate rooms retain boundaries

Managers encourage professionalism in the workplace. They want cordial interaction among employees but generally discourage oversharing or prying into someone else's business. Likewise, they expect workers to dress appropriately and exhibit good hygiene. Such things contribute to an environment where people feel comfortable around one another.


When you ask that employees share rooms, all this goes out the window. Workers get first-hand looks at their roomies. Such glimpses can cause discomfort or tension. Will you look at Bill the same way the next day after learning he always downs three shots of tequila before bed to help him sleep? Can you ever unsee Christine in her flimsy nightgown she says she must wear because of her horrible hot flashes? And good luck facing your colleague at breakfast the next morning after you stunk up your shared bathroom!

Rather than promoting bonding, making workers double up may actually pull them apart. Besides the potential for embarrassment, you run the risk of colleagues judging one another or obtaining new information for the gossip mill. Ask yourself if the money saved is worth this risk.

## People need downtime and a good night's rest

Travel in and of itself stresses out many people. Some dislike flying or driving long distances. Others hesitate to leave a spouse or find themselves worrying about what their kids are doing. Even a time zone change or a different bed can prove bothersome. Add to the mix potential business-related challenges: dealing with fussy clients, making endless small talk with new people, working more hours than normal, or struggling to learn new material.

After a long day, workers crave their own space. They want to make phone calls home without others listening. They want to watch TV without worrying that the sound is bothering a roomie who is trying to read. They want to remove make-up, put on old sweats, and chill without concerns about how they look to someone else. Bottom line: They want to be "off" work, not "on," at the end of the day.

This freedom to recharge alone allows workers to return to business duties the next day feeling refreshed. The solitude also gives them maximum opportunity to create an environment conducive to sleeping well. They are not subject to somebody else's snoring, nor do they need to worry about their own. They can adjust attire, temperature, and lighting to their preferences. If they feel like falling asleep with the radio on, so be it.

## Single rooms eliminate potential legal and safety issues

Giving each employee his or her own room is considered a courtesy that benefits morale and productivity. No law exists that prohibits employers from requiring employees on business travel to share a hotel room. However, companies that make colleagues share rooms should realize that they might set the stage for some

As much as you might want to believe it would not happen, sharing quarters increases the risk for theft. One person can rifle through a purse, invade a jewelry bag, or copy confidential information while the other sleeps or showers. Even if it later turns out that the missing bracelet was actually left at home, the accusations and distrust can cause long-term relationship damage.

In our post-pandemic world, some people remain very vigilant about precautions such as handwashing, social distancing, using sanitizer, and staying away from others if displaying any symptoms. Other people are more lax. If the two employees sharing a room are of different mindsets, problems can ensue - especially if they do end up getting sick.

Employers assign same-sex roommates in order to reduce the chances of sexual harassment or general uncomfortableness. This way of thinking assumes certainty of each person's identity and ignores the fact that many people keep preferences private. Single rooms for all avoids the issue altogether.

Be particularly careful about asking a worker with a disability to share a room with someone else. The arrangement could force the disclosure of medical information the person does not want to share. You could possibly be in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by putting an employee with an accommodated medical condition in a situation that lacks full privacy regarding prescriptions, medical equipment, and the like.

Realize, too, that you may know nothing about the medical conditions of staff members who have never asked for ADA accommodations. Someone who takes antidepressants or gives himself insulin shots may do so out of the eyes of others and prefer to keep it that way. A single room provides the space to attend to health matters without fear of discovery or judgment.

## Alternative ways of saving money

Many leaders - especially those at small companies, startups, and nonprofits - argue that they cannot afford to provide individual rooms. They recognize the inconvenience but feel they lack a choice.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) offers these cost-saving alternatives to room sharing:

- Same-day travel, where possible.
- Renegotiation of the corporate rate with the hotel chain.
- Use of a less expensive hotel chain.
- Reduction of travel costs in other areas, such as meal and alcohol per diems and transportation.
- Virtual meetings.

When talking about travel arrangements, ask (without pressure) if anybody would like to double up. Workers who are good friends may enjoy hanging out together. Or, you might have some nervous types among your group who would rather room with a colleague than stay in a hotel room alone.

Could you employ a travel policy in which employees can pay the difference between a private and a double room out of their own pocket? The possibility exists, but experts generally discourage the idea. The company looks cheap, and resentment builds among workers who cannot afford to pay.

Constructing a company policy of giving each employee a separate room may ultimately result in fewer trips or participants in order to stay within budget. While not ideal, many bosses and employees see this trade-off as worthwhile. Remember, happy employees make better brand ambassadors wherever they travel, and they bring a positive attitude back to the office when they return.

