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## Tricky Workplace Issues and How to Address Them

Your small business clients will inevitably face difficult workplace situations. Common issues, like time off requests, may be easier to prepare for, but uncommon scenarios can be tricky. Here are six challenging scenarios along with best practice tips that you can share with your clients:

### 01 EMPLOYEE CRASHING AT THE OFFICE



**An employee has been living out of his office for several weeks. His supervisor has just discovered the situation.** Establish a policy on being at the office after hours, and apply it fairly and consistently. At a minimum, inform employees that time spent at the office is for work time and that your company policy prohibits sleeping at the office overnight.

### 02 SMELLY FOOD

**A few employees have complained about a co-worker eating smelly food at her desk.** It's a best practice to request that employees eat in a lunch or break room, rather than at their desks. Remember that food might be representative of an employee's national origin or religion, so apply your lunch policy consistently and fairly to avoid implicating nondiscrimination laws.



### 03 LUNCH THIEF

**Employees are complaining about someone stealing their lunches.** Consider rules that expressly prohibit employees from taking food that does not belong to them. In addition, outline circumstances where it may be acceptable for employees to *help themselves* (such as when there is leftover food from a company luncheon).



### 04 CLUTTERED WORKSPACE



**An employee complained that a co-worker is a hoarder and that the co-worker's workspace is a mess.** Meet with the co-worker privately and review your company's policy on maintaining a neat and

orderly workspace. Document all conversations and actions taken to address the issue. The co-worker's behavior may be the result of an underlying condition so be sensitive and avoid using terms like *hoarder* or *hoarding*. If you learn that he or she may have a disability, begin an *interactive process* to discuss how the disability impacts their behavior. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and similar state laws, you may be required to provide reasonable accommodations, such as time off to receive counseling or providing containers for storage and organization.



### 05 LOUD TALKER

**Employees have complained that colleagues talk so loudly on their phones that they have trouble getting work done.** In addition to asking employees to keep their voices down when on the phone, designate certain enclosed areas of the workplace as quiet zones or places where employees can make phone calls. If your facility has an open floor plan, consider sound-absorbing barriers or white noise machines to mask background noise.

### 06 LONG BEARD

**An employee is growing a long beard, but company policy requires beards to be trimmed.** If the beard violates your dress and grooming standards, meet with the employee in private and discuss your concerns. Keep in mind that if the employee is growing the beard for religious reasons, you must generally provide an exception to your grooming policy, unless it would impose an undue hardship on your business. Discuss potential accommodations to address the employee's sincerely held religious beliefs and practices if appropriate.



### CONCLUSION:

When approaching any workplace situation, apply your policies consistently and fairly, and remember to comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws.