

Greener offices make happier employees

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Growing plants in the office. Credit: flora.cyclam

According to the 2000 census, Americans office workers spend an average of 52 hours a week at their desks or work stations. Many recent studies on job satisfaction have shown that workers who spend longer hours in office environments, often under artificial light in windowless offices, report reduced job satisfaction and increased stress levels.

How can employers make office environments more conducive to productivity and employee happiness" Try adding some “green” to your office. Not greenbacks—green plants! A research study published in the February 2008 issue of HortScience offers employers and corporations some valuable advice for upping levels of employee satisfaction by introducing simple and inexpensive environmental changes.

Dr. Tina Marie (Waliczek) Cade, Associate Professor of Horticulture in the Department of Agriculture at Texas State University, explained that the project was designed to investigate whether employees who worked in offices with windows and views of green spaces and workers who had green plants in their offices perceived greater job satisfaction than employees who did not have access to these environmental components.

Researchers posted a job satisfaction survey on the Internet and administered the survey to office workers in Texas and the Midwest. The survey included questions about job satisfaction, physical work environments, the presence or absence of live interior plants and windows, environmental preferences of the office workers, and demographic information.

Survey data showed significant differences in workers' perceptions of overall life quality, overall perceptions of job satisfaction, and in the job satisfaction subcategories of "nature of work," "supervision," and "coworkers" among employees who worked in office environments that had plants or window views compared to employees who worked in office environments without live plants or windows. Findings indicated that people who worked in offices with plants and windows reported that they felt better about their job and the work they performed.

Study results showed that employees in offices without plants rated their job satisfaction low, while employees who worked with offices with live plants rated their job satisfaction higher. Additionally, employees in offices with plants rated their statements relating to bosses, coworkers, and their overall nature of work more positively when compared to employees in offices without plants.

When asked about their overall quality of life, results supported that employees with interior plants in their offices tended to consider themselves happier or more content when compared to employees

without plants in their offices. Additionally, the group of employees that did not have either live plants or windows was the only group that stated they were “dissatisfied” with their quality of life.

According to Cade, “there were no statistically significant differences among the categories of “age,” “ethnicity,” “salary,” “education levels,” and “position” among employees who worked in offices with or without plants or window views. However, we did find gender differences. Males who worked in offices with plants rated their job satisfaction higher than males who worked in offices with no plants.” Interestingly, the study found no differences (in level of job satisfaction) in groups of female respondents.

The study supports previous research showing that adverse environmental conditions can have negative effects on employee perceptions of job satisfaction and overall well-being. Findings from the study also support self-reports from employees that job conditions are directly related to their attitudes, including job satisfaction, frustration, anxiety on the job, and turnover rates. Productive, happy employees keep businesses thriving. So, employers — want to keep your employees happy? Bring in some green and open the windows!

Source: American Society for Horticultural Science

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