

**Q: What do you think of March Madness in the office? We tolerate it in our busy law office because we have to, but don't really like it.**

**Mary**

**A:** And people ask me why I don't practice law anymore!

Sure, we all know that the basketball hysteria this time of year gets in the way of things. Folks fill out their brackets, watch games online, chat about how they are doing, and so on.

The most recent issue of Newsweek pegs the figure of lost productivity at \$1.7 billion. But isn't that losing the forest for the trees? It's not big picture thinking.

Figures like that assume that people are busy little bees while at work, humming along, doing their job all the day through, consistently and persistently productive.

But that's not how work works, is it? You work, you surf the net, you work, you get some coffee, you work, you go out for lunch, you work, you take a break, you chat, you work, you go home. Right?

So, while March Madness may, theoretically, get in the way of productivity, all it probably really does it take the place of something else that an employee would be doing instead of work at that moment.

And in any case, March Madness good easily outweighs March Madness bad. For starters, the camaraderie that comes along with bracketology is invaluable. The best workplaces are ones where employees get along, work together, and strive for the common good of the enterprise.

March Madness fosters that.

It gives people something to talk about other than work. It promotes teamwork and makes your office a more pleasant place to work.

Look, people work for all sorts of reasons, work being just one. We work for money, to socialize, to get ahead, for benefits, to learn skills, to be productive, for self-worth, etc. Assuming then that the only thing your staff is supposed to do is think and talk about while work is work misses the boat.

And once you appreciate that work is about more than just work, then you can begin to create an exceptional workplace. And know this too: Once your staff knows you want them to be satisfied whole bees and not just busy little worker bees, they will bend over backwards for you.

It's ironic – the harder you push, the less you will probably get. It is sort of like trying too hard when you golf; you know that is when you do the worst. But as soon as you let go and trust, things flow easier.

Well, that is what March Madness is really all about.

Sure, it has somewhat to do with the greatest sport ever invented, basketball, but equally, it has to do with treating employees right, like adults, letting them have some fun, trusting them enough to know their work will still get done, not being a jerk, and promoting workplace unity.

Great small businesses are dedicated to something bigger than just the bottom line. They value values. That is why March Madness at work should not just be tolerated, but encouraged. It is about creating the kind of business everyone likes to go to every day (well, at least almost every day!)

Someone should figure out a way to measure the value that comes from having a fun, happy workplace. I bet if that ever happens we would see that whatever March Madness costs business in hard productivity loss is made up, and then some, by increased goodwill and loyalty.

So really, the only thing left to say is . . . Go UCLA!

**Today's Tip:** According to the Baltimore Business Journal, “Nearly half of U.S. workers have participated in office pools, and nearly one-quarter have watched or followed sports events on their computers at work, according to a recent survey by Spherion Corp.”

Are you really going to be able to stop the tidal wave, and if you do, at what cost? Better bet: Harness and ride it.