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Open Plan Productivity Survival Tips

Open plan environments are popular for teams with high collaboration, and allow a larger number of people in one space. Many successful organizations have moved to this model including Facebook, Success Magazine, Cisco, Microsoft, Google, and eBay.

If you are one of the many people who would like to understand the unwritten rules of open plan environments, let me break it down for you.

You have no Privacy –assume all conversations can be heard, documents can be seen and you are on 'show'. Need privacy? Step into a conference room or go outside.

Be quiet–Be super conscious of the volume of conversations, music and annoying ring tone on your phone

Stop using speakerphone - it annoys everyone you

Clean up - control your clutter, use drawers, file cabinets and storage space to stay organized and eliminate mess.

Don't be Smelly – do NOT heat up that left over tuna casserole someone lovingly made you for dinner last night (it stinks!) – no one will tell you, however there is unwritten rule of not stinking up the office with your food – especially fish. You might be a rock star working out at lunch, but don't leave you smelly gym bag under your desk for the whole floor to know you worked out. Be sensitive to smells.

Stand up for interruptions – if people constantly stop at your cubicle, stand up! A standing meeting is a quick meeting – they will get to the point, see you are busy and you can help move them along. If you want to make the conversation go even faster, start walking them out of your space!

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Create a 'Do not disturb' sign – create an internal do not disturb sign everyone agrees to. Some clients place a koosh ball on their monitor; others use a red/green sign on the back of their chairs. You could include a whiteboard with an in/out system on it.

Use headphones - educate those around you when your headphones are on, you need to complete something and appreciate their support by not interrupting you.

Book a conference room – if your conversation involves multiple people or you want to use a speakerphone, get a room.

Use passwords and value security –be sensitive about important and confidential documents and conversations. Use screen lock, cabinets that lock if required and be diligent about managing this.

Host a team meeting – encourage the team to set up a set of unwritten rules (let's call them guidelines) for your open plan environment.

Assess comfort – recruit your HR leader to check the ergonomics of the set up of your new open plan. Make sure it is set up for your most productive work.

Speak up – if there is someone doing something in an open plan that is affecting your productivity be a grown up and share it with them. Approach them factually and without emotion, determine a solution and then move on. Open plan success requires team involvement.

With good old-fashioned etiquette we can create harmonious and productive open plan environments for people to work in where everyone can pay attention.