



Impress From Your Desk

YOUR WORKSPACE IS AN EXTENSION OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEMEANOR. AND IN CUBICLE-VILLE, MORE PEOPLE ARE PAYING ATTENTION. *by Daniel Bortz*

APPEARANCE MATTERS—and in the corporate world, that applies to your desktop as much as your dress attire. “Your space speaks to your work mentality, creativity, and organizational skills,” says Sam Gosling, a psychology professor at the University of Texas at Austin and the author of *Snoop: What Your Stuff Says About You*. And with 70% of American employees now working in open-plan offices, as the International Facility Management Association reports, desks are more in the public eye than ever. Ensure that yours sends the right message.

1 SHOW SOME OF YOUR COLORS

Research has found that employees tend to be more productive when they can express their personalities, Gosling says. So make your area your own. But be wary of *over*-personalizing—lining the walls with team pennants or your kid’s artwork, for example—as this can tarnish your professional image. Limit yourself to seven personal

items, suggests Washington, D.C., career counselor Karen Chopra.

2 MINIMIZE PAPER ...

A messy desk could make your manager question your attention to detail or efficiency, says Julie Morgenstern, author of *Organizing From the Inside Out*. Worse yet if your mess keeps you from quickly producing documents upon request. To help reduce the paper you keep, make a cheat sheet defining “trash” vs. “save” items—simply writing that list can be instructive—and post it up as a reminder. Next, create a system to organize “saves.” Not a filer? At least put them in themed piles in labeled bins.

3 ... BUT LEAVE A LITTLE CLUTTER

While untidiness is unbecoming, there’s also a downside to being too neat. “People will wonder when you do any work,” says Chopra. Plus, you may impede your creativity: A recent study at the University of Minnesota found that a disorderly

environment stimulates innovative thinking. The right balance? Make sure at least two-thirds of your desk is visible, says Morgenstern.

4 HAVE A TALKING PIECE

Being able to click with your boss determines your ability to leverage the relationship. So display something that could start a nonwork conversation, suggests Alan Hedge, a Cornell professor who studies the effects of office design on workers. That may be an interactive or interesting object (like your Google Glass) or a photo showing a shared interest (you on the slopes if the boss skis).

5 HIDE EVIDENCE OF LUNCH

Six in 10 Americans regularly eat at their desks, the American Dietetic Association found. Sound familiar? Keep cleaning spray handy. And trash takeout containers promptly. When clients visit the office, Hedge says, “your boss wants it to look like a work area, not a cafeteria.” **M**