

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Gambling at Work: More Than Just a Pool

With March Madness in full swing, office pools are popping up all over the country. While these are incredibly popular and often seen as fun or a team building activity, the fun can become complicated.

Is it legal?

Perhaps the biggest question of these office pools is their legality. In most states, they are illegal and could lead to significant legal issues, such as arrest and possibly incarceration. Though this is atypical, individuals have been arrested over office pools.

How does it impact productivity?

Beyond their legality, these pools can take away from productivity and have an impact on morale. Sure, those who are winning may be in great spirits but those on the other side may see things a little differently.

Whether employees are winning or losing, their work could take a hit by participating in office pools. Employees may be focused on their bets, making choices for their brackets, checking scores, or worrying about whether or not their team is going to win, when they should be focused on work.

It has been reported that over half of employees involved in office pools spend some time during their workday discussing the pool or researching things related to the pool. Some even reported watching games while at work.

How else can they cause problems?

While the issue of productivity is very important to the workplace, it is also important to note that March is also National Problem Gambling Awareness month. Pathological gambling is estimated to affect 8 million Americans, and these kinds of workplace activities can be a great challenge for those dealing with or impacted by a gambling problem.

The impact gambling has on a person and their loved ones can be extraordinary. For each person that is dealing with a gambling problem there are 5-10 affected others, such as family, friends, or coworkers. Though the experience these loved ones go through may not be seen by many, seeing and dealing with gambling in the workplace may be yet another challenging experience for them.

With problem gambling often referred to as the “hidden” addiction, it’s important to be aware that people recovering from problem gambling may not be recognizable in the workplace. And for those who are recovering from a gambling problem this can be a very difficult time deciding whether or not to participate in this “morale building social activity.” For them it could be an alienating experience if they choose not to participate, or it may push them to share their experience with gambling that they may not be comfortable doing. Either way this could add a great deal of stress and anxiety in their lives.

No matter the choice in your office to have a gambling pool or not, it’s necessary to know that it can have an impact on the office. Also, some organization have policies on office gambling, so make sure the office activities you engage in are in compliance with your company’s regulations.

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If you think that someone is struggling with a gambling problem or if it's a concern for you, call your EAP. We can talk with you about your concerns and help you determine the best way to deal with your concern.