Implementation of Smoking Policies

An interview with
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Q: Is there a movement toward nonsmoking policies in the workplace?
A: Yes, and it becomes stronger every day. The success of policies restricting smoking at organizations as diverse as Pacific Northwest Bell, CIGNA Healthplan of Arizona, Ralston Purina, and the United States Indian Health Service has shown that policies can reduce the problems created by smoking in the workplace. The record shows that effective, equitable, and comprehensive policies will clear the air of smoke *and* employee complaints.

Q: Why are organizations restricting smoking in the workplace?
A: They have identified a variety of reasons for restricting smoking on the job. These include: concerns about exposing employees to a known health hazard; responding to employee requests, complaints, and suggestions; the threat of lawsuits from employees unfavorably affected by tobacco smoke; increased expenses created by employees' smoking on the job; the success of organizations that have restricted smoking; and local laws requiring nonsmoking policies. However, the prime issue for most companies is employee morale.

Q: But don't smoking restrictions create more problems for a company?
A: Companies actually document an improvement in employee morale following the implementation of a nonsmoking policy. In a survey, the employees of the City of Seattle were asked if employees should be left to work out smoking-related problems among themselves.

Sixty-eight percent of the employees said no and felt that it was the responsibility of the company to develop a comprehensive policy on smoking. Employees in many companies are tired of fighting over this issue and want sensible solutions.

Additionally, once the policy is in place, management no longer wastes its time and energy on the smoking issue: no fear of impending lawsuits; a reduced likelihood of company fires; cleaner air; and healthier employees.

Q: What kind of policy should companies implement?
A: Companies should consider all the policy alternatives and options so that they can develop policies based on their special needs. In some instances, a total ban is the most effective response to a corporation's circumstances; in others, properly ventilated designated areas are more appropriate solutions.

Q: Can't a company just ban smoking without making a big deal about it?
A: Although this may work for some companies, most organizations prefer a more sensitive approach to this issue. Surveys to document employee reactions, committees to develop policy recommendations, and employee-management meetings to discuss policy alternatives are just three options that have proven successful for organizations restricting smoking. Smoking policies, like any management decision affecting employees, require careful research and planning.

Q: What are the components of a successful policy?
A: There are five progressive steps that a company should take to assure itself a successful smoking control policy.

1. A corporation begins with *management review*, in which a presentation is made defining the issues and the decisions for which management is responsible. The management team then selects a program coordinator, a policy development team, and the work for which the team will be responsible.

2. The first task of the policy development team is to complete a *situation analysis*, or internal information gathering process. This includes surveys and/or reviews of employees, labor relations and contracts, facilities, extant personnel policies, and so on.