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# Playing by the rules



## Modals of obligation

### Reading: Workplace rules

- 1** Do you or your colleagues work under pressure? What do people do to relax and relieve stress at work?
- 2** Read about three companies with unusual ways to relieve workplace stress. Which idea do you like most and why?
- 3** Find words or expressions in the article which mean the same as these phrases.
  - 1 the level of positive feeling that people have about their work
  - 2 producing or achieving a lot
  - 3 restrict, keep something below a certain amount
  - 4 unhappy because you know you have done something wrong
  - 5 a short sleep
- 4** Answer these questions.
  - 1 Who benefits when employee morale is high and why?
  - 2 What are Burton Snowboard's employees allowed to do? What do they have to do?
  - 3 What limit does the Dutch insurance company put on playing computer games?
  - 4 Why does the managing director of Vielife think taking a nap is a good idea?
  - 5 Could the ideas work in your workplace? Would they make you more productive? Why?/Why not?

### Relax the rules and boost productivity

When employee morale is high, everyone benefits. Happy employees are more enthusiastic about their work. That means they're more productive, so employers are happy, too. But it's difficult to be enthusiastic when you're working long hours under pressure. Here are three companies that have found unusual ways to put smiles on their employees' faces. They've relaxed the rules and increased productivity at the same time.

Animals are welcome at Burton Snowboards headquarters in Vermont and employees are allowed to bring their pets to work. They don't have to worry about getting home on time to feed or take care of them and that helps when they need to work late. It costs the company nothing and improves morale. The only rule is 'You must clean up after your pet'.

In most companies, workers can't play computer games because employers think they're a waste of time. But an insurance company in the Netherlands finds that games like patience\* help their workers to relax. They have to limit how long they play but if it's one hour or less a day, productivity increases. Perhaps more organizations should try it.



'You mustn't sleep on the job' is the rule in most companies, but you don't need to worry about it at Vielife, a London-based consulting firm. They have a dark room with a comfortable chair and soft music where employees can go for a short sleep when they're tired. The company's managing director says employees return to work with more energy and they shouldn't feel guilty about taking a nap in the middle of the day.

*patience*: a card game you can play on your computer  
AmE: *solitaire*