

feature

Space, the final frontier

Bosses will get more out of staff if they give them more room, writes **Helen Hawkes**.

According to a 2007 Relationships Forum Australia report, more than 20 per cent of employees work 50 hours or more a week and more than 30 per cent regularly work at weekends.

Two million Australians also spend at least six hours of family time on Sundays working, without compensating for it during the week. It's hardly surprising, then, that many of us crave more personal space and time when we are at work. After all, the office is almost our second home.

Fortunately, most companies are coming to realise that the line between work and private life is becoming blurred, says workplace consultant Andrew May, author of *Flip The Switch* and co-founder of Australia's largest corporate health company, Good Health Solutions.

"People might need to make a

personal call or send a personal email," he says. "This should be acceptable as long as you are [doing] everything the company needs you to do."

More than this, May believes staff also need quiet areas where they can recharge at work and says some forward-thinking companies are creating "breakout areas".

"These are meeting rooms or open spaces where people can go and have a cup of coffee or a brain break," he says. It benefits both the employer and the staff because "you can't be focused on work all day and be productive".

Gary Bertwistle, a keynote speaker and author of *Who Stole My Mojo*, agrees: "Rather than keeping a keener eye on employees, leading companies are realising that people often have their best ideas when they are away from their



Room with a few ... a quiet area can improve output. Photo: Tamara Dean

'You can't be focused on work all day and be productive.'

Andrew May, workplace consultant

computer screen and in a relaxed, comfortable environment."

He concedes it can be difficult for management to give people more personal space but says that having confidence and trust in staff produces the best result.

It's a message he and May alike preach to clients, including financial institutions Colonial First State and Macquarie Bank and global commercial real estate service CB Richard Ellis.

At the Sydney offices of CB Richard Ellis, each floor has a "quiet room" and breakout areas, as well as a meeting room. There are 275 staff.

James Patterson, senior managing director for NSW, says: "The quiet room is a place to relax, or write a report, while the breakout areas have a proper coffee machine, a toaster, a television, reading material and

get away from the working areas. It has certainly increased productivity by providing something extra for staff."

May says if your company isn't enlightened enough to provide "breakout areas", there are other ways of creating more personal space at work.

Bertwistle also thinks "music, pictures, or other [non-work related] items all help to relax the brain and put you in a 'creative space'".

Other ways to work more efficiently, even in a crowd, include isolating yourself, putting a "Do not disturb" sign on your door or workstation, or sticking headphones in your ears (even if you're not listening to anything).

If all else fails, May suggests working in a coffee shop to avoid the constant daily distractions or even working at home. Of course you'll have to

first gig



Kerri-Anne Kennerley, television presenter

"My first real job was for QTO Channel Nine at Mount Coot-tha, Brisbane.

I was 13 years old when I was asked to join Uncle Jim Iliffe for an afternoon children's show called *Everybody In*.

It was a live show, recorded on Saturdays. I remember how excited I was, literally jumping up and down, and I travelled very happily up Mount Coot-tha regularly.

Uncle Jim was a great mentor and I was treated so well. It was there I started to learn the art of television and production, which I am still trying to perfect today. It was a fabulous experience of discipline, timing and having fun.

My first appearance was in a performance of Charlie Drake's *My Boomerang Won't Come Back*, which is very politically incorrect by today's standards.

The director, Bob McLachlan, taught me how the desk upstairs worked and how the camera pictures merged. I really couldn't learn enough.

Luckily for me, most of what I did at that tender age never survived. It was pre-digital - archaic in fact - but every once in a while a few seconds emerges of a teenage blonde with a squeaky voice doing her best."

Peter Hawkins