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How to make gambling in the workplace a safe bet



Photo: [Nicolas Raymond](#)

With the [Super Bowl](#) right around the corner—and [March Madness](#) coming up soon thereafter—many employees will be trash [talking](#) and placing their bets on their favorite [teams](#). But be careful—although it may seem innocuous, in some cases [workplace](#) gambling just isn't a safe bet and the [fun](#) may not be worth the [risk](#).

Know the laws of the land

Before getting together with coworkers for some friendly wagers, make sure that you protect yourself by becoming familiar with the [laws](#) of your state. Although the laws may not prohibit betting among colleagues entirely, there may be some specific guidelines that must be adhered to when participating in an office pool.

"Most states have 'social gambling' laws that allow for office pools, however, all betting must take place in private, entry fees collected need to be distributed in prizes, and the organizer cannot take a cut," said John Scally of [Padilla Speer Beardsley](#), who has been the NCAA Tournament Office Pool Bracket Manger at his company for over ten years. "States have limits on how much the winning pot can be worth, so check your individual state's laws."

If you don't check the laws of your state before getting involved in an office pool, the stakes can be higher than you might think.

"In the vast majority of states, sports betting by an individual is a misdemeanor offense with a year or less of jail time and fines of less than \$1,000. Individuals who run the gambling activity (in the case of the Super Bowl—set up and sell the Super Bowl squares or offer proposition bets on things like who will score first or which team will have the most fumbles) could be found guilty of a felony offense," said Dr. Tim Otteman of [Central Michigan University](#). "These felony offenses could result in jail sentences of up to ten years and fines up to \$100,000."

Know the rules of your company

Even if you are legally free and clear to place your bets in the workplace, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't check in with your company to make sure it's acceptable. Some companies do allow [friendly](#) betting among coworkers to help build camaraderie and [morale](#), while others have a "don't ask, don't tell" approach. In some cases, however, companies strictly prohibit workplace gambling and will enforce the rules stringently—making workers subject to reprimands or firings. These companies will monitor their employees to make sure they aren't engaged in any gambling activities: For example, some companies install computer software that triggers a [security](#) alert whenever employees visit any Web sites with the word "gambling" on them.

Avoid other workplace problems

Even if your company allows workers to bet on sporting events, there may still be some sticky workplace issues that you have to navigate through. For one, not everyone in the workplace will approve of the gambling—whether it is sanctioned by the law and the company or not.

"The workplace is an environment that should foster a team atmosphere," said workplace expert [Dallas Teague Snider](#). "There are people who have personal distain regarding gambling—which can cause a negative environment and destroy cohesiveness in the workplace."

In addition, betting can be a highly [addictive](#) activity and for some people in the workplace, even betting on the Super Bowl or March Madness can trigger a gambling addiction. If a coworker spends a lot of time on the

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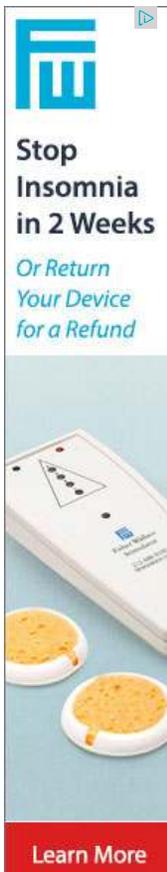
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Internet or telephone looking for gambling information, is placing large bets on multiple sports, or speaks a lot of gambling jargon—terms like over/under, parlay, spread, and juice—these may be signs of a gambling addiction.

Tips for gambling in the workplace

Social gambling in the workplace can be a fun opportunity to bond with coworkers while enjoying your favorite sports—as long as the laws in your state and the rules of your company allow it. The following tips can ensure that betting on the Super Bowl or March Madness in the office is an enjoyable, drama-free activity.

Don't leave anyone out. An office pool should be fun for everyone in the workplace—not just a select few.

"When creating office pools, be sure to be inclusive," said Jodi R.R. Smith of [Mannersmith Etiquette Consulting](#). "Allow everyone, from the mail clerks to the CEO, to have the chance to get in on the action."

Don't badger coworkers. If someone in the office does not want to participate in the pool, don't try to pressure them into it. Respect their wishes and don't try to guilt or bully them.

Remember workplace etiquette. Even though you're having a good time, don't leave your professionalism at the door when placing bets in the workplace.

"It is easy to get carried away talking about the game, scores and bets, however, remember it is an office environment," said Laura A. Barclay, President and Founder of the [Etiquette Centre of Minneapolis, LLC](#). "When talking about your draft picks or yesterday's game, avoid loud talking, shouting across the office cube walls, or congregating outside the workspace of those not engaged in the conversation."

Don't be a sore loser...or winner. Whether you are experiencing the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat, be a good sport. Don't rub it in when you win or pout when you lose.

Make clear rules. If you're in charge of the office pool, make sure that you have clear written rules that are given to all participants. This will decrease the likelihood of any miscommunication later on.

Pony up the money. Be sure to pay any entrance fees or losses as soon as possible. Don't put someone in the uncomfortable position of asking you repeatedly to cough up the cash you owe. Also, be sure to pay taxes on your winnings.

This article originally appeared on my [Workplace Communication Examiner](#) page on February 4, 2010.

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