

Ten Ways To Cope With Your Company's Dumb Rules



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Society is moving fast, but [company rules are not keeping up](#). Many if not most large and medium-sized employers (and way too many small companies, too) still follow outdated and pointless HR policies.

They don't realize how much damage their company rules do. No one can get excited about their work when they're treated like a child or a criminal.

Here are ten ways to cope with your employer's dumb rules.

Taking little steps toward humanizing your workplace will grow your muscles. That's the best exercise you can get at work!

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Ten Ways To Cope With Your Employer's Dumb Rules

1. When you hear or read something that doesn't make sense in your company's handbook or policy manual, ask a question about it. Ask your manager about it. I was an HR leader and luckily my co-workers questioned our policies all the time. Their questions got me to say "Wait, this policy is dumb. Let's scrap it." Unless they are pushed off course, people will keep doing something just because it's what they have always done.

2. Do your research. If your company enacts a rule that horrifies you and your co-workers, get some background on the rule using your awesome internet research skills! HR fads are no different from fashion trends that are hot for a few years and then die off. Most HR fads, unfortunately, are pointless and annoying to employees. Read blogs and listen to podcasts on the topic your company's dumb new rule addresses. That will help you form an argument in favor of reviewing, revising or junking the new policy.

3. When appropriate, break a company rule that doesn't make sense -- this is one of the most common ways bad policies evolve. It goes without saying that you cannot break the law, put yourself or anyone else in danger, skip or cut corners on any process that is subject to regulatory control or mess with anybody's money. Beyond that, rule-bending is a principal way that bad rules eventually get changed. It is time for a lot of dusty workplace rules (rules barring tattoos, fussy dress code policies, requiring doctors' notes when people are sick, etc.) to go extinct. The more irrelevant a rule becomes, the faster it will slide into oblivion. The more often employees ignore the rule, the faster that will happen.

4. It is good to have your manager's support when you are proposing any big idea at work, whether it is a new-product concept or the abolition of the company's Mad Men era performance-review systems. It is good to have your boss's support but it is not essential. Lots of managers will tell "Yes, please bring up that issue to HR -- I support you in doing that!" but they will not say a peep to publicly support you. They are waiting to see how the wind blows. That's okay -- your muscles are big and your mojo tank is full! You can gather like-minded co-workers together, craft a proposal and meet with your HR manager to walk through it.

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5. Chambers of Commerce and Employers Councils publish surveys on HR practices every year. Get one of those surveys and see how common or uncommon your company's most loathsome policies are. You may be able to get an outdated rule abolished just by pointing out that nobody else has that rule in place anymore.

6. Suggest a better alternative. One day my co-worker Frank came into my office to say "We have a bad provision in our travel policy. I can't get reimbursed for a movie in my hotel room." "I didn't know that," I said, "but what do you propose instead?" "I skipped the company-paid dinner and entertainment after a long day in the trade show booth," said Frank. "The Sales VP took everybody out and he would have taken me out too, but I was tired. The bill for dinner and a show was easily a hundred bucks a person, but I can't watch one movie for a few bucks?" "What you say makes sense," I said. "Can you please send one paragraph on the policy you would propose to replace the one we've got?" Frank sent me a paragraph and we enacted a new policy that didn't penalize traveling employees for declining a group dinner invitation to catch a film in their own hotel room. It takes a lot of different brains to run a company, and to make a healthy culture!