



Cannabis in the workplace

As the use of cannabis for medical reasons has become legal, even commonplace, in many jurisdictions, there has been increased pressure on federal, state and provincial governments to legalize and regulate recreational marijuana use. Advocates argue that from a health perspective, cannabis is less harmful than tobacco or alcohol and from a social perspective decriminalization unclogs courts, saves taxpayer money and puts money into government coffers instead of criminal pockets.

This summer, Canada will become the first G7 country to decriminalize the use of cannabis for recreational use (to date only nine U.S. states have done so). As the new legislation looms, many organizations, especially those in safety sensitive industries such as construction, transportation and health care, are concerned and unsure about their rights and responsibilities regarding the use of cannabis in the workplace or with their duties regarding accommodating medical use. Some issues, such as an employer's right to conduct mandatory drug testing, have yet to be decided by the courts but others are more clear cut.

The rights of the employer

The most important point for organizations is that the legalization of recreational marijuana use will not give people the right to use in the workplace. Most companies already have strict health and safety guidelines regarding the use of alcohol or drugs in the workplace and zero tolerance policies for impairment. The decriminalization of cannabis will not change the fact that employees are expected to show up sober, stay sober and perform to expectations – and will face disciplinary measures if they do not. This includes during breaks and lunch hours and at company and client functions.

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Duty to accommodate

There is specific federal, provincial and state human rights legislation that governs an employer's duty to accommodate disabled employees. Accommodations can include moving the employee out of a safety-sensitive position, providing more frequent breaks, implementing alternative scheduling or altering the employee's duties.

Preparing for decriminalization

A 2017 Canadian Cannabis Survey of nearly 10,000 people found that 23 per cent of full and part-time workers admitted to smoking marijuana and 39 percent said they had driven under the influence of cannabis. Some wonder if these figures will increase after the legalization of recreational cannabis use but others think those numbers may actually decrease because decriminalization allows organizations to create and communicate clear policies and procedures regarding recreational cannabis use in the workplace as well as more detailed disciplinary measures for impairment.

To fully prepare for legislative changes, organizations can also:

- **Provide in-house information sessions to employees.** Everyone needs to be aware of legislative changes, revised health and safety regulations and the organization's expectations regarding sobriety and codes of conduct.
- **Provide training to managers, supervisors and front-line staff** about detecting impairment, their duty to accommodate employees using cannabis for medical reasons and what measures to take if employees contravene organizational policies and guidelines.
- **Establish awareness programs.** Communicating the dangers and legal consequences of impaired driving and the risks associated with the abuse of any substance is part of any comprehensive workplace health and safety strategy.
- **Have resources available** for employees who need more information on medical or recreational marijuana or help with a substance abuse issue. Let both employees and managers know that their Employee Assistance Program can offer a wide range of assistance and resources.

The bottom line

Both businesses and business leaders can be found liable under the Criminal Code and health and safety legislation for not ensuring workplaces are physically or psychologically safe. Due diligence means keeping abreast of changes in legislation and/or health and safety guidelines, updating and amending existing workplace policies, training front-line supervisors to detect impairment and implementing and enforcing policies regarding the use of alcohol or drugs in the workplace.

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Managing a team with different work styles

The fact that today's workforce is the most ethnically, culturally and generationally diverse in history is a tremendous advantage for organizations competing in an increasingly global economy, however, it is also a challenge. While there is greater understanding about the impact of culture on working styles, many companies continue to struggle with generational issues. In a 2013 survey, 77 percent of managers cited different work expectations among generations as one of their major challenges.

The generational divide

Before the year 2000, most workplaces consisted of two age groups: those under 40 and those over 40. There were differences in attitude between younger and older employees but almost everyone had similar ways of working. That is no longer the case. Today, four, sometimes five, generations work side by side and managers oversee teams with many different talents, expectations, learning preferences, technical abilities, values, working styles – and especially ways of communicating.

The five age groups that can be found in many organizations are:

- **The Traditionalists (also known as the Silent Generation).** These are people born before 1946 and while most have disappeared from the workforce, some still remain – often in senior or advisory positions or as board members. Traditionalists prefer a top-down chain of command and acknowledgement and respect for their experience.
- **Baby Boomers.** Members of this enormous post-World War II generation are now in their 50s and 60s and dominate the ranks of senior management. They came of age in the optimistic 1960s and 1970s and believe anything is possible if you just work hard enough. Many are starting to retire but many more intend to continue working past the traditional retirement age of 65. They respect authority but prefer to be viewed and treated as equals.
- **Generation X.** Wedged between the enormous Baby Boomer and Millennial generations, this smaller demographic born between 1964 and 1979 are known to be self-reliant, entrepreneurial and independent problem solvers. They expect continuous learning and development and if their job isn't taking them where they want to go, they'll move on.
- **Millennials.** These are the children of the Boomers born between 1980 and 1999 who, by 2025, will make up 75 percent of the workforce. As a group, they are technologically-savvy and better educated than any previous generation. They are known as team players who seek employers and managers who will help them do meaningful work that makes a difference.

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- **Generation Z.** Still mostly in their teens and early 20s, Gen Z's are the most globally connected and sophisticated generation ever. They were born in an era of terrorism, global recession, climate change and political unrest and as a result, are socially conscious and already surpassing the Millennials as influencers, activists and agents of change. They don't remember life without smartphones and have great confidence and skill across social media platforms.

While each generation tends to share certain attributes, no two people will act the same way. Not every Boomer struggles with new technology and not every Millennial is a team player. It helps to understand generational differences but it's more important to get to know individual needs and preferences.

Managing a multigenerational workforce

The key to managing multigenerational teams is flexibility and finding new ways of working. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Offer different working options such as working offsite or flexible work hours. Focus on results rather than on how work gets done.
- Set and communicate clear expectations that are aligned with organizational goals. Younger workers need to know how their work contributes to the business and older workers need to know why a particular strategy, which they may have heard in various forms before, is being tried again.
- Consider teaming younger and older workers together to complete a goal. It's a great way for older employees to acquire new technological skills and younger people to get the mentoring they need to advance their careers.
- Accommodate different learning and communication styles. Boomers favour traditional learning methods like PowerPoint presentations, workshops and handbooks and prefer face-to-face or telephone conversations, while younger workers gravitate towards more independent, interactive, technology-based forms of learning and tend to communicate through texts, social media and emails.
- Get a clear understanding of everyone's professional aspirations. The goals of a Millennial are likely focused on advancement or doing meaningful work whereas Boomers may be more interested in mentoring and reducing their work load as they head toward retirement.

Finally, motivating and engaging different age groups begins and ends by creating fair and harmonious environments in which everyone can succeed. For more information on managing and nurturing employees at all stages of their career, contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program.

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