

1 Corporate culture

1.1 About business Work culture and placements

Internet research

Search for the keywords "work fun". Find out how companies are trying to create a fun atmosphere at work.

Discussion

- 1 You've just started working for a new company. Do you:
- a) wear your best clothes or b) wear jeans and a T-shirt like all the other employees? Why?
 - a) stop work at five o'clock like everyone else or b) stay longer to finish your work? Why?
 - a) share your ideas and opinions at staff meetings immediately or b) say nothing like most of your colleagues? Why?

Scan reading


- 2 Scan the article opposite to find:
- 1 what the monkey experiment demonstrated.
 - 2 seven examples of unwritten rules.
 - 3 what new staff learn about work culture and how they learn it.

The words in grey are explained in the *Wordlist* on page 148.

Discussion

- 3 In small groups, discuss the questions.
- 1 What do you think organizations and companies can do to avoid negative unwritten rules?
 - 2 What unwritten rules do you imagine you might encounter in your country as an intern in:
 - a government department?
 - a small public relations firm?
 - a manufacturing company?Think about:
 - office etiquette, e.g. dress code, punctuality, personal calls, coffee and lunch breaks.
 - relationships with colleagues, management and clients / business partners.
 - autonomy and initiative.
 - 3 Which work culture above would you prefer to work in? Which would be the most difficult to adapt to? Why?

Listening for gist

- 4  1:01, 1:02 Listen to Alessandra, an Italian business student, and David, a British civil service manager, talking about problems they experienced with work placements, and answer the questions.
- 1 What problems did Alessandra and David have?
 - 2 What were the misunderstandings that caused these problems?

Listening for detail

- 5 Listen again. What mistakes did the students and the supervisors make in each case?

Brainstorming and presentation

- 6 In small groups, hold a brainstorming meeting to decide how companies can help interns to adapt to their work culture. Design a set of guidelines for supervisors of interns. Then present your guidelines to another group, and give feedback on the other group's ideas.

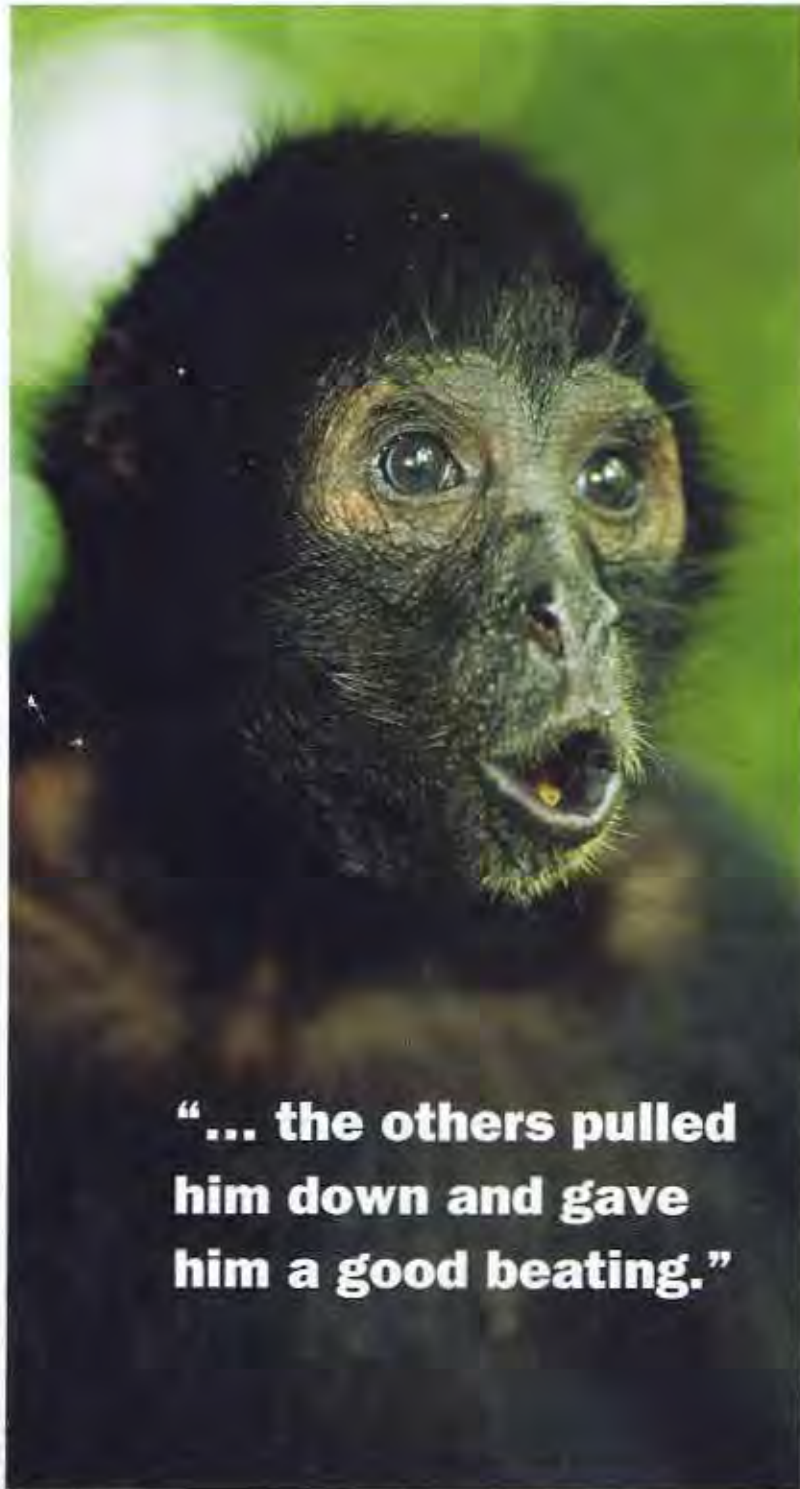
GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISORS

Thank you for agreeing to supervise a student work placement. The following guidelines are designed to help you ensure your intern adapts quickly to the work culture of the organization.

- If possible, give advice about office etiquette by telephone before the beginning of the placement.
- Give the student a copy of the company rules on the first day.
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Monkey business?

Scientists put a group of five monkeys in a cage. At the top of a ladder, they hung a banana. As soon as a monkey climbed the ladder, he was showered with cold water; the group soon gave up trying to reach the banana.



“... the others pulled him down and gave him a good beating.”

5 Next, the scientists disconnected the cold water and replaced one of the five monkeys. When the new monkey tried to climb the ladder, the others immediately pulled him down and gave him a good beating. The new monkey learned quickly, and enthusiastically joined
10 in beating the next new recruit. One by one, the five original monkeys were replaced. Although none of the new group knew why, no monkey was ever allowed to climb the ladder.

Like the monkeys in the experiment, every culture
15 and organization has its unwritten rules. These rules are probably the single most influential factor on the work environment and employee happiness. Though many work cultures embrace positive values, such as loyalty, solidarity, efficiency, quality, personal development and
20 customer service, all too often they reinforce negative attitudes.

In many businesses, an unwritten rule states that working long hours is more important than achieving results. In one medium-sized company, the boss never
25 leaves the office until it is dark. Outside in the car park, he checks to see who is still working and whose office windows are dark. Staff who risk leaving earlier now leave their office lights on all night.

Other common unwritten rules state that the boss is
30 always right, even when he's wrong; if you're not at your desk, you're not working; nobody complains, because nothing ever changes; women, ethnic minorities and the over 50s are not promoted; the customer is king, but don't tell anyone, because management are more
35 interested in profitability.

Often nobody really knows where these unwritten rules came from, but like the new monkeys, new recruits pick them up very quickly, despite the best intentions of induction and orientation programmes.
40 The way staff speak to management, to customers and to each other gives subtle but strategic clues to an organization's culture, as do the differences between what is said, decided or promised, and what actually gets done. New staff quickly learn when their ideas
45 and opinions are listened to and valued, and when it's better to keep them to themselves. They learn which assignments and aspects of their performance will be checked and evaluated, and whose objectives and instructions they can safely ignore. Monkeys may be
50 more direct, but work culture is every bit as effective at enforcing unwritten rules as a good beating.