



CAREERS

By Joyce Lain Kennedy

X-Sm - prev. employment

Job advice for smokers

Dear Joyce: At a recent job interview, I noticed "no smoking" signs in several areas of the office. As a smoker, I am wondering if such company policies are becoming common. M.N., Baltimore, Md.

No, according to a recent survey. The Administrative Management Society found that 84 percent of surveyed firms have no official policies on the rights of smokers and non-smokers on the job.

Only 37 companies out of 302 respondents forbid smoking in specified areas, such as reception rooms or open offices. Of the five companies that do outlaw smoking throughout the premises, two hire non-smokers exclusively.

The old-permissive attitude within companies toward employees who smoke doesn't hold for job interviews. As Bradford Hunt, writing for Management World magazine advises, though the interviewer may give permission, "When you inhale the cigarette, you may exhale the job. Pipes and cigars are taboo."

But suppose you are asked whether or not you smoke. Though most companies have no regulations, the question itself may imply an anti-smoking bias. Suggested responses if you do smoke:

1. If you can't refrain from smoking during work, say "Yes, but I try to be considerate of other people's air space."
2. If you can and intend to refrain from smoking at work, say, "Yes, in social situations."

3. If you aren't sure whether you can refrain from smoking on the job, say, "I don't generally smoke at work, but when I do, I defer to non-smokers."

Never confess you are quitting. Just as being in the midst of a divorce signals emotional turmoil, an admission that you are giving up smoking may be perceived as a red flag signifying nervousness, irritability and tension — characteristics employers can do without.

If you're a non-smoker who objects to having others blow smoke your way, what can be done? Lodging a complaint may bring results. Most companies in the AMS survey said that if confronted with non-smoker protest, they would attempt to negotiate a compromise between the involved employees. Others said they would relocate one of the people. Among alternative solutions were changing the office layout, setting up mechanical air-flow systems and the most novel, sponsoring "Kick the habit" programs.

READER SERVICE: If you're personally ready for habit-kicking and could use an extra boost, send for the 34-page booklet, "Cleaning the Air." It's a compendium of tips on how to quit smoking and stay prepared by the National Cancer Institute. Send your postcard request to Joyce Lain Kennedy, care The Courier-Journal & The Louisville Times, 523 W. Broadway, Louisville, Ky. 40202. The offer ends Dec. 1.

—Tom Foreman

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