

How to focus and stay productive in a noisy open office

While open offices have a lot to offer a workplace in terms of productivity and sociability, they also present a host of challenges.

One of these challenges is the noise, and it's quickly becoming the biggest barrier to a productive and pleasant work day.

- 5 Say what you will about cubicles, but the fact remains: For better and for worse, they offer both real and perceived barriers to noise in the workplace, and they might result in a more restful atmosphere overall.

What's The Problem?

- 10 When open offices first became "a thing," we were told they would bring about positive and dramatic shifts in the way employees work and interact with one another. Were we wrong? Yes and no — depending on how you look at it.

- 15 It's arguably true that doing away with physical barriers in the workplace can encourage greater collaboration and camaraderie among millennial employees, but we've quickly reached the point of diminishing returns. With more collaboration comes more talking. With more talking comes more distractions, and with more distractions come drops in productivity. It seems we've come full circle.

- 20 Surprisingly, even the gadgets and gizmos we use at work each day might be contributing to this phenomenon. Regulatory groups like OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) require acoustic noise testing on many types of equipment, but even these efforts won't completely shut out the hum, whine or buzz of computers, light fixtures, refrigerators or any of the other items you might find in an office setting.

Make no mistake — The open floor plan began with good intentions, but as it turns out, millennials are more likely to complain about noise pollution in open offices than in "traditional" workplaces, and they find excess noise detrimental to their productivity.