

## Headphone etiquette

Written by Julie Desmond

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A good playlist at work is a good thing. People tapping away at keyboards all day say that music makes the day go faster and keeps them focused. Companies have known this for a long time. Before Beats, we had Muzak, soft (yawn) music piped in over a speaker above the cubicles. I once owned real estate in the form of a cubicle immediately under one of those speakers. Not for long.

And before Muzak, there were transistor radios and before that, I don't know, wandering musicians?

Thankfully, we've moved on. Now anyone who wants to can march through a productive, focused day of work to the beat of his own drummer. And therein lies the problem. What if your self-selected, personal concert actually disturbs someone else? Did you know? There is a new kind of etiquette in the workplace, and it has to do with headphones. Put really simply, if you want to avoid annoying your co-workers, remember to ASK.

ASK your manager, "Is it okay if I use my headphones while I'm working?" Depending on your duties, you should know already whether the manager will say yes or no. For example, if you work in a medical clinic, you may have to be alert to hear a phone or speak with a patient, so rocking out privately isn't going to work in that setting. But if your duties are repetitive, if you're doing data entry or shredding documents, you're probably okay. Either way, ask.

ASK your nearby co-workers, "Is my music too loud?" Even if you know it's not, just ask. Sound carries in strange ways. Sometimes a nearby teammate will be able to hear just the bass, which can be worse than actually listening to the full on track. If anyone else can hear your music, it's too loud. Turn it down. Then ask again, "Is this okay?"

ASK yourself, "What do I do while I'm listening?" People hardly notice their own habits sometimes. Do you tap your foot? Hum along? Rap a pen on the desk? For people around you, this can be a huge distraction. Self-awareness is a good thing. If you need to, alter your situation so you're not bothering others. For example, if you're tapping your foot on a carpeted floor, no one is going to notice that. If you catch yourself humming along, turn the volume down slightly, so you can hear yourself. Music is good. Noisy is bad. Try not to be noisy.

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