Passage #4 – Internet Filtering in the Workplace

Extended Response Stimulus Materials:

Source Material #1
Email
From: Justine Timmons, CEO
Sent: Monday, September 24
To: Employees of Niagara Equipment Corp.

Subject: Workplace Internet Use

Beginning next month, we are instituting a new policy for all employees regarding Internet use at work. To limit access to inappropriate and social media websites, we are installing new filtering software that will block those sites on every company-owned computer.

Although management recognizes that the Internet is a valuable tool, especially for our creative department and sales team, we are also aware of the potentially costly downsides to unlimited access. According to a survey by Salary.com, at least 64 percent of employees nationwide admit to visiting non-work-related websites while on the job. This "cyberslacking," as it is called, hurts productivity and wastes company resources. Workers who are distracted by checking their social media sites are clearly not giving their full attention to their jobs.

The other important reason that we are installing filters is to promote a positive workplace for all of our valued employees. When staff members use their computers to access offensive or inappropriate material that can be seen by their fellow workers, this creates a hostile workplace environment, thereby exposing the company to expensive and demoralizing lawsuits. Even social networking sites can lead to legal jeopardy if they are used to bully fellow workers. Other businesses have already faced harassment suits for just such activities.

A committee comprising representatives of each team will be formed to determine which sites to block. Please tell your team leader if you are interested in serving on this committee.

Thank you all for your cooperation and for your commitment to making Niagara Equipment the best place to work in Buffalo!

Best,
Justine Timmons, CEO

Source Material #2
From: Honoria Bell
Sent: Tuesday, September 25
To: Justine Timmons, CEO
CC: Employees of Niagara Equipment Corp.

Subject: Workplace Internet Use

Dear Ms. Timmons,

We, the undersigned employees of Niagara Equipment Corp., urge management to reconsider the installation of Internet-filtering software. While we recognize that it is in all our interests to promote productivity and a positive workplace environment, we believe that blocking our free access to the Internet is the wrong way to go about this. First, there is more to that Salary.com statistic that you cite than meets the eye. Most of the "cyberslackers" in that survey surf the Internet for only one hour per week. This is comparable to taking a walk to the water cooler or chatting about last night's game with a colleague. According to author Laura Vanderkam, "no one can get through a whole workday without taking a break." In fact, one 2009 study found that workers who could occasionally check the Internet were happier at work than those who could not. Another study, this one from the National University of Singapore, found that Web-surfing refreshed employees, actually making them more productive, not less.

Second, one important function of the Internet is as a communication tool, just like the telephone. Just as workers are permitted to make brief personal calls at work, so should they be allowed to use the Internet for the same purpose.

Third, we believe that the best way to grow as a business and protect the company from lawsuits is to hire responsible employees and then demonstrate your trust in them. Instead of treating us like children, why not establish clear guidelines concerning Internet use? All employees can understand the reasons that offensive websites are off limits.

Finally, installing an Internet filter may create resentment and tempt some employees to find ways around the filters. It is an unnecessary solution in search of a problem.

Thank you for your attention.

Honoria Bell, Chief Designer and the undersigned 53 employees

Extended Response Prompt:

Analyze the arguments presented in the two emails.

In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

References

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