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ASK ANNIE

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Follow-up: Is a messy office hazardous to your career?

Many thanks to all who wrote to comment on the column a couple of weeks ago about whether a messy office is a career liability. The vast majority of you pooh-poo the notion that an office that looks like a bomb site reflects badly on its occupant - as long as said occupant is producing great work.

"What your expert is really saying is that there is only one correct way to do a job, and that is in a neat and orderly fashion," writes a reader named Chris T. "While we're at it, why don't we make everyone wear white shirts, burgundy ties, and charcoal suits? Trying to make everyone conform is a sure-fire way to lose some very talented people."

Some of you even confess to using a chaotic office as a means of fending off distracting colleagues.

"I am a pathologist, and I keep an unkempt messy office for the express purpose of keeping people from stopping by to socialize," writes Ben. "This reduces chit-chat sessions and makes me the most productive pathologist in our group." (As for what exactly a pathologist could leave lying around that might make people uncomfortable, it's probably better not to speculate.)

Still, I'd be remiss not to mention an observation from the only CEO who answered my query, Joel Martin of Martin Racing Performance, a Miami distributor of motorcycle parts.

"I have a double standard like most bosses," Martin admits. "I expect my employees to have clean and organized desks even though my own desk is a mess."

A word to the wise: Just because your boss is a packrat may not mean it's okay for you to be one, too.
