

Employee Workplace Theft: Tips to Stop Workplace Theft

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Is workplace theft really that bad? Is it something really necessary to be alarmed about? If you own or operate a business, it is.

According to [American DataBank](#), \$120 billion annually are lost through employee theft. And in his book ([Biting the Hand that Feeds](#)), Terry Shulman relates that 20% of every company's dollar is spent on employee theft. Those numbers aren't huge...they're astronomical.

Face it, many of us in our previous day jobs somehow found that we brought home company pens, company sticky notes, company staplers, etc. It seems petty. But add up the number of employees in this country and that petty number grows. And admittedly, it's more than pens.

Psychologists say that it's not a matter of need, but rather a matter of contempt: feeling as if your company owes you something more than they're paying. Whether or not you've stolen when you were an employee, most people have felt that at one time or another.

Now you're the employer. What are your employees bringing home? How can you put an end to employee theft?

Although it's not the only answer - and it certainly won't eliminate employee theft - you can start by working hard at creating a great work environment. Employees who like their job and feel that they are fairly treated and fairly compensated are less likely to steal.

Encourage a sense of ownership. If employees are paid off of the bottom line (for example, in a salary plus profit-tied commission) they will be less likely to steal since they are simply taking money out of their own pockets in exchange for a spare pack of staples.

Reduce opportunities to steal: Keep a minimum of smaller items around. Don't provide an open closet that contains boxes and boxes of sticky notes. Keep the closet locked and give the manager the key. Rather than putting a stapler on everyone's desk, have a "staff resource center" where the stapler, scissors, paper cutter, etc. are kept. (Of course, there is a trade off when it comes to productivity: Is your staff constantly getting up from their desk to staple something? You'll need to

find the balance).

Employees are more likely to steal from you when angered or treated unfairly in some way - either by staff members, vendors, or customers. If an employee is treated harshly by anyone, give them a little cooling off period: tell them to take a couple hours off. Of course it's good for them, but it's also good for productivity and to keep theft down. In the end, you won't miss their work time because they wouldn't have been nearly as productive.

Not all theft occurs in the office: Monitor expense reports carefully for expensed meals, hotels, and mileage. Are the prices appropriate? To help reduce mileage expenses, consider working out an arrangement with a rental car company for a mileage discount. Clearly outline for staff ahead of time what you will cover (i.e., hotel rooms and restaurants) and what you won't cover (i.e., in-room movies, room service, bar tabs).

A major moment of theft occurs when an employee is let go. After the process, accompany them to their desk and stay with them while they pack up. In some difficult cases, consider packing up their desk for them.

It's a shame that these measures have to be taken, but the reality is that people are far from perfect. Rather than strictly policing your staff (which could actually result in MORE theft), use some of these ideas to help your staff do the right thing.