



Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.
The original outplacement company

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH MADNESS TAKES BACKSEAT TO RECESSION AMONG EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES

CHICAGO, March 11, 2009 – With the onset of March Madness just a week away, the nation’s employers typically would be bracing for a productivity drain, as workers research teams, fill out office pool brackets and watch live, streaming feeds of the games online. However, companies may have little reason to worry this year, according to one workplace authority.

“In this economy, employees are disinclined to do anything that might put their jobs at higher risk than they already are. Meanwhile, employers have bigger issues to address than whether a few workers are using work time to fill out betting pool brackets or sneaking peeks at games online. Even if this is occurring, companies would be better served by allowing this minor distraction during these stressful, anxiety-producing times,” said John A. Challenger, chief executive officer of global outplacement consultancy Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

“In light of the fact that employers and employees have more important things to worry about, we feel that any attempt to estimate the impact of March Madness on productivity would be counterproductive and inappropriate. We hope to continue this lighthearted look at the intersection of sports and the workplace once the economy is on surer footing,” said Challenger.

“With worker stress and anxiety on the rise as job security declines, a little distraction could be just what the doctor ordered. The key for companies is finding a way to maximize the positive aspects of March Madness so that they outweigh any perceived negatives,” Challenger noted.

“Companies can use this event as a way to build morale and camaraderie. This could mean putting televisions in the break room, so employees have somewhere to watch the games other than the Internet. Employers could also offset productivity losses by using the Tournament to boost morale. Employers might consider organizing a company-wide pool, which should have no entry fee in order to avoid ethical and/or legal questions,” Challenger suggested.

“In the past, one company we contacted allowed workers to wear their favorite team’s apparel for a small fee, which was then donated to a local charity. Another held a free office pool, which rewarded the top four a free lunch and the overall winner a gift certificate,” said Challenger.

Challenger offered some additional ideas on ways companies can co-opt March Madness excitement to build a loyal and more productive workforce.

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MARCH MADNESS WORKPLACE MORALE BOOSTERS

Hold team sweatshirt day. Relax the dress code (for employees not meeting with customers) for the first Thursday and Friday of the tournament so that fans can wear the sweatshirt of their favorite college team (even if the team did not qualify for this year's tourney).

Offer flexible schedules. On the four days when tournament games are played during work hours, allow workers the opportunity to arrive early so they can work a full shift and still leave in time to see the games.

Organize a company pool. Employees can enter **free of charge** and the winner is given a gift certificate to a restaurant or store.

Keep a bracket posted. For employers without company-wide Internet access, keep a large, updated tournament bracket in a common area so workers can check their teams' progress.

Stay tuned. Keep television in breakroom tuned to coverage to eliminate the need for workers to sneak peeks online, which can slow everyone's internet connection as bandwidth is constricted.

Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.®