

Hard day at the office

● No photos

● Ask for toilet breaks

● No birthday cakes

Linda Parri

WA bosses are making workers ask permission to use the toilet and banning them from bringing birthday cakes and sugary treats to work.

Other employees are required to arrive early for their shifts. One company has banned staff from asking customers, "How are you?"

Recruiters also say bosses have banned hot food from being eaten at the desk and stopped family or personal photos being displayed.

Salvatore Testa, who worked at the WA College of Teaching call centre, said he had to ask to go to the toilet.

"As the sole person in my department, I had to ask my manager if it was OK to go to the toilet," he said.

Mr Testa claims the company would also require staff to arrive 15 minutes before their shift. He said: "If your shift started at 8am and you were there at 7.46am, you were marked late."

Suzanne Parry, director of the WA College of Teaching, said her staff had to "notify" co-workers when they were going to the toilet.

"People do have to be considerate of other team members and notify them if they won't be receiving calls for a period of time," she said.

Dr Parry denied staff were required to arrive 15 minutes before their shift.

"Our staff have to arrive in time for them to be logged on and ready to work," she said. "That only takes about a minute. So as long as they arrive one minute before their shift, it's fine."

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But UnionsWA secretary Simone McGurk said: "An employer can't require that you log on and be present and be ready for work before they start to pay you."

Ms McGurk said employees had a right to privacy and shouldn't be required to notify management when they were going to the bathroom.

Managing director of Messages On Hold Kym Illman doesn't allow his staff to ask customers, "How are you?"

His staff are told to congratulate the customer on a recent achievement or ask, "How can I help you?"

Mr Illman also forbids staff to say "sorry" to customers because he considers it a "selfish word".

They must give the power to the customer to forgive, by asking "please forgive me" or "please accept my apology".

A staff member at musical instrument chain Allans Music and Billy Hyde said sales staff must ask customers a strict set of questions.

The WA staff member, who did not want to be named, said staff must "break the ice" with a non-business related question about things such as the weather or footy.

He said they also must ask customers

three open-ended questions that don't require a yes or no answer and conclude the conversation by asking if they will be purchasing an item.

He said every store was subjected to an undercover "mystery shopper" once a month and staff who failed to ask the questions had to forgo a \$300 monthly bonus.

Jane McNeill, Perth director of recruitment company Hays, said in light of Perth's skills shortage, companies should avoid "unrealistic" policies.

"Some of the more extreme examples of unrealistic policies we've seen are 'no hot food to be eaten at an employee's desk' or 'no personal photos', while some organisations don't allow employees to celebrate birthdays, let alone have a birthday cake," she said.