

Ear Buddies

The company water cooler, a symbolic gathering post for employee chatter disguised as a refreshment center, has gurgled into a resting place for analog office tools.

I read a brief story about digital chatter in the Jan/Feb edition of The Atlantic.

While reading the story, I could only respond with a deep “Duh!” This is the sentence that evoked my guttural response:

“Workplace technology is revolutionizing how we communicate in the office.”

The horse left that barn many years ago.

Companies discovered open office structures in the 1950s. Walk through any collection of cubicles or divider-free tables and you’ll find digital walls guarding the mind-space of knowledge workers. The walls bear striking resemblance to earbuds or, perhaps, headphones.

Workers connect with virtual chat in their workspace. They connect through social media, instant messaging, texts and email. Meaningful conversations occur throughout the workday without too much personal interruption.

There is no need to knock on the digital office door. The sign for “DND” is understood. Earphones are closed office doors. At least in theory.

What hasn’t changed, and probably won’t, is that workers still find time for social chat away from their cubicles. People need time to talk with each other to share, laugh and cry. Facebook doesn’t satisfy.

Open offices have many ears. Our work teams will always find a place for a private talk.

Love leaders encourage analog talks. The cooler may have disappeared, but the need for human interaction remains strong.

When you see earbuds, just smile at the sign of progress.