

Social Distancing A New Workplace Norm

In relatively short order, a number of forced changes have been imposed on workplaces across the world. Compliments of COVID-19, these changes have been necessitated towards safeguarding the health and safety of workers. It is possible that safety and health protocols are now being taken more seriously. These have invariably changed the way employees interact with colleagues, customers and clients. Further, the changes have imposed the need to demonstrate more responsible individual behaviour.

The practice of social distancing is now widely promoted. This practice may be seen as a remedy towards ensuring persons que in an orderly fashion with adequate distance apart. From a hygienic point of view, it gives the individual an ease as it relates to personal space. The benefit of having personal space, rest in the opportunity it offers for observing confidentiality. The introduction of social distancing in offices and in some businesses where it is common to have persons working in a clustered space, comes as a welcome relief. It cannot be ruled out that the call for the observance of social distancing will have serious implications for the operations of some businesses. Social distancing as a new norm in the workplace, will impose some immediate challenges. This may require the need to revisit the layout of some business places, so as to accommodate the engaging of customers and clients.

It would be interesting to know how social distancing will be managed in a school setting, where it is almost impossible to restrict or eliminate socialization or personal contact. The burning issue which needs to be addressed is the implication which social distancing has for class sizes. In public schools for the most part, the average class size is thirty students. If social distancing is to be taken seriously, then good reasoning would suggest that class sizes are to be reduced by half. The nature of the forced change means that the expansion of the school plant may become a consideration, based on the need to adequately accommodate all students on a full-time basis.

Evidently, social distancing threatens to revolutionize the way we live, function and do business. Invariably the business sector which depends largely on face to face interactions and through traffic, will seriously feel compromised and constrained.

Social Distancing A New Workplace Norm: Dennis de Peiza: Labour & Employee Relations Consultant: 12 June, 2020

While social distancing is good for the promotion of order and discipline, there are questions to be raised about how good it can be for business. There can be no denial that social distancing is desirable, but at the same time the sustainability as a new norm is questionable.

Social distancing must not be used as an excuse to reorganize the formal workplace, where workers are so displaced that they are required to work remotely, removed from any human contact, and engaging in workplace comradery. Social distancing must not be allowed to distract or move away from the human resource needs of the workplace.

In societies where the tourism product is the backbone of the economy, it is difficult to understand how social distancing would assist with the growth and development of the sector. Equally so, it can be expected that if social distancing is the new norm, then the entertainment industry is likely to be stifled.

It is a fact that the value of social distancing in its intent, is that of preserving the health, safety and wellness of workers, customers and clients but it should not be dismissed as a nuisance or inconvenient measure. To the contrary, it ought to be seen as giving life to occupational safety and health legislation and standards which are to apply to the workplace.

Admited the many concerns regarding the introduction of social distancing, it can be reasonably argued that it has its place in ensuring every individual has his/her personal physical space.