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Fantasy Football Sacks Productivity

ANNUAL DISTRACTION COULD COST EMPLOYERS NEARLY \$16 BILLION, BUT THAT'S NO REASON TO SHUT IT DOWN

CHICAGO, August 18, 2015 – As fantasy sports and, more specifically, fantasy football continue to grow in popularity, so might the financial impact on the nation's employers. However, one workplace authority says companies should not crack down on workers managing their teams at the office, but instead embrace the fantasy fanaticism.

Over the 17 weeks of the NFL preseason and regular season, millions of Fantasy Football participants -- an estimated 66 percent of whom are employed full time -- will be researching, building and managing their fantasy football teams. Many will do this during work hours from cell phones, tablets or the speedy internet connections found in most modern workplaces.

The cost of this workplace distraction could approach \$16 billion in lost wages paid to workers managing their teams during business hours, according to an estimate from global outplacement consultancy Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

"That figure represents just one hour of unproductive work time each week during the 17-week stretch in which fantasy football becomes an obsession for millions of Americans. However, before getting worried about fantasy football leading to the economy's collapse, it is important to understand that the figure accounts for a tiny fraction of all the wages paid out over that period," said John A. Challenger, chief executive officer of global outplacement and executive coaching consultancy Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

"Unless you are J.J. Watt, who appears to put in 100 percent during every hour of his workday, it is impossible to reach full productivity. We would burn out within a week. Just look at all of the negative attention given to Amazon.com in recent days for pushing its employees to their limits with a pace and set of expectations that reportedly leave many workers crying at their desk, at some point. Whether you believe the reports or not, most people agree they would not want to work for the type of employer depicted in those reports," said Challenger.

“We need distractions during the day, whether it’s checking Facebook, scanning Twitter, buying something at Amazon.com, or managing one’s fantasy football team. It may seem counter-intuitive, but those short periods of being unproductive help workers be more productive in the long run. They also help boost morale, lower turnover and keep our creative juices flowing. For these reasons, employers may not only want to avoid clamping down on fantasy football, but may want to encourage it within the office,” said Challenger, who belongs to multiple fantasy football leagues, including one managed by an employee at his firm.

Forty percent of respondents in a 2006 Ipsos survey said fantasy sports participation was a positive influence in the workplace. Another 40 percent said it increases camaraderie among employees. One in five said their involvement in fantasy sports enabled them to make a valuable business contact.

Back to that seemingly wild estimate of financial losses related to fantasy football; Challenger based it on the number of fantasy football players nationwide multiplied by average hourly wages.

According to the latest data from the Fantasy Sports Trade Association, approximately 56.8 million Americans and Canadians will participate in fantasy sports this year. That is up from about 12.6 million in 2005. The Association reports that 66 percent or about 37.5 million of those participants are employed full-time.

Meanwhile, the latest figures from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that Americans on private-sector payrolls earned an average of \$24.99 per hour in July. So, each hour of wasted work time among the 37.5 million fantasy sports enthusiasts costs employers \$937,125,000 (37,500,000 X \$24.99).

Multiply that figure out over the four weeks of the preseason and 13 weeks of the regular season, which is the duration for most standard fantasy leagues (excluding playoffs), and the total loss comes to \$15,931,125,000.

“Of course, many fantasy football fans will spend time, some during work hours, trying to debunk this figure. And, we are not suggesting that this figure is not debunkable. It can definitely be broken down and picked apart, mostly because it actually would be impossible to measure the true impact of fantasy football on productivity or a company’s bottom line,” said Challenger.

“However, one cannot dismiss the idea that fantasy football is not wildly popular or deny that it has crept its way into the workplace. It may be immeasurable in terms of real dollars and cents, but undoubtedly there are workers, managers and supervisors across the country who can attest to the fact that fantasy football is now a common subject around the watercooler, in offices or during meetings,” he added.