

*by Boyd Byers*

## **The Wild, the Innocent, and the Super Bowl Shuffle**

Super Bowl Sunday is February 3. About 140 million Americans will watch the game on TV, and 20 million will attend a Super Bowl party. While doing so, we'll eat 20 million pounds of potato and tortilla chips. Let's look at some other Super Bowl-related numbers for you to ponder in your role as HR quarterback. (Like many sports fans, I'm also a statistics geek.)

### ***Productivity sacked***

U.S. employers suffer over \$820 million in lost productivity the week before the Super Bowl, a consulting firm says. That estimate is based on the assumption that the average employee spends 10 minutes a workday talking about the game, planning parties, participating in betting pools, or engaging in other Super Bowl-related distractions. Employers can count on losing another \$156 million in unproductive wages on the Monday after the game, when employees discuss their take on the game, commercials, and the halftime show (Heaven help us if there's another "wardrobe malfunction").

So what should you do about it? Probably nothing (other than the gambling part — more on that later). While you need to keep things under control and make sure work gets done, cutting employees a little slack to banter about sporting events can improve office camaraderie and boost morale, which in turn may increase productivity in the long run.

### ***A case of the Super Bowl Mondays***

An estimated 1.4 million Americans call in sick the day after the Super Bowl (in addition to the everyday absences that occur regularly). Those unscheduled absences cost employers millions of dollars in lost productivity. If the "Super Bowl hangover" is a problem at your company, tell employees that if there's a chance they might need to come in late or miss work on Monday because of a Super Bowl party, they should ask to take the time off in advance. It's easier to plan for and deal with scheduled absences than unscheduled ones.

A group of football fans has launched a grassroots campaign and is collecting petition signatures to designate Super Bowl Sunday as a new national holiday, to be officially observed on Monday after the big game. (Read about it for yourself at [www.SuperBowlMonday.com](http://www.SuperBowlMonday.com).) You shouldn't bet on it happening.

### ***Don't drown in the pool***

Speaking of betting, 58 percent of HR professionals in a recent survey reported that their employees are involved in office Super Bowl pools. But gambling is against the law, and in Kansas, it's also illegal to allow your premises to be used for commercial gambling. While law enforcement officials have more pressing concerns than cracking down on office sports pools, it's still something to think about.

If your company has a policy against workplace gambling, make sure it's clear on whether it applies to low-stakes sports pools. If it does, remind employees about the rule before major sporting events like the Super Bowl.

If you like the idea of a Super Bowl pool to foster camaraderie and pump up morale but you're concerned about the legal risks, have the company sponsor a contest, let everyone play without paying an entry fee, and award prizes to the winners. It's not illegal gambling if participants don't have to put their own money at risk.

Of course, the Super Bowl isn't even the biggest productivity drain among sporting events. That honor goes to March Madness, the NCAA basketball championship tournament. You get to deal with that one next month!

### ***He said it***

*If it's the ultimate game, how come they're playing it again next year?*

— Duane Thomas, former Dallas Cowboys running back