The New Grad's Guide to Decorating a Cubicle

by Mary Lebeau

Welcome to your cubicle. Your home away from home. The place where, as an average full-time employee, you’ll spend more than 2,000 hours in the next year. Usually it’s beige, gray, or another color equally as bland, with the standard desktop, a telephone, a color-coordinated chair, and, if you’re lucky, a shelf or bin and some file drawers.

Were you dreaming of the ideal office, the one in the corner with the view of the park, and a refrigerator in the corner? Well, wake up and face reality—but be assured you’re in good company. In the business world, many CEOs and captains of industry began their own careers in a 10-by-10 cube. For most American workers, there’s no place like their cubicle!

Since you will be spending so much time in your workstation, you’ll want to make it your own—and that means decorating. So should you bring in your “Girls of Summer” calendar, or display your collection of American League baseball caps?

The answer is a resounding “no!” This isn’t your dorm or your bedroom and, yes, it does matter what you have in your ‘personal’ space.’ After all, cubicles are nondescript for a reason—they’re designed for work. Nothing you put in your cubicle should distract you from that focus.

But that doesn’t mean you have to leave your walls blank and your shelves empty. It’s okay (if your employer allows) to personalize your area. How do you determine what is permissible décor for your cubicle? Start by taking a look around. See how others have their cubicles decorated, and very specifically, see how your supervisor’s or manager’s office or cubicle is decorated. Take your cues there. If others in your area feel comfortable with certain decorations, then go for it. If the office seems conservative, then refrain.

It’s also important to consider who will actually see your cubicle. If you never have direct contact with a client or customer, your decorating style can be a bit more relaxed. If your cubicle is in an area that clients pass regularly, be more conservative.

Keep in mind the style of the entire office and the function of your particular cubicle. Here are four dos and don’ts to transform your cubicle into your own personal—and very productive—work station:

- **Do** personalize your cubicle with nicely framed family pictures, diplomas, and appropriate, inspirational photographs. You may even want to create your own bulletin board on an inside wall to display these items.
o **Don't** go overboard. Remember that in decorating, “less is more.” Instead of filling every inch with trinkets and souvenirs, choose a few special items to brighten your area. Your cubicle should resemble a professional office, not a teenager’s bedroom!

o **Do** use plants to add color and life to your workspace. Make sure the plant is an appropriate size for the cubicle, and ask your neighbors about allergies before choosing your greenery. Replenish fresh flowers regularly, or use silk arrangements for an easy-care, hypoallergenic alternative.

o **Don't** be offensive. One of the truest signs of professionalism is respect for people, be they your clients, your co-workers, or your superiors. Never put up anything that will impose on someone else’s rights. In other words, no pin-up girls, no centerfolds, no fat jokes, no racial jokes, and no ethnic or religious cartoons.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](https://www.nace.org).