

# Workplace Trash Can Challenge

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Posted on April 22, 2021



I dare you to spend three minutes taking this challenge. After just a few minutes, you are likely to experience a change in perspective, a boost in creativity, and an overall sense of being a do-gooder. The challenge requires no special skills or equipment and, if repeated, could mean serious benefits for your organization and the well-being of the planet. So, are you ready? All you have to do is...stare at a piece of trash.

The word waste used in an office setting imparts a negative reaction because waste in business is synonymous with lost money and inefficiency. Despite this, we still litter our office buildings with trash cans because we blindly accept that our office trash has no place else to go but to the landfill. Surely there is no way to eliminate ALL that trash....right? Have you tried?

Go to the nearest trash can. Maybe this is the personal trash can under your desk or maybe the community trash can in the breakroom. For this exercise, it could even be your kitchen trash that has turned into your office trash ever since you started working remotely from your dining room table. Regardless of the size or smell of your selected trash can, take a good long look at what is inside. What do you see? Perhaps you see your morning coffee cup, some crumpled post-it notes, or a report that was printed by mistake.

Pick up one item from the trash can. Just one. It can be anything – a pen that ran out of ink, a plastic bottle, an ink cartridge, or a cable that doesn't work anymore. What if that item you pulled out never had to be created in the first place?

Here is the challenge. All you have to do is pause.....and be thoughtful.

First, for 30 seconds, think about whether this item before you was truly desired or needed. If not, is there a way the purchase of this undesired item could have been avoided? How much money could have been saved?

Next, for 30 seconds, ponder how long this item served its purpose. Did it reliably provide your computer power for years or was it only alive long enough to clean up a spill or communicate a message to a coworker? Does the time this item was in use at least equal the amount of time it will spend in the landfill?

Then, for 30 seconds, consider who else might use and discard this item and how often that cycle occurs. Start small and conceptualize the use of this item first within your office then your organization. Try to imagine all those instances piled up in one space. Would it fill your conference table or the conference room?

Next, for 30 seconds, ruminate on all the options that could make this object obsolete or more sustainable. Is there a reusable alternative or even the same item in a non-plastic material? Maybe this item that is clogging your trash can would feel more at home nestled in a recycle bin or creatively repurposed into a new role.

Finally, spend 60 seconds imagining the next time you will find yourself needing to consume this item. Will you pause for a second to think about the item before you buy it? Will you look for cheaper more sustainable alternatives? Will you properly reuse or recycle the item?

Why not?

There you have it! You just gave a piece of trash three minutes of your time. Trash, no matter how small, is not something we have to blindly accept and subject the planet to. Simply taking a moment to consciously think about the trash we leave behind breaks the mindless consume/discard cycle. It teaches us to look for more sustainable options that will not only be kind to the planet, but likely save time and money.

I dare you to spend three minutes taking this challenge. Take this challenge tomorrow, the next day, and the day after that because waste in any sense should not just be something we thoughtlessly accept.

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