



Office life during the World Cup

In the coming weeks, senior executives and business owners will be showing colleagues and employees their true colors: whether it's in the elevator, canteen, corridor or conference room, soccer lovers and haters will be pitting their wits against each other.

Between now and mid July, there will be little room for sitting on the sporting fence. You are either with us or against us. Mercy will only be shown to the people who make no secret of their ignorance of the beautiful game.

Wannabe soccer aficionados who have eavesdropped on tactical talk amongst their colleagues, gleaning some but not all of the rules, may just about survive the early rounds, but only if their luck holds. Because as coach and former player Otto Rehhagel, said: "The moment of truth is out there on the pitch." People who make valuable contributions with comments such as, "It'll be interesting to see how North Korea fairs against South Korea," could be facing summary dismissal, with little likelihood of being allowed back onto the field for the rest of the summer. And if, by some remote chance, we do witness a match between the two Koreas, the colleague in question will no doubt be accused of membership in some sort of international betting mafia. Incidentally, in case you were wondering, Otto Rehhagel is not "the Greek coach" but "the coach of the Greeks" – but even some of my fellow media pundits will get that one mixed up.

BUT LET'S NOT DIGRESS:

Believe me, whether we're talking about the Olympics, Formula 1 or soccer, I've experienced all these types. And whether male or female, you can classify everyone in one of these groups. So what about you? When the whistle blows to start the very first game (South Africa versus Mexico) in Johannes-



burg at 4pm on June 11, will you be revealing a totally new side of yourself? Or will you remain true to the image your co-workers already have? Which category best describes you?

If you're not entirely sure, here's a handy method to help you: if you repeatedly mistake the increasing number of flag-flying cars on the company parking lot for a convoy of diplomats, then you're a lost cause. It's probably best to remain a safe distance from colleagues, turn your office TV from stand-by to off. Somehow, you'll get through the tournament.

IF YOU'RE A SOCCER HATER

and not afraid to admit it, then you are sure to encounter suspicious events – such as hastily muttered excuses along the lines of “Erm ...important meeting with the ..erm.. shareholders' committee...” If the meeting happens to be scheduled for an afternoon when your country's team is in action, alarm bells should definitely ring. What's more, you need to be particularly wary if you work for Emirates, Budweiser, Adidas or Continental. None of these official World Cup sponsors will schedule a meeting to clash with a match – unless the pow-wow is being held in a stadium in South Africa, of course.

SELF-CONFESSED SOCCER FANS

– perhaps your boss – may decide to make every day of the World Cup a dress-down Friday. CEOs of publicly traded enterprises – whether Australian, German or Brazilian – won't bat an eyelid when senior executives choose to

ignore the fact that PhD students, secretaries and temps are turning up for work wearing the soccer strip of their national squad. But let's be honest for a moment: when a team is sent packing despite a heroic performance because of a debatable penalty awarded in the 93rd minute, don't we all identify with the losing country?

True friends of soccer (I'm repeating myself, but I want to be absolutely clear on this) will not be all that concerned by the reduced hours colleagues and employees dedicate to their work over the next four and half weeks. But on the other hand, they're pretty glad that synchronized swimming championships and orienteering contests also exist, i.e. sporting events that don't create quite so much of a kaffuffle as the World Cup does.

Just remember, when it comes to capturing the spirit of a sport and transporting it to our desks and canteens, then it's perfectly ok for bosses to introduce special time sheets in the next few weeks, to redefine goals, set up big screens in open-plan offices, and have a flutter on the department's sweepstakes. So it only remains for me to say: have a ball this World Cup!

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Vita

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