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1	7	4	8	5	9	2	3	6
6	8	3	7	4	2	9	1	5
9	5	2	1	6	3	4	7	8

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Employee Appreciation Day!  
Are You Getting the Most Out of Your Digital Home Assistant?

# Get the Most Out of Your DIGITAL HOME ASSISTANT

More and more people are welcoming in the Amazon Echo or the Google Home into their spaces. Everyone knows they make great Bluetooth speakers and can tell you the weather forecast, but they're also capable of so much more.

Digital assistants can do a variety of tasks depending on how much you want them to do for you. For example, if you want your digital assistant to be heavily involved in your daily life, you can use the Echo or the Home as the core of your "connected home." You can connect numerous compatible devices to these assistants, including other Bluetooth or networked speakers, lights, thermostats, coffee makers, refrigerators, and even microwaves.



Of course, therein lies the challenge — you must have compatible devices to make a connected home efficient. And let's be honest: Many of us aren't going to buy a connected fridge or Wi-Fi enabled lightbulbs just to get the most out of our digital assistants.

What you can do, however, is make use of what you already have. Here are some ways to put your digital assistants to work without committing to a connected home.

Both the Echo and the Home make excellent communication hubs. In the home, they can be used as a local intercom system. Do you have a few Echo Dots or Google Home Minis? If you do, you're set. You can communicate in any room where another device is present.

Your digital assistant can also make outgoing calls. As long as the device has access to your contacts (or the person you're trying to contact has an Echo or Home), you can easily make the connection. Want to send a text message? No problem! You can dictate a text anyone in your smartphone's contact list and send it without ever touching your phone.

Aside from communications, the assistants can handle calendars, appointments, emails, and more. You can ask for information relevant to you, like "When is my flight again?" Google Home can recognize your voice, or the voice of anyone in the house, and respond accordingly. There's no worry that anyone's calendar or appointments will be mixed up with yours.

If you want to learn more, search for tutorials online. We've only scratched the surface when it comes to what these digital assistants can do for you.



# Blue Sky and Good Will vs. Science

## BEWARE IAQ MIRACLE CURES

Last August, I was approached by a guy who claimed to have an amazing product that used hydrogen peroxide to oxidize odors and particles in the air. It worked great, he insisted, and would solve almost every indoor air quality problem. After being endorsed by both the U.S. Army and Homeland Security, he wanted to use this equipment to clean the air inside schools. He reached out to have me test the air inside the schools before they put in the equipment, then come back and test again to show how much of an improvement there was.



that housed people who had crossed the border and were waiting to be told where to go next. He had the church install the equipment in their buildings and offered anecdotal evidence, insisting everyone in the buildings felt great. Claiming to be endorsed by Homeland Security was a stretch, to put it nicely. I couldn't get a straight answer on how they were endorsed by the U.S. Army.

The worst came when I finally spoke with the guy who claimed to have invented the product. I quickly realized he couldn't answer many of my specific questions, like

how hydrogen peroxide would interact with formaldehyde already in the air. He claimed the product had been tested by Kansas State University and the University of Cincinnati. When I asked for the research papers, he could only give me the name of the doctors who supposedly did the research.

Most of what I learned about this "amazing" product came later when I did a little research of my own. I found the doctor from Kansas State. They had written a paper on a similar piece of technology, but that research was on how it could handle a variety of contaminants on stainless steel kitchen surfaces. Likewise, the doctor from the University of Cincinnati had written research papers on IAQ in food-service areas but offered no comment on this tech they were selling.

“Every four or five years, another miracle cure-all hits the market.”

didn't end with the marketing lingo — there was actual pseudoscience in store.

When I pressed about the product being endorsed by Homeland Security, I learned the salesman was a former Baptist minister who worked with a church in south Texas

Continued on page 2 ...

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After the meeting, I gathered up every scrap of reasonable data they'd given me — which wasn't much — and sent it to my friend Dr. Richard Shaughnessy at the University of Tulsa. Dr. Shaughnessy is one of the world's top IAQ researchers. I asked him if he'd ever seen any research on using hydrogen peroxide in the air. He told me that not only had he never seen any such research, but the stuff I sent over to him about the project also didn't make any scientific sense.

This isn't the first time someone pitched a product or piece of equipment that would supposedly solve all our IAQ problems forever. Every four or five years, another miracle cure-all hits the market. Most of the time, the people selling this product don't have malicious intent. (Yes, the "inventor" was pretty shady, but the salesman and the guy who contacted me both seemed to honestly believe in the product.) They're full of blue skies and goodwill. But they always overlook the fact that personal stories don't make up for the lack of real science. Just because a piece of equipment shows promise in a food prep area dealing with various contaminants does not mean it will be able to solve every IAQ problem under the sun.

These situations never fail to frustrate the living daylights out of me. The thing that scared me the most happened at the beginning of our meeting. These guys claimed they had just come from a meeting with a big school district here in Texas, and that the district had agreed to put this equipment in all of their school buildings. I don't know if this was just another overblown sales tactic, but I certainly hope Texas school districts aren't exposing their students to equipment that hasn't received some measure of peer-reviewed, scientific testing.

It's not uncommon for people to be blinded by what sounds like a great offer, especially when they don't know the right questions to ask. A property manager often won't know what holes to look for if given the kind of marketing lingo these guys were throwing around. It's not the property manager's job to have those answers. This is why you need to have someone you can go to for a second opinion. Even I needed to reach out to Dr. Shaughnessy to get his opinion on the subject.

I can't go around debunking every bad IAQ product on the market, but I can heavily scrutinize any that cross my path. And I can remind people that if something sounds too good to be true, it usually means you need to get a second opinion.

*Travis West*

# Another Country Bans Asbestos

(No, It's Still Not the United States)

In 2018, Canada officially banned the use of all types of asbestos and products containing asbestos. This ban was a huge victory for workers at risk from asbestos and Canada's Building Trades Unions (CBTU), who spent years lobbying for the change. With this ban, Canada joined 55 other countries who have banned the use of all types of asbestos. Most notably absent from that list of countries? The United States.

Contrary to popular belief, the United States has not completely banned the use of asbestos. In the late 1970s, the EPA attempted a "near-complete" ban of asbestos, but in 1991, a federal appeals court overturned many of the regulations. The ban eliminated many popular uses of asbestos, like insulation or fireproofing paper, but allowed asbestos to be legally used in previously existing items, like car brakes or floor tiles. This is troubling when you consider the fact that 12,000–15,000 Americans die every year from deaths related to



asbestos exposure, such as asbestosis, mesothelioma, and other forms of lung cancer.

Most American companies have purged asbestos from their products, but there are still many products you interact with every day that may contain asbestos. The Mesothelioma + Asbestos Awareness Center warns that asbestos can be commonly found in vehicle parts, construction materials, fireproof clothing, and potting soil.

Dealing with asbestos in the United States is an ongoing struggle. Last year, the EPA proposed the Significant New Use Rule (SNUR), which looked to regulate some of the legal uses for asbestos that are not currently being used in the United States. Under SNUR, if a manufacturer wanted to use asbestos in one of 15 specific categories, they would need to seek approval from the EPA first. These categories included high-grade electrical paper, roofing felt, vinyl-asbestos floor tile, and roof and non-roof coatings.

A lead senior scientist from the Environmental Defense Fund described SNUR as "an improvement," but most experts fear the rule does not do enough to regulate asbestos use in the United States. It is also uncertain if the rule will lead to an increase of asbestos products being released to the public.

Asbestos is a known carcinogen. It's important for you take appropriate steps to make sure asbestos isn't anywhere near your building. If someone in your building gets sick due to asbestos exposure, you could be held liable. Pay attention to common places where asbestos could turn up like old insulation and certain building materials brought in during remodeling projects. Until the United States completely bans asbestos, you must be proactive to protect yourself, your building, and your tenants from the dangers of asbestos.

## HAVE A LAUGH WITH TRAVIS



## SUDOKU

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Employees are the backbone of any business, big or small. If you're looking for a way to give thanks to your hardworking staff, there's no better time than now. Employee Appreciation Day is a non-official holiday that takes place on the first Friday of March. However, this holiday doesn't have to be confined to a single day, nor does it have to be expensive.

### History

In 1995, the idea came to Dr. Bob Nelson — also known as the "Guru of Thank You" — and he put it into action. Dr. Nelson is a founding Recognition Professionals International board member, head of Workman Publishing, and author of "1,001 Ways to Reward Employees." His goal was to create and bolster the bond between employee and employer in all industries.

### Observing Employee Appreciation Day

An employer can use many different methods to give thanks to their employees. To celebrate, employers across the country throw office parties, buy lunch for the whole office, or give their workers part of the day off. Other ways to celebrate on that day, month, or throughout the year include:

- Organizing an after-work gathering
- Buying surprise snacks for the entire office
- Practicing flexibility in the office
- Giving thank-you cards to your staff
- Creating an encouraging environment
- Praising team efforts and accomplishments
- Celebrating birthdays
- Giving rewards
- Recognizing team and individual achievements publicly

### The Importance of Appreciation

No matter where they work, employees want to be treated like human beings. When they've reached a personal or professional goal or they accomplish a feat for their team, they want to be recognized. And when that recognition is given, employees feel proud of their work and valued as individuals within the company. It doesn't take much effort to give that praise, and when you do, it affects the whole company in a positive way.

Taking the time to value people for the work they do will create a happier and more productive workplace. Let this year's Employee Appreciation Day be the first day of many to celebrate the efforts of hardworking employees.