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wanted. Those who were moderately skilled at their jobs benefited the most, while experts saw little or no effect. And some novices regarded the music as distracting.

Dr. Lesiuk has also found that the older people are, the less time they spend listening to music at work.

Few companies have policies about music listening, said Paul Flaharty, a regional vice president at [Robert Half Technology](#), the staffing agency. But it is still a good idea to check with your manager, even if you see others wearing headphones in the office.

He said some supervisors might think that workers wearing headphones weren't fully engaged and were blocking out important interactions "because they are going into their own world."

"If someone's not doing a good job," he said, "then you can have a hiring manager say that all they do is listen to music all day and that it's hampering productivity."

For those who choose to listen to music, it's best to set limits, because wearing headphones for an entire shift can be perceived as rude by those nearby.

Dr. Sood, at the Mayo Clinic, said it takes just 15 minutes to a half-hour of listening time to regain concentration. Music without lyrics usually works best, he said.

Daniel Rubin, a columnist at The Philadelphia Inquirer, said he has listened to jazz and piano concertos for most of his 33-year newspaper career — but only when writing on deadline. He started off using a Sony Walkman, but now makes use of 76 days' worth of music on his iTunes playlist.

"The person clicking their nails three desks away and the person humming next to me all sound equally loud and it's hard for me to block them out," he said.

As a columnist, he works mostly alone, and people in the office seldom need to approach him. But when he was a budding reporter, he noticed that colleagues would become irritated when trying to get his attention. "It was really annoying because suddenly you would hear 'Dan ... DAN ... DAN RUBIN! People were screaming at you because they needed you.'"

ANDREW ENDERS, 28, a lawyer and insurance broker in Linglestown, Pa., said he and an officemate bonded over a local radio station when they worked at the Dauphin County District Attorney's office. They switched off the radio only when speaking with a client, and they lowered the volume when their boss was around.

"I do these very serious things, reviewing insurance policies and evaluating risk and liability exposure," Mr. Enders said. "A big part of my personality is the artistic side, and music helps me balance who I am as an individual with what I'm doing at work."

A version of this article appeared in print on August 12, 2012, on page BU7 of the New York edition with the headline: The Power Of Music, Tapped In a Cubicle.

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