

Guide your staff to do more without working longer hours

BY ANNETTE RICHMOND

Are you and your employees working longer hours? Getting less done? You're not alone.

In today's economy many businesses are struggling to get more done with smaller resources and fewer employees. Sneaking into the office early to get "a little work done" is common these days. Most of the official workday is spent sitting in meetings, answering endless email, and, trying to squeeze in a little paperwork whenever we can.

While it's easy to focus on the difficulties, more work, fewer employees, it's more effective to focus on finding solutions. Helping your staff accomplish more in less time can boost morale and increase productivity. Here are five ways to save time, pass them on to your employees.

Trim the Fat: Most of us spend several hours each week in meetings. And most of them include unproductive time that could be used elsewhere. Analyze your company's meetings. Does your staff really need to meet for two-hours every week? Or is that just the way it's always been? Most meetings expand to fit the time allotted. Try cutting the time in half and see what happens. You may discover some meetings can be eliminated all together.

Leave a Message: Friendly phone calls are terrific for building relationships. They also eat

into our workday, often consuming several hours a week. One of the secrets to saving time is returning calls during off hours. For example, next time you need to confirm an appointment

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or give someone a quick answer call them after five or six p.m. This allows you to finish your call quickly without having to worry about cutting the other person off. This may not be the way to connect with clients; but it can help you plow through a pile of phone calls.

Jump Start Meetings: Meetings can be a great place for brainstorming, as long as you plan ahead. Some people like to think out loud, listening to other people's ideas adds fuel to their fire. Others need time to reflect. They prefer to let their ideas percolate before sharing. Providing an agenda in advance gives quieter types a head start, making it more likely they'll be prepared to contribute during the meeting. Agendas also help everyone stay focused on the matter at hand.

Take a Walk: Today receiving 100+ email

messages per day is not unusual. Our mailboxes are overflowing. Still, we email a colleague in the next office rather than picking up the phone or, better yet, poking our head around the corner. Before you dash off your next message, consider whether it might not be quicker in the long run to say it in person. Think of ways to make your next trip to the coffee machine productive.

Block Out Time: Getting actual "work" done seems to be a universal problem. Somehow something always seems to get in the way. Tackle your next project by setting aside "blocks" of time. For example, next week reserve a few 45-minute to one-hour time slots. Put them in your schedule as meetings. This is your time. If possible let your calls go into voicemail and turn off your email. Focus on a project you've had on the back burner. You'll be amazed at how much you can accomplish when you have uninterrupted time.

While working 24/7 may seem necessary at times, eventually it leads to burnout. For you and your staff. Look for ways to help your employees get more done without working longer hours. The increased productivity may translate into bigger budgets and new hires down the road.

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