

Clear the way for productivity



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This is a guest article by Jeff Davidson

None of us can make our interruption-based culture less onerous. We can, however, make changes in our immediate environment, with our own correspondents. We can be more diligent and thoughtful in what we choose to send. Within weeks, or months at the most, we can train others to not overwhelm us.

What we give out we tend to receive. We can practice the Golden Rule as it applies to the sanctity of someone else's space, making fewer interruptions and offering higher quality messages at digestible intervals, in the manner and form that best suits the other party.

Effective communication partners, in time, begin to emulate each other's interaction pattern. The positive changes that you make within your inner circle are likely to be revisited upon you as others acknowledge them on some level, and accept and emulate your practices.

Office mates in productivity

Within an office setting, we can make great strides toward ensuring that all staff professionals have the opportunity to work for uninterrupted stretches for at least some time throughout the day or the week. Establishing such an environment will require the participation and cooperation of all involved.

Convene once a week, perhaps on a Friday, when people can reflect on the work week that just transpired and look forward to the next. Meet in a conference room, an empty office or even a reception area. Encourage people to be informal.

Have a moderator illicit the participation of all concerned. *Ask penetrating questions such as:*

- What are the major ways in which you are interrupted? What can we do collectively to diminish or eliminate such interruptions?
- What are officewide, systematic assaults on your concentration that could be addressed by changing logistics or policies?
- For in-person visits to one another's office or workspace, what ground rules can we establish to more greatly respect each another?

- For electronic messaging, in any form, what ground rules can we establish?
- What type of written communications could be reduced or eliminated, thereby diminishing your paper handling and filing responsibility?
- What other suggestions do you have that would make a positive impact, groupwide?

At first, more senior staff might dominate such meetings, but that's OK. Soon, staff at all levels should feel as if they can speak up and convey their feelings without retribution. The meeting has to be supportive for the best ideas to spring forth.

As suggestions are implemented and their merit exposed for all to experience, fewer, shorter meetings might be possible. However, with the introduction of new technology, new types of challenges and other directives from above, it's not likely you'll be able to eliminate such meetings altogether if you're committed to keeping productivity high, while keeping interruptions at bay.

It is not our sealed fate to be endlessly interrupted throughout our days. Individually and collectively, we can take the time and expend the effort to make our environments more suitable for reflection, concentration and focus, as well as remaining responsive to others.

Jeff Davidson is “The Work-Life Balance Expert®,” and the premier thought leader on work-life balance issues. He has written 59 mainstream books, is a preeminent authority on time management, and is an electrifying professional speaker, making 806 presentations since 1985 to clients such as Kaiser Permanente, IBM, Novo Nordisk, American Express, Lufthansa, Swissotel, Re/Max, USAA, Worthington Steel and the World Bank. He is the author of Breathing Space and Simpler Living.

Jeff believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance, and he supports that quest through his website www.BreathingSpace.com and through 24 iPhone apps at www.itunes.com/apps/BreathingSpaceInstitute.