

Producing Productivity

By: Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

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Information is a form of power. With the increased flow of information and technological intrusion in society, you're all but ensured of facing a constantly growing array of work related expectations. You can be sure that these higher expectations, especially when you have the same finite resources, will lead to more stress. The more tools of technology that

are created to assist you, the more you are asked to do; however, even with these increased pressures to do more, it is possible to work with greater efficiency.

For example, two career professionals, in this case two women who happen to be administrative aides, are able to work with great efficiency.

Linda won't transcribe tapes late in the day or anytime on Friday. As a matter of fact, she has established a personal work pattern or cycle where specific tasks will be undertaken throughout the course of the week.

Susan, the production supervisor, rarely interferes with Linda's cycle unless an urgent report or letter has to be completed. Is Linda an obstinate employee, undermining the production needs of her office? Is Susan deficient as a production supervisor?

Should either or both be given the heave ho? [] Yes [] No

Okay, put down your pencil.

Is either woman derelict in her duties? No; they are not mutineers. Linda is an extremely effective member of the production staff, and Susan directs the production department skillfully. Linda has long since determined her production peaks and valleys throughout the course of the normal work week and recognizes her personal cycle of productivity. For all but urgent assignments, Susan acknowledges Linda's ability to maintain high productivity by handling assignments on those days and at those hours which achieve a relatively constant "effort to task" ratio.

Robert, Linda's production staff partner, also maintains high productivity by personally prioritizing assignments. While Linda and Robert have similar production responsibilities, each has different strengths and weaknesses, varying energy levels (throughout the work week), and has long since gauged these factors so that each knows what can best be undertaken when. In short, they "go with the flow" of their energy levels.

Employees Establish Their Cycles

If you report to others, read on to see how you might implement this arrangement: If you supervise others and want more assignments completed faster and more effectively, give your good employees every opportunity to establish their personal productivity cycles. Within reason, it makes sense to allow your best workers to undertake assignments in a manner which best suits them. You know too well that many employees devise many ways to diminish personal productivity by stretching out assignments or by coasting until checkout time.

However, highly productive employees such as Linda, Robert, and Susan take pride in consistently maintaining high productivity. Enabling them to respond based upon personal cycles of productivity results in high job satisfaction and yields a greater long range output.

Letting productive people follow their own schedules means that they will be less fatigued and less stressed. It's draining to continually meet largely arbitrary deadlines. Productive employees allowed to pace themselves can accomplish more and remain vibrant.

Working the Cycle

Productive employees have an internal "time grid" which charts their cycle of productivity, though no formal sketch or chart is ever made. Still, it does exist. When your best staff members say that they'd "rather not handle the DEF report right now" because they "can do a better job on it tomorrow morning," and the "GHI assignment could be better undertaken now," believe them!

Here are basic ways to get the most from productive employees in recognition of their cycles of productivity:

* Provide enough and varied assignments so the cycle can be used. If an employee only has one assignment, then obviously, there is little leeway in undertaking the assignment at the most personally opportune time. With numerous assignments, a productive employee can strategically arrange his/her schedule.

* Be flexible with "due" dates when possible. Unlike others we all know, productive employees will finish the important jobs on time. Assignments of lesser importance will be finished as soon as possible. The more flexibility a productive employee is given in completing assignments, the greater the opportunity for him/her to execute assignments in accordance with the cycle. More often than not, given flexible due dates, the productive employee will complete many assignments sooner than you anticipated.

* Avoid late afternoon and surprise assignments. The productive employee, in concurrence with his/her cycle of productivity, intuitively allocates tasks for the late afternoon.

* Closely related to the above, always try to provide advance notice of assignments to productive employees so that sufficient time is available to schedule the new assignment in accordance with the cycle of productivity. If you usually provide flexible due dates, then the need for advanced notice is not so essential.

Reprogramming the Cycle

If a report needs to be finished within four days, good employees will prepare themselves and generate the requisite energy to successfully accomplish the task. In the short run, good employees can "reprogram" their cycles to handle a crisis.

Forcing a good worker to reprogram his or her cycle for an extended period is not recommended. Since he or she is already highly efficient, an extended variation soon becomes an imposition. Therefore, respect the work cycle of others and create your own so that you can more easily increase your breathing space.

About The Author:

Jeff Davidson is "The Work Life Balance Expert," a preeminent time management authority, has written 56 mainstream books, and is an electrifying professional speaker, nearly 800 presentations since 1985 to clients such as Kaiser Permanente, IBM, American Express, Lufthansa, Swissotel, America Online, Re/Max, USAA, Worthington Steel, and the World Bank. Jeff is Executive Director of the Breathing Space? Institute; a popular speaker; and the author of numerous books, including:

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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 websites www.BreathingSpace.com and www.WorkLifeBalance.net, and through 24 iPhone Apps at www.itunes.com/BreathingSpaceInstitute.