

Quick Guide: Minimising Interruptions

Have you ever noticed how much more you can get done on the occasional day that you work away from the office? So where does the time go in the office? A "quick" question from a colleague, a phone call, a never-ending flow of incoming emails, a quick trip to the coffee machine: they all add up. So here are the **top ten tips** to help you minimise interruptions:

- 1. Are you the cause of your interruptions?** Work out if you are using interruptions as an excuse to avoid your work. If you procrastinate, butterfly from job to job, or are distracted by the world outside your window do something about it!
- 2. Determine the nature of the interruption.** Get into the habit of getting enough information about the importance and deadline of the interruption. Then you can decide what to do and when to deal with it.
- 3. Discourage squatters.** Remove visitors' chairs to stop colleagues making themselves comfortable. Alternatively, stand up. It discourages people from hanging around, and also helps you feel less "trapped" in your chair.
- 4. KISS people!** (Keep it short and simple.) You can be polite and minimise the interruptions if you take control of the interruption (both in person and on the phone.) Make sure you ask questions to get the information you need.
- 5. Help others to help themselves.** If spending a few minutes with a colleague allows them to continue working productively for a few hours, the return on your small time investment becomes substantial.
- 6. Get yourself a reputation** for meeting deadlines - this will minimise people interrupting you to chase you or find out "how it's going".
- 7. Always put a time limit on any interruptions,** for example "Hannah, I can see we need to deal with this, however I have only five minutes now. Is that sufficient, or shall we schedule another time?"
- 8. Set up an Action Book** and encourage people to write simple requests for you in it. Alternatively, ask them to email you the details so you can prioritise it.
- 9. Consider using your "out of office" message** with a time you will be back, so that people who need to contact you don't chase for an immediate response.
- 10. Resist the temptation** to check emails every few minutes. Set up regular times, say, every 15 or 20 minutes (or even every two hours), to do so. Then decide WHEN you will deal with each of them. And do it!

Compiled by Des Whitehorn