



EMPLOYEE SERIES

Tips for Increasing Productivity at Work



Track and limit how much time you're spending on tasks. Some research suggests only around 17% of people are able to accurately estimate the passage of time. Consider downloading Rescue Time; a freely downloadable program that can measure time spent on tasks including social media, email, word processing, and apps.



Take regular breaks. Taking scheduled breaks can actually help improve concentration. Some research has shown that taking short breaks during long tasks helps you to maintain a constant level of performance; while working at a task without breaks leads to a steady decline in performance.



Set self-imposed deadlines. A manageable level of self-imposed stress can actually be helpful in terms of giving us focus and helping us meet our goals. For open-ended tasks or projects, try giving yourself a deadline, as you can find yourself increasing productivity when you're watching the clock.



Follow the "two-minute rule". Entrepreneur Steve Olenski recommends implementing the "two-minute rule" to make the most of small windows of time that you have at work. The idea is this: If you see a task or action that you know can be done in two minutes or less, do it immediately. According to Olenski, completing the task right away actually takes less time than having to get back to it later.



Just say no to meetings. Meetings make up one of the largest components of daily work life and therefore time, yet somehow we continue to unquestioningly book them, attend them and, inevitably, complain about them. According to Atlassian, the average office worker spends over 31 hours each month in unproductive meetings. Before booking your next meeting, ask yourself whether you can accomplish the same goals or tasks via email, phone, or Web-based meeting (which may be slightly more productive).





Hold standing meetings. If you absolutely must have a meeting, there's some evidence that standing meetings (they're just what they sound like--everyone stands) can result in increased group arousal, decreased territoriality, and improved group performance.





Stop multitasking. While we tend to think of the ability to multitask as an important skill for increasing efficiency, the opposite may in fact be true. According to Meyer, Evans and Rubinstein (2001) even brief mental blocks created by shifting between tasks can cost as much as 40% of someone's productive time. If important, or requiring mental focus, finish a given task before shifting attention.





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Give up on the illusion of perfection. Rather than wasting time chasing after the illusion of perfection, complete your given task to the best of your ability and move on. It's better to complete the task and move it off your plate; if need be, you can always come back and adjust or improve it later.
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Take exercise breaks. Using work time to exercise may actually help improve productivity, according to a study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. If possible, build in set times during the week for taking a walk or going to the
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Be proactive, not reactive. Allowing incoming phone calls and emails to dictate how you spend your day will mean you do a great job of putting out fires--but that may be all you get accomplished. Set aside time for responding to emails, but don't let them determine what your day is going to look like. Have a plan of attack at the start of each day, and then do your best to stick to it.
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Turn off notifications. No one can be expected to resist the allure of an email, voicemail, or text notification. During work hours, turn off your notifications, and instead build in time to check email and messages. This is all part of being proactive rather than reactive (see Be proactive, not reactive).
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Work in 90-minute intervals. During the day we move from a state of alertness progressively into physiological fatigue approximately every 90 minutes. Our bodies regularly tell us to take a break, but we often override these signals and instead stoke ourselves up with caffeine, sugar and our own emergency reserves — the stress hormones adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. Working in 90-minute intervals turns out to be a prescription for maximizing productivity; as confirmed by Professor K. Anders Ericsson (1993).
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Give yourself something nice to look at. Some research shows outfitting an office with aesthetically pleasing elements--like plants--can increase productivity by up to 15%. If living things aren't possible, surround yourself with photos or images of family, friends or landscapes.
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Minimise interruptions (to the best of your ability). Interruptions; irrespective of its duration, produce a change in work pattern and a corresponding drop in productivity. After only 20 minutes of interrupted performance people reported significantly higher stress, frustration, workload, effort, and pressure. Minimizing interruptions may mean setting office hours, keeping your door closed, or working from home for time-sensitive projects.

Adapted from John Rampton's 15 ways to increase productivity at Work (2016)

If you would like to book an appointment and /or speak with one of our Counsellors, it's as easy as calling 1300 66 77 00 or New Zealand 0800 327 669 or visit our website www.accesswellbeingservices.com.au