

TECHNIQUES FOR MINIMIZING INTERRUPTIONS

All of the following techniques should be used within reason. Allow your good judgment to dictate objectively which technique is to be used and when. Always remember, be very protective of the time it takes to complete your “A” tasks!

DROP-IN'S

Office Hours:

- Establish an ongoing time frame as to when you will be available to others. Encourage people to hold their issues until that time. You determine the amount of daily focus time you need based upon the length of time it typically takes to finish at least your “A” tasks.

Hide:

- To capture some time to concentrate, work in a remote, isolated area. Let a co-worker know where you are and what time you will return to your office.

Close Your Door:

- Close your door at least during “A” tasks. If your office space does not have a door, use a “do not disturb” sign or a red flag taped within clear view.

Flex Hours:

- Ask permission to stagger your work hours to include one or two “off” hours during the day.

Three-Minute Rule:

- The moment you are interrupted, politely and directly ask, “What can I do for you?” Then, volunteer only three minutes of your time explaining that if the issue is likely to take longer you will need to set an appointment to discuss the issue in detail. If the interrupter insists on addressing the issue right then, hold the person to three minutes. This technique will train people to collect their thoughts and review the issues before taking your time to do so.

Body Language:

- *Don't relax.* When interrupted, be polite but keep your pen in hand. Don't relax until you choose to invest some time in the interruption. You can usually effectively convey your priorities by looking busy.
- *Stand up.* Also minimize the length of the interruption by standing up to quickly assess the issues. This will discourage the interrupter from sitting down and getting too comfortable.
- *Avoid eye contact.* If the positioning of your desk causes you to gaze into a heavy traffic area when glancing up from your work, reposition your desk. Eye contact invites conversations, interruptions. When possible, move your desk so that your back or shoulder is addressing the traffic pattern, not your eyes.

Recognize The Patterns:

- Be sensitive as to who repeatedly interrupts. This should signal a training problem. Also be sensitive to the issues or questions which repeatedly surface from several different people. This is usually a sign that a meeting should be held to thoroughly go over the topic to eliminate further interruptions.

TELEPHONE INTERRUPTIONS

Voice Mail:

- Use voice mail to protect your concentration for “A” tasks. Your outgoing message should always state when you will be available (office hours) and request from the caller **four** items: the caller’s name, phone number, purpose for call (so you can prioritize and prepare), and the best time to reach the caller (to avoid further phone tag).

Phone Teams:

- If you are a support person who is finding it impossible to keep up with what phones and your other responsibilities, you are not alone. Team up with another support person so that each of you covers the other one’s phone in addition to your own for at least one hour per day. This will give each of you at least one quiet hour per day to work on high priority tasks.

Avoid interrupting others at all costs by using a passive communication device whenever practical. (E-mail, voice mail, memo, fax) Label a red tab “office” and keep a separate sheet behind the tab for each person you typically work with on a given day. Then whenever an issue or question arises, jot the issue on the person’s sheet. Touch base with that person only once or twice during the day and cover all the issues you have collected.



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