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## Six Ways to Make Meetings More Productive

Staff meetings can prove hit or miss. If everyone contributes to a meaningful discussion of a relevant topic, then the gathering makes sense. But if the leader rattles on for 30 minutes, the rest of the group can resent the time wastage and yearn to return to work.

To make a meeting more productive:

1. *Limit the topics.* If you overload the agenda with too many items, participants can rush through each subject without sufficient focus. It's better to jettison nonessential topics so that the group can concentrate on the most critical matters. Rule of thumb: Schedule two high-priority topics per hour. For a three-hour meeting, stick to just six major items.
2. *Choose simple labels.* Use the fewest words possible to label each agenda item. Examples: discuss progress, decide best strategy, give input.
3. *Avoid distractions.* Stick to what matters most. If someone raises a minor problem, don't let the group get distracted by it.
4. *Set ground rules.* To prevent people from using their electronic devices during meetings, state up front, "You can leave to check your smartphones or handle other matters. Use your judgment. But please pay full attention when you're in here."
5. *Track what counts.* Monitor the way the group interacts in meetings. Collecting data will help you take corrective action as needed. Examples: Track the number of interruptions, who interrupts whom, how much time an interruption diverts from agenda items and who refocuses the group on the agenda.
6. *Confirm each commitment.* End by clarifying who will do what by when. Make sure each individual accepts and understands the assignment.

Source: <http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/44697/6-ways-to-make-meetings-more-productive>

# Be a Great Boss When You're Swamped



When you are overwhelmed with work, you may unknowingly take your stress out on your employees. You become more demanding, curt or rude. However, no matter how stressed out, frazzled or overwhelmingly busy you are, you still have to be a great boss. Follow these tips to do just that:

- Schedule time to talk with staff. Specifically when it comes to addressing performance or behavioral issues, meet with employees within 48 hours. If you wait too long, your feedback won't be meaningful.
- Additionally, block off time in your schedule to walk around and connect with employees. First thing in the morning is ideal. You can discuss any concerns and answer any questions, ensuring that everyone is more productive throughout the day.
- Respond to emails quickly and thoughtfully. Employees may be choosing email to communicate because they sense you don't want to be disturbed in person. Read their messages carefully, and follow up as soon as possible. Don't respond with gruff one-word answers either. Instead, answer all of their questions carefully to avoid another round of emails.
- Apologize for your behavior. Everyone becomes stressed out—and turns into a jerk—from time to time. When you catch yourself raising your voice, acting impatiently or demanding more than is fair, say: "I'm sorry for being so scattered/tense/busy/absent this week. It's been incredibly hectic, but things will be back to normal very soon."

However, don't make a habit of apologizing every week for your bad behavior. If you are constantly overwhelmed, you may need to assess your time-management skills and make some changes.

Source: <http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/44753/be-a-great-boss-when-youre-swamped>

# Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.



**Q. My employee discusses many personal problems at work. One day it's health issues, the next day it's problems with her sister-in-law. It's bothersome to coworkers, and I fear it could influence some to leave the agency. Should I refer her to the EAP? Is this a performance matter?**

A. Meet with your employee in private and express your concern and share your observations about the frequency and effect of her multiple problems and suggest the EAP as a resource. If no changes are forthcoming, and self-referral to the EAP is declined, encourage her more strongly to participate. If needed, express your concerns more directly about the work environment. Use documentation based on your observations of her interactions. The goal is to help her make changes and get help if issues in her life are serious enough to need counseling support. Always keep in mind that as a supervisor you can refer your employee to EAP for performance issues but their participation is voluntary.

**Q. I am a new supervisor. I am sure there will be many challenges, but with all the different personalities of employees I supervise, how can I best help each one perform to his or her peak?**

A. Understanding that each of your employees will see you differently, will relate to you differently, and will need different things from you is the place to start. Many managers make the mistake of seeing their employees as "the troops." As such, they communicate with them as though they are Marines in a barracks waiting for orders. Take the opposite approach. It takes time, but over months and years, pay attention to how your employees are unique in five key ways: 1) Communication style and needs, 2) Career goals, hopes, dreams, education desires, 3) Motivation triggers and reward preferences, 4) Limitations, avoidances, and dislikes, 5) Leadership and problem-solving capacity. There are more, but these five hit most of the bases. Growing to understand each one will help maximize employee job satisfaction and productivity.

**Q. How can I help employees cope with workplace demands that I don't have any control over? I can't manage their stress for them, so can you suggest what role I should play?**

A. Stay engaged - don't be a manager or supervisor who disappears on the job. When employees are stressed, feelings of isolation can set in. Your energy as a manager and your influence can play a powerful role by breaking a naturally negative self-talk script employees are prone to playing under stress. Also, be sure to develop relationships with your employees. Each one is different, and they will handle stress in different ways. Understanding workers under your supervision will allow you to offer support tailored to their individual needs. The managerial behaviors described above don't eliminate stress—they simply facilitate and allow the employee's natural ability to cope with stress to come forth.

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