

Make My Day - stopping interruptions

Quicklist

- It takes 2 minutes for the brain to reengage after an interruption.
- Answer emails 4 times a day.
- Turn off email alerts.
- Broken record, broken record, broken record.
- Each week reserve time slots for important activities.
- Can this wait 30 mins?
- Use your answering machine.
- Visit your boss's office.
- Work while your boss is away.
- Shut your door if you are lucky enough to have one!
- Ask for protected time.
- Remove chairs or put files on them.
- Be brisk and business-like.
- Are you too visible?
- Could you set up a surgery slot?
- Are you too helpful?
- Can you screen your calls?
- What are you worth? £25,000 per/annum = £12.50 per/hr.

An example to follow:

During the hour and a half I was in his office every month, there was never a telephone call, and his secretary never stuck her head in the door to announce that an important man wanted to see him urgently. One day I asked him about this. He said, "My secretary has strict instructions not to put anyone through except the President of the United States and my wife. The President rarely calls and my wife knows better. Everything else the secretary holds till I have finished. Then I have half an hour in which I return every call and make sure I get every message. I have yet to come across a crisis which could not wait ninety minutes."

- Learn to prioritise.

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Prevent interruptions from walk-in visitors by isolating yourself. Close your door. Put up a sign. Work in a conference room. If you work in an office, take a day to work on important projects at home if necessary.

Change the layout of your desk so that you're not facing traffic. Otherwise, you encourage interruptions.

If you're storing materials or files that people have to access frequently, move them to another area.

When They Walk In

When someone asks for a few minutes of your time, respond with "Sure, how about if I come by your office at 2 o'clock this afternoon?" This gives you more control.

If they insist that it's urgent, ask them how many minutes they need, then agree to that time (or tell them how much time you can give them).

Prevent Them From Staying

When someone walks into your office or cubicle, immediately stand up. That way, your visitor is less likely to sit down and get comfortable.

If you must, place a binder or a briefcase on visitors' chairs, to discourage people from sitting down if they happen to drop in. (Or remove chairs altogether.)

Invent a meeting that you have to go to. Confess that you promised to call someone back about a confidential matter at exactly this time. Go make some photocopies. This will bring a meandering discussion to an end.

Set a time limit. Then check the time in an obvious way, and make sure to announce the end of the allotted time when it occurs.

Be careful that your tactics aren't counterproductive to the organization. What may benefit you as an individual may be detrimental to the team. Isolating yourself might frustrate others, or cause them to waste their own time because you weren't available for help.

Boundary setting is not about getting other people to change (even though at first, it may seem that way). It's really about deciding what you will and won't tolerate any longer in your life, and then communicating this firmly and consistently whenever you need to. Boundaries are essential to becoming a healthy adult and balancing your work and personal life effectively. They demonstrate your commitment to self-respect."

Natalie Gahrman.

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