



7 Tips to Increase Your Efficiency in the Office

Ever wonder where all the time goes? Or why your “to do” list is always getting longer? If you are a small business owner, you wear a lot of different hats and have the daunting task of getting everything done to keep your company running smoothly. Here are some potential ideas on how to increase productivity in your office and start the year off right.

1. Block out time to work

- Block off time in your planner for major activities. This might include a block of time for working alone on major tasks. If someone wants to meet you during that time, say "I'm sorry, I already have an appointment."
- Create a block of time during non-prime hours to handle paperwork. Schedule this in your planner and stick to it. For example, block off every Friday morning for invoicing and expense management.

2. Block out time to play

- Work life balance is important. You didn't go into business to avoid your family and friends (hopefully!). Always plan time for balance: include family, fitness, recreation, social and spiritual activities. Schedule these activities in your planner. By taking time out, you will also re-energize yourself and be more productive. This is especially important if you work alone out of a home office. Schedule some social coffee chats with your colleagues to keep you connected and engaged with the world.

3. Automate where you can

- Automate repetitive, clerical and mechanical tasks. For instance, set up automatic bill payments.
- Consider a contact management system. This will help your organization keep track of leads, customers and contacts and save time looking for files for answers.
- Consider automated replies to web and email inquiries if practical.

4. Standardize

- Are you always re-inventing the wheel? Putting together proposals or quotes? Create standard documents and email templates that can be easily modified – inquiry responses, proposals, presentations, quotes, contracts, order forms, invoices, thank you letters, newsletter formats, etc.
- Also having standard processes makes things more efficient. For every process, make sure it's clear what the steps are and who is responsible. This will save time and eliminate rework and redundant steps.

5. Delegate

- Delegate routine activities, even though you may not want to:
 - Fact-finding/research projects
 - Preparation of first drafts of reports
 - Problem analysis and suggested actions
 - Collection of data for reports
 - Photocopying, printing and collating
 - Data entry
- Also, ask subordinates to submit recommendations along with important reports. Nothing should be sent to you without a summary or recommended action.

6. Outsource

- Outsource things that aren't part of your core competencies. For small businesses, these could include accounting, web site design, marketing, deliveries, hardware upkeep, software help, graphic design, travel arrangements, legal issues and even HR functions such as payroll.

7. Simplify

- Say no instead of yes. People agree to requests from others because they like to please them. Instead, realize that you have a right to say no.
- Creating plans or policies makes saying no easier. ("I'm sorry we've already allocated out marketing dollars for the year." "I'm sorry, we already have a plan for giving to charities.") This will also save you from spending time on un-needed phone calls and meetings.

Your time is a precious commodity. By implementing some of these suggestions, you should have more of it and a better running business.