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8 Tricks To Help You Stay on Task at Work



Banishing workplace distractions is a great way to ensure you stay on task throughout the day and remain as productive as possible.

Julie Morgenstern, professional organizer and author of *Time Management from the Inside Out*, offers these tips for getting rid of workplace distractions.

1. Change your environment. Create a kind of cocoon by stacking books or moving files to make yourself less accessible.
2. Be honest with yourself. Accepting that distractions are out there is half the battle in keeping them at bay when your mind is tempted to stray.
3. Make a plan. Preparing a list of what you need to get done or setting a timer can help you focus.
4. Take a walk. When you do need a break, don't hop online—hop out of your chair and get some fresh air. Doing so provides a different kind of brain stimulation that can leave you refreshed.
5. Let others know when you're buckling down. Put a sign on your workspace saying "on task" or "on deadline." Talk to your team about everyone adopting the practice.
6. Send it to email. "Can you email me that?" is a good way to get someone to stop talking to you while you're focused on working.
7. Hold your line. If people ignore your sign or keep talking, defend the boundary you've set. Acknowledge that what they're saying is important and explain you want to give it your full attention when you're able to do so.
8. Bring it up off deadline. Set up check-in times so you can communicate when it works for you.

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Creating an Environment that Encourages Employee Growth and Development

There are many benefits to organizations who provide an environment that encourages the growth and development of their employees. Working in an environment like that helps to improve employee motivation and leads to increases in both employee engagement and retention. In addition, providing resources that encourage employees to grow professionally results in a more skilled and productive workforce.

Importance of Supervisors Taking an Active Role in Each Employee's Professional Development

Of course, it's in our best interest as leaders to take an active role in the growth and development of each of our staff members. Unfortunately, many supervisors don't prioritize working with their employees on their long-term growth because of the pressure and stress of day-to-day tasks and problems.

It's important for supervisors to recognize that, by focusing on both short-term issues and long-term employee growth concurrently, they'll maximize the team's success over time. Employee knowledge and skill development should be a core part of every supervisor's performance management approach.

Start by Staying Current with Each Employee's Goals & Interests

Your support of the professional development of your employees will be most effective when it's customized to the needs and interests of the individual. Kevin Kruse, the author of "Employee Engagement 2.0", recommends that supervisors meet with their employees twice per year to talk about their career goals, what types of projects they are most interested in, what skills they would be interested in further developing, etc.

It's important to remember that many employees will not focus on their long-term professional development without the encouragement of their supervisor. When a supervisor recommends that an employee takes advantage of available resources such as tuition assistance to pursue an advanced degree, participation in a training class in an area of interest, or attendance at an industry conference to stay current in their field, it's more likely that the employee will participate. And when they do, both the employee and the organization will benefit from their continuing knowledge and skill development.

Follow up to Encourage Their Progress

Follow up with your employees and ask about their progress. Provide recognition for their efforts, and continually offer your support. It demonstrates that you care about them as individuals, and as professionals. Research shows that motivation and engagement increases when an employee knows that their supervisor cares about them.

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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. Why is it important for supervisors to understand bullying, what it looks like, and how it impacts the workplace?

A. Workplace bullying harms employee health and reduces productivity. Unfortunately, many supervisors misidentify bullying as personality conflict, disrespect, incivility, personality style, jealousy, insecurity, or one employee having a bad day. It is natural to minimize the significance of a problem if it otherwise implies we may be called upon to use significant effort to address it. The more benign explanation usually wins out. This is also true with sexual harassment, which is not trivial or inconsequential. Investigate bullying as a possibility when you learn of employee conflict, particularly if you see a power disparity. One employee may have more tenure, clout, seniority, or recognition as the expert, or be considered by customers and peers as the “go-to person.” These dynamics make it difficult for victims to defend themselves because of their subordinate position, inexperience, lack of clout, or hesitation to be assertive.

Q. Why is domestic violence an issue for the workplace? Domestic means this problem is at home, not at work, right?

A. Three quarters of battered women and men report being threatened while at work by a partner or spouse. This leads to lost productivity, distractions, and absences from the work post. Other issues also affect the workplace, like a violent partner coming to the job site. This can pose a grave threat, and many incidents of homicide in the workplace each year are associated with this circumstance. A former partner of a domestic violence victim may phone or come to the workplace to harass the victim primarily because the job site is a required, familiar, and predictable place for the victim to be. Less often considered, but also costly are employee batterers. They may be less productive, miss work, get incarcerated, or have unpredictable absences when stalking victims and getting into legal trouble. At work, batterers or stalkers may use work time to check up on their victims, or may spend lengthy periods of time on the phone processing and apologizing following battering incidents. A supervisor may never discover that domestic violence is linked to performance issues, but if you do, don't keep it a secret. Contact the EAP and consult on arranging referral.

Q. What's the most common mistake supervisors make when confronting troubled employees?

A. The most common mistake is not doing it in time. Not confronting an employee as soon as an inappropriate situation occurs is one of the worst mistakes supervisors make. This does not mean the confrontation must include a corrective interview at the moment. This is where the second mistake often occurs. Because many supervisors link confrontation and corrective interviews, they believe the two actions must happen at the same time. They don't. As a result, a supervisor may fail to confront an employee because the timing isn't right, they're busy, it's the end of the day, or they simply don't have the energy for one more thing on their plate. Barring an emergency, any of these are legitimate reasons for not having a meeting to correct behavior or performance, but not for delaying a brief conversation and arranging a meeting for a later time—that day or even several days later. The problem with lack of confrontation is often its negative effect: unstated approval.

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