

Are you derailing productivity?



It's in your best interest as a manager to ensure that your team is productive, but despite your good intentions, there are plenty of ways managers unintentionally stifle the successful workplace environment you're striving to foster. Here are a few common ways your efforts to be a supportive manager may actually hinder your team's productivity potential.

1. You don't scrutinize meeting agendas. Though ensuring you have a relationship with the people you report to is important (nearly 55% of respondents to a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement survey said it was a key factor in the level of engagement they feel with their jobs), meetings aren't the way to foster a connection among employees. To facilitate productivity, all meetings should have one defining purpose: to move further toward a defined and desired result.

Before a meeting, ask yourself:

- (1) Is there an agenda?
- (2) Does each item on the agenda have a defined and specific outcome that will lead to either continued momentum, and/or completion?
- (3) Does each agenda item specify the amount of time and attention it will receive?
- (4) Does each agenda item have an "owner" assigned?
- (5) Are all the people who need to be involved in an agenda item available?
- (6) Does everyone on the invite have a "place" on the agenda?
- (7) Does the meeting end time coincide with the amount of time each agenda item will receive?

Lead by example, and encourage your staff to get in the habit of strategically scrutinizing every meeting for these criteria as well. If every question above can't be answered in the affirmative, consider alternative ways to communicate.

2. You force your way. Taking a "hands off" approach isn't all there is to delegating; you must also be mindful about allowing employees to have a voice. "It isn't about you, it is about the work," says Dr. Jené Kapela, a leadership coach, consultant, and the founder of Jené Kapela Leadership Solutions. "Don't be concerned that things get done your way—just that they get done well. Your staff members will do a better job if they can do things in a way that makes sense to them." With that in mind, however, she says you'll need to create opportunities for those discussions to take place—and keep an open mind about any approach.

3. You don't confirm communication. Miscommunications usually aren't revealed until a mistake occurs in

the midst of a project, or until an employee hits a “roadblock” that causes him or her to seek clarification. By that time, countless hours of what could have been productive time are lost. To eliminate potential miscommunication, Mark Goulston, management consultant and author of six best-selling books including *Just Listen* suggests tweaking your language when you give direction. “Instead of asking ‘Do you have any questions?’ replace it with a phrase like ‘So that we are clear, please tell me what I have asked you to do, by when and why it’s important to what we are trying to achieve,’” says Goulston. Not only will repeating the information help the employee begin to process the task and reveal miscommunication before it’s problematic, you’ll gradually gain a better understanding of how to communicate effectively with the different personalities on your team.

4. You do more than one thing at a time. Though multitasking may seem like the only way to handle a demanding workload, it’s ineffective in terms of maximizing productivity. “Constant multitasking makes us more prone to mistakes, more likely to miss important information and cues, and less likely to retain information in working memory—which impairs problem solving and creativity,” says Maura Thomas, author of *Personal Productivity Secrets*. Further, she points out that it can lead to job unhappiness and undue stress among your staff. “In multitasking environments, employees work in reactive mode all day long; it prevents them from being proactive, and robs them of the opportunity to assess their overall workload and choose what to work on next.”

To encourage more single-task focus, remember that the team looks to you for the “right” behavior. Don’t take your smartphone into meetings, don’t check emails while you’re on conference calls, and establish a protocol for how “urgent” requests for information are to be handled. For example, you may instill a policy that when urgent needs arise, colleagues visit one another in person, versus sending urgent emails that make it impossible to temporarily disconnect from online distractions.