

Too busy to chat? What to do

Oh no! Here comes Long-winded Louis again. He's sure to have a lengthy story to tell about his fun-filled weekend that is sure to waste your valuable time (as well as his). While small talk can be a good way to connect with your employees, when you need to get stuff done, it is often tough to get away from drop-in visitors.

Try these steps to get back to productivity:

Take the direct approach. Of course, the best approach is to simply say you are too busy to chat and you're sure he understands you need to do your work. If he comes back by, say it again. Eventually, he will move on to more receptive ears.

Adopt a posture and workspace that discourage visitors. Avoid making eye-contact when walking by a Chatty Cathy. Sit as though you are concentrating intently on the task at hand in your office. Position your desk so that it's harder for passersby to attract your attention.

Head him off at the pass. Hold up your hand and say, "Hey, Louis. Sorry I don't have time to chat. I am about to make a phone call." Then pick up the phone and start hitting the buttons.

Use the "walk and talk" strategy. Save up several errands you need to do in the office. When you see Louis coming, stand up and say you are on your way to somewhere else while walking away.

Of course, if Louis has a legitimate reason for stopping by, you can always prompt him by asking, "Is there anything I can help you with today?"

Keep your door nearly closed. A wide-open door is an invitation for employees to wander in any time for all sorts of reasons (not what you want all the time). A door that's cracked open a few inches will give any employee pause to barge in for small talk, but open enough for business matters. A completely shut door essentially tells your workers "don't bother me at all."