Don't be the cause of bottlenecks

Communication bottlenecks can bring your team's progress to a screeching halt. Make sure that you aren't responsible for slowing things down because of poor communication habits. Follow these tips:

Have some self-awareness. You become a bottleneck when you don't finish your part of a project on time or you fail to prioritize, making it hard for others to do their own work. You become a communication bottleneck when you are consistently missing in action or you fail to keep your co-workers up to date on your progress.

Make sure you are clear on expectations. You should know who needs what by when. If people will be waiting on you before they can begin or complete their own work, you need to prioritize those tasks to ensure they receive what they need on time. Your other work is important, but not important enough to impede others.

Be responsive. Even if you're hard at work, if you don't respond to emails or calls, you are slowing progress. Answer urgent messages immediately and follow up on everything else within 24 hours.

Announce your availability. During hectic times when decisions must be made fast, share your schedule and how co-workers can reach you in an emergency. You can take meetings, unplug to focus on work or even take a day off. Just make sure that in an urgent situation, people aren't waiting for you to respond.

Let people know what you're up against. If you know you won't meet a deadline, tell affected co-workers so that they can adjust accordingly. Together, you may be able to come up with a solution to keep everything on track, even if you're behind.

— Adapted from "How to Avoid Being a Human Bottleneck at Work," Alina Vrabie, Lifehacker, www.lifehacker.com.