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Maximize your day

Raise the bar to greater productivity

Question:

With all of the cutbacks and layoffs going on, companies will be trying to squeeze more productivity from the employees they retain. Do you have any suggestions for increasing productivity?

Answer:

Peak performance is, indeed, a focal point for organizations these days. Confronted with today's tough marketplace conditions, it cannot be a "once in awhile" occurrence either. In that sense, all employees (including managers and executives) must reflect on the techniques they are (and are not) using to be productive.

Let's briefly consider the context for work in today's electronic work environment. People work at smart stations supported by computers that allow sophisticated voice, image, text and other data handling operations. Voice messaging utilizes the voice recognition capabilities of computers to take dictation, answer telephones and relay messages.

Databases are accessed to prepare and analyze reports. Once finished, documents drafted via word processing are stored for later retrieval and/or sent via electronic mail to others. Standard filing cabinets are few, and little paper is found. Mail arrives and is routed to its destination via computer. It gets posted on electronic bulletin boards to be prioritized and accessed according to importance.

Telephone calls are received at the workstation, which can accept and store voice messages for later retrieval. Computer conferencing and videoconferencing are commonplace and people work with one another every day over great distances, without ever being personally face-to face.

Set in this context, what if you were able to achieve even simple gains in productivity from each employee? What would be the impact if you could realize even just 5 percent more output from everyone who works for your company? Undoubtedly, you would be unleashing a positive ripple effect throughout the organization.

To become more productive, here are some factors for all organizational mem-

time needs to be minimized to the fullest extent possible. Make it a habit to be doing something purposeful or thinking about doing something purposeful while you are on the job. Along the way, try to avoid reinventing the wheel. Confronted with a task, start with solution strategies that have previously proven to be successful.

» **Keep your workspace clean.** Use the "TRAF" (i.e., toss, refer, act, file) system to avoid having your workspace become cluttered and messy. Make it a habit to organize your workspace at the end of the day. You'll feel a sense of accomplishment for what you've done

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bers to consider:

- » **Begin each day with a distinct sense of purpose.** "Make each day your masterpiece." John Wooden, the UCLA men's basketball coach during that program's dynasty of the 1960s and '70s, used that catch phrase to motivate his players to practice with diligence every day. He believed that peak performance in practice enabled peak performance during the games. Effort is something you offer all of the time, not just some of the time.
- » **Work as efficiently as possible.** Idle

that day and you'll thank yourself the next day when you come back to a clean space.

- » **Mind your time.** Improve your timeliness. Meet your appointments on time. Bring an agenda that serves to organize the time within meetings. Be respectful of others' time. Inquire before barging in on colleagues and interrupting what they're doing.
- » **Avoid procrastination.** Manage tasks and assignments. Become a list maker. Determine what needs to be done today and get it done. If you're running

into bottlenecks that impact deadlines, alert your customer (internal or external) ahead of time, so they're not surprised. Be proactive. It's been said that the best way to get something done is to give it to someone who's "busy." Strive to be that kind of vigorous contributor in all that you do.

» **Avoid workaholism.** Lest you believe I am preaching only work, work and more work, it is worth noting that we are most productive when we are rested and healthy. You're doing no one any favors if you come to work each day dragging and bedraggled. We all know that we need to make healthy dietary choices, use alcohol in moderation, avoid smoking, exercise regularly, maintain an appropriate body weight, etc. So, do it!

» **Seek a personal-professional balance.** To be maximally productive, you need to recharge your batteries from time to time. Make sure you take your vacation days, rather than banking them. Cultivate hobbies and interests outside of work so you avoid falling into the all work, no play trap. Reflect on the question, "Am I living to work or working to live?"

» **Prioritize.** Organize your to do list from easiest to hardest, so that you can devote the bulk of your time to the most complex issues. Make sure you're not over-committing or over-

promising, as well. A key to satisfying customers is to exceed their expectations. To do this, you must promise and then over-perform. Promising and under-performing, on the other hand, guarantees dissatisfaction.

» **Encourage others to do the same.** While you will realize some gains if you incorporate the strategies I outlined, the real gains will be made when others join you in pursuing increased productivity. In order to encourage peak performance in their employees, leaders must draw upon effective interpersonal skills while occupying the leadership roles of coach, facilitator, and coordinator.

Effective leaders drive effective organizations. In the final analysis, if your goal is to cultivate an environment of peak performance, then all of the organization's leaders must operate at a high level as performance catalysts.

Ultimately, leadership is best defined in terms of "followership." When leaders "model the way" of industriousness and peak performance, the evidence will be the effort their employees offer and the output they deliver. ■

Daniel A. Schroeder, Ph.D, is the principal of Brookfield-based Organizational Development Consultants Inc. (www.OD-Consultants.com). He can be reached at (262) 827-1901 or Dan.Schroeder@OD-Consultants.com.