

Go Away, I'm Busy - How to Manage Interruptions

September 26, 2005

By Beth Schneider

You are in the zone, working away, the inspiration is flowing. Your hands are blowing over the keyboard like magic. You start thinking about what a productive day you are having. Then suddenly it happens. The phone rings, an email arrives, someone bursts into your office and it's all over.

Next thing you know, hours have gone by. You look up and think, "How did I get here?!" The day is almost over, you haven't finished what you wanted to and all that fantastic productivity has just flown out the window.

Interruptions are more than annoying. They can really slow down your business and your productivity. Arriving emails, ringing phones and unexpected visitors are the most common types of interruptions. Here are some ways to deal with them.

You've Got Mail

Personally, I am an emailaholic. That little "ding- ding" goes off and I get excited. I just have to see what is waiting in my in box. But even with all the heavy duty spam filters, it never fails. I've given up my train of thought and focus to find out that I can buy prescriptions over the web for 75% off. Great. Now where was I?

Don't let your email control you. Rather than immediately jumping when the little ding goes off, pick specific times to check your email. Maybe once every couple of hours or at the start of each hour.

Then when you do sit down to read your mail, actually spend a few minutes processing it. Read it once. Answer those that need answering, delete what you don't need, add tasks to your calendar. This way you don't have a mountain of mail piling up and you can go back to what you were doing.

Voicemail is Your Friend

How many times have you uttered the words, "I'd get so much more done, if the phone would just stop ringing"? Now I'm not saying that you want to ignore your customers or your team. But rather than automatically picking up the phone when you are in the middle of something, decide if you should pick up the call or let it go to voicemail.

Set yourself a schedule. Choose to answer the phone during some parts of the day and not others. Check voicemail every hour or half-hour and return calls all at the same time. See if there are certain questions you can address on your outgoing message. If you are on the phone all day, maybe you should be delegating portions of your phone duties.

A client of mine who has a large team was always dealing with questions and impromptu coaching. Now rather than just answering the phone every time it rings, we set up specific coaching hours. Each caller is allowed 10 minutes. If they needed more, they set up an appointment for the next coaching time. This way her team knows to get to the point, she's able to work with several people in one day AND get all of her own work done.

Two's a Crowd

Whether you work in a home or corporate office, people walk through our offices. Team members, clients, kids and other family members, cleaning people, UPS guys (or gals), etc all seem to just show up at the worst time.

Be proactive and let people know when you are not available. If you need an hour of focus time in the morning ask people not to bother you during that hour unless it is an emergency. Then define what an emergency is. Put a sign on your desk that says Do Not Disturb. Get a sitter for the kids and close the door. Let the UPS guy leave the package at the door.

Don't be Your Own Worst Enemy

Ever get working on something and the next thing you know you're surfing the web reading about the weather or you're off buying shoes. Focus on what you are doing. If it is something tedious set a timer and don't do anything but that task for 30 minutes. Come on it's only 30 minutes. You can do anything for half an hour.

When you do find yourself interrupted, be aware of the interruption. Create processes and systems for yourself. A great way to get started is with my home study kit, [Your Business Machine Basics](#). That way if you need to stop what you are doing you can bookmark your spot. Were you writing an email? Making follow up calls? What ever you were doing, note where you were and what you were doing and then go back where you left off.

© 2005 Beth Schneider. Want to reprint this article, feel free as long as you include the following: Beth Schneider, Chief Infopreneur of Process Prodigy, is a business process consultant who helps solo-entrepreneurs, small business owners and network marketers who want to systemize their business to increase profits, increase productivity and grow their business without having to give up the family oriented, flexible, balanced lifestyle they desire. Beth works one-on-one with her clients, offers home study courses, and teleclass boot camps. For more information visit www.processprodigy.com and sign up for your FR*EE 5-Step Process Starter Kit and FR*EE Process Tips.