

# IDEAS FOR SUCCESS

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## Managing Your Interruptions

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Many people say they could get a great deal more accomplished “IF” there weren’t so many interrupts during the day. For many, attempting to get caught up on the work they missed doing due to unnecessary interruptions is a never-ending battle. Some try working from home, staying late, coming in on weekends, or working through lunch. But is going to these lengths really necessary all the time?

The following are a few suggestions for managing unnecessary interruptions that may work for you:

1. **Turn off Instant Messenger (IM) when possible.** *If possible*, rather than just trying to ignore those instant messages, turn that program off periodically during the day. For many, instant messenger is more of an annoyance or distraction from work than a useful tool. *If* your instant response is not essential to others doing their job, it likely you can do without it at times.
2. **Don’t constantly check your email.** This is a common distraction many feel only takes seconds to do. In reality, it diverts your attention for minutes and multiplied many times over the course of a workday, it can add up to an hour or more of unproductive time use. Close Outlook until you’re ready to use it—perhaps once an hour or at the beginning, middle and end of your workday. Few people expect an instant reply to email.
3. **Be proactive in advance by contacting those who usually interrupt you before they have time to do so.** Have a long commute to work? Is there anyone you can call along the way and address their questions or needs for the day before you get to the office? Can you send out emails with instructions for the day before you leave home? Not all solutions work for everyone, but the point is to be proactive and initiate contact on your terms and at the time most convenient time for you. This approach also works in the office. If you initiate a visit to someone’s office, it is much easier for you to end that visit than for you to get that person to end a visit to your office. If you know the

interruption is coming, don’t just wait for it and dread it, take action.

4. **Close the door to your office.** In response to this suggestion people often say, “But I don’t want to be rude or have others think I don’t want to talk to them!” Don’t think of your office door as a barrier, just a boundary. Barriers are sometimes hostile. Boundaries are not hostile—they simply let people know how you wish to be treated or considered. In this case, place a sign on the door asking for no interruptions for a set period of time. This way you are not denying them access to you, you are simply letting them know you need time to concentrate on the task at hand.
5. **Schedule times when you’re available and times when you are not.** If closing your door at random times doesn’t work for you, try scheduling time when you’re available and when your not and let others know your schedule. It works all the time. For example, when everyone knows you’re in a meeting, they usually do not even think of interrupting you. Why? There are certain times and circumstances we have learned not to interrupt people. Teach the people with whom you work there are other times interruptions are unacceptable.

Interruptions in the workplace are a fact of life—it is impossible to eliminate them altogether. Therefore, the key is to manage these interruptions effectively so you may be as productive as possible. Try a new approach and see what works for you!

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