

# Time Management: Avoiding Interruptions

## *Prevent intrusions before they distract you*

Who causes most of our interruptions? We do. Nearly half of the readers who answered our survey last month said they themselves are the most frequent source of interruptions. They start working on one thing and then switch to something else.

*If that's a problem for you, try these two techniques:*

**Clear the decks first.** Before you start working on something, remove all the competing thoughts from your mind. If you're thinking "I need to call Betty about the sales flyers," call her or jot a note on your to-do list.

**Set a timer.** The Pomodoro Technique has become one of the most popular time-management methods. It boils down to one simple practice: Set a timer for 25 minutes and work on one task until the timer rings. Then take a 5-minute break. After four cycles (two hours), take a longer break.

Nearly as many readers (41%) told us that people coming into their office without appointments is the most frequent interruption they encounter. *Here are two more ideas for that problem:*

**Flag availability.** Create a visible signal for co-workers: a "Do not disturb" sign or a traffic light that welcomes them with green or stops them with a red signal.

**Take a hard line.** Tell your team that you are serious about taking control of your time and that everyone must schedule an appointment. Don't allow any exceptions, even for people who ask for "Just a second."

We'll say this one more time:

**When you need to concentrate, send calls to voice mail and turn off your email and instant messaging programs.** In our survey, 30% of readers blamed email and IM for interruptions, and 15% cited phone calls.



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# Time Management: Make Effective Use of your time

## Understand your priorities

- Set priorities according to importance and urgency
- Set priorities according to best use of your time
- Review new requests according to your priorities

## Schedule your time

- Schedule things requiring your greatest energy and effort during the time of day you are most alert and productive
- Always keep a clock in full view while you are working
- Carry a small notebook to write down things you want to remember
- Carry a calendar and note any due dates or appointments
- Keep reading material available in your car or bag for when have down time and are waiting for an appointment
- Delegate what you can

## Set office hours for PTA

- Set aside certain times to regularly handle PTA tasks
- Let people know they can always reach you during that time
- Take advantage of answering machines to leave messages whenever possible
- Utilize e-mail wisely - jokes and inspirational messages consume lots of time and discuss with your group about how to use "reply all"
- When you are busy use your answering machine to monitor calls and only take the necessary ones



you



## Develop a procedure for handling paperwork

- Consider using one of these sets of categories:
  - act on it, pass it on, file it and toss it
  - TRRAF - Toss it, Refer it/pass it on, Reading material for later, Action, File it/keep it
- Keep important information accessible and current
- Maintain a place for each type of information you wish to retain
- Develop an effective filing system