

How to Increase Your Team's Productivity and Performance *(without increasing hours worked)*

Many employees find that responding to a constant stream of emails and messages disrupts them from deep thought and focused work. The masses are bogged down by constant meetings that eat into productive 'alone' time. Additionally, in today's virtual world, it's all too easy to find yourself lost in countless distractions and procrastinate your day away (which is often brought on by feeling overwhelmed and a lack of strategic focus).

How can we protect ourselves and our team from these and other threats to productivity? Some employers are testing out four-day workweeks and flexible schedules, finding that productivity increases since employees are more motivated and focused during the times they are at work. However, distractions, unreasonable expectations, and a non-strategic approach to tasks may still impede actual progress unless we do something about them. In this article, we share some ways you can help your team increase productivity and performance.



65% of workers were dissatisfied with the length of time they spend "in the zone" (doing focused work without interruption). ¹



89% believe carving out a daily block of dedicated focus time would positively impact their and their team's productivity. ¹

ENCOURAGE GOOD COGNITIVE HYGIENE

We live in a world of muddled cognitive associations and distractions, which are huge drains on productivity. As environmental stimuli drive our behavior, we are constantly influenced by what's around us. It can be difficult (especially for people working from home) to avoid distractions and separate work and home life. Some of the most common distractions are emails, texts, phone calls, background noise, and visual clutter.

WHAT TO DO

- ◆ Recognize the need to disconnect from the phone or email; respect your colleague's need to focus and don't always expect them be available at any time of the day.

- ◆ If you have an open-plan workspace, allow team members to create visual barriers or turn toward a wall and away from foot traffic. (see below)
- ◆ Wear noise-canceling headphones or employ similar tactics to reduce background noise if it's a problem.

Open offices reduce productivity and increase cortisol. Our brains cannot ignore the constant faces and movements and treat these as potential threats (or opportunities). ²

1. BecomingSuperhuman.science

2. (Bernstein, 2018) *The impact of the 'open' workspace on human collaboration.*

RECOMMEND SETTING DAILY “MITs” (most important tasks)

The #1 factor that can enhance emotions, motivation, and productivity during the workday is making progress on meaningful work. The more frequently people experience this sense of daily progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run.³ However, our most important tasks can get sidelined by less important ones if we aren't careful. Help your team focus on the most important ones by being strategic.

WHAT TO DO

- ◆ *Recommend that each team member list their top 1-3 MITs (most important tasks) of the day and focus on those. And be sure to allow them plenty of time to do so.*

RESPECT PERSONAL ENERGY PATTERNS

Everyone follows a different “chronotype” – an internal rhythm that dictates our optimal wake/sleep times and energy levels throughout the day. It's essential to recognize that everyone's ‘peak performance’ hours vary, as do their times of lower energy, and not to expect everyone to follow the same patterns. When people have the flexibility and autonomy to create their schedules based on their energy patterns, productivity skyrockets – this affects the overall work schedule, meeting times, and many other work facets.

WHAT TO DO

- ◆ *Give employees the flexibility to design their days: Suggest that they reserve at least one of their peak performance hours for cognitively intensive, high-value work and schedule email responses and administrative tasks for lower energy periods.*
- ◆ *Consider chronotypes when scheduling meetings: Generally speaking, the vast majority of workers are most productive before mid-afternoon, so consider holding meetings later in the day to give people more productive time early on.*⁴

5X *High-performing executives and managers report being up to 5X more productive during their Peak Performance Hours.*⁵

3. (Amabile, 2011) *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*

4. (Accountemps, 2019) *New Survey Reveals Productivity Peaks For Workers...*

5. (McKinsey, 2013) *Increasing the Meaning Quotient of Work.*

ESTABLISH & PROMOTE FOCUS SPRINTS

“Focus sprints” are a research-backed method for getting work done twice as fast while minimizing mistakes. It's been shown to provide the highest ROI of any productivity method studied. Focus sprints allow us to work highly focused for short periods with breaks in between, which is much more effective than being partially focused for long periods. So long as you have a clear stopping point, you can push yourself to your limits for short periods. Think sprint rather than a marathon. Then, after a rest, you can sprint again. Start by encouraging your team members to perform at least three focus sprints per week.

FOCUS SPRINT PROCESS

- *Identify and set aside one hour*
- *Write down goals for that hour (be specific and realistic).*
- *Eliminate distractions (post a “do not disturb” sign, remove phone from the room, reduce noise)*
- *Block time on your calendar noting “Focus Sprint”, so everyone knows you are in the zone*
- *Focus on the task for 50 minutes (use a timer; do not do anything else in that time).*
- *Then, take a brain break (perform a more physical task, take a walk, stretch, breathe.)*

There are quite a few strategies that leaders can employ to help their teams improve productivity and overall performance. Consider exploring some, or all, of the suggestions listed here and illicit feedback from your employees. You may find that some of these simple strategies are exactly what your team needs to increase output and motivation.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Explore effective leadership styles that inspire increased productivity. Join our upcoming New Manager Boot Camp. Learn more here:

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