



Timely Information for Personal Success

Managing Distracted Employees

By *Marty Martin*

Workday distractions are everywhere, stealing employees' precious time and productivity. Between new technologies that beg for people's attention to the prevalence of shortened attention spans, everyone has the opportunity to be more distracted today than in the past. Of course, being distracted creates numerous problems, from missed opportunities to strained business relationships. Therefore, business leaders need to effectively manage their employees so their distractions are *minimized*.

Consider this common scenario: A customer service representative is responsible for phone, email, and chat communications. When a customer calls, the rep has scripts to follow for each. In addition to working from memorized scripts, she is also instant messaging with customers and answering emails.

In fact, her computer screen is divided into quarters: one quadrant has the details of the caller on the phone, and the other three are active chats she's engaging in simultaneously. She's also in an office space where the physical space between her and the next customer service representative is only 5 to 8 feet. Even though she's wearing a headset, she can still hear the other reps talking.

And there are probably *other* distractions on top of that! Today's employees have to spread their attention very thin just to complete their work. Fortunately, most distractions can be eliminated. Here's how managers can do just that:



❖ **Redesign a job from a distractibility point of view.** Take a good look at the job and work area to see if it's making the employee distracted. What visual or auditory distraction triggers are present? How are the lighting, chairs, and desks set up? Realize that if the work environment is poorly designed, management will continue to hire talented individuals who will *not* do well — not because of *them*, but due to a bad job design.

❖ **Create a distraction elimination plan.** Think back to your school days. You likely had a few kids in class who always bothered others. The teacher had a plan for dealing with them, such as moving the disruptive kids up front near her. She knew what to do because she had a plan.

Good managers do the same. They sit down with the distracted employee and create a Distraction Elimination Plan (DEP). They may decide on physical changes in the office, such as moving to a new

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Healthy Recipe: Grilled Rosemary Flank Steak

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 small rosemary spring, chopped or 1/4 teaspoon dried
- 2/3 pound flank steak
- 1-1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- Freshly ground pepper
- Salt to taste

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 331
- Carbohydrates: 1 g.
- Protein: 51 g.
- Sodium: 391 mg.
- Fat: 12 g.
- Saturated fat: 4 g.

DIRECTIONS:

- 1 Mix the oil, vinegar, garlic, rosemary, salt and pepper, and brush on the flank steak. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or overnight.
- 2 Preheat the grill.
- 3 Grill the flank steak for 4 to 8 minutes on each side, depending on the desired doneness. Let the steak rest on a carving plate for 1 or 2 minutes.
- 4 Slice the steak on the bias.

Serving size: about 1/4 pound cooked meat.

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Questions and Answers

Keeping Gossip in Check

Q: Gossip is a big problem where I work. I am tired of all the negativity, but I like my job for the most part. Do I have any recourse other than quitting?

A: The following are a few ideas for preventing or ending workplace rumors, according to Jane Demerica with Inside Business: 360:

❖ Putting a stop to gossip starts with you. If someone comes to you with a juicy story about Jane or wants to tell you some odd little tidbit about the president of the company, close your ears to it. Letting them know from the start that you don't want anything to do with gossip can work wonders in getting mouths to shut. Usually, it's enough for them to at least leave *you* alone even if they move on to the next person.

❖ If you are simply trying to do your work but the gossip comes to you, they must not have any work to do. Hand them some work and tell them you sure could use some help with your overload. They will stop coming to your area because they don't want more work!

For more tips, visit www.insidebusiness360.com/index.php/how-to-prevent-or-end-workplace-rumors-3-29458/. ■

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cubicle, or they may figure out strategies the employee can use to maintain focus, such as not having an email program always open or disabling smart phone alerts.

A plan also serves as a benchmark to gauge progress. Many organizations have strategic plans and business plans ... so why not distraction elimination plans? Distractions rarely resolve themselves – so the better the plan, the better the results.

❖ **Offer other resources.** *Solicit your employee assistance program for help.* For instance, you could suggest using the EAP as a step in the DEP, as in “If the outlined steps in this plan don't resolve the issue, then the employee will seek outside assistance in the form of a counselor or therapist.” The key is to help the employee find the resources to determine if the situation is more serious than simple distractions.

Summary

The next time managers notice employees who are underperforming, they need to determine if there's something else going on – like a poorly planned work environment with multiple distractions. The fewer distractions people have, the more productive they'll be. ■

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