

# *managing* distractions

*a thing that prevents someone from giving full attention to something else*

The average employee is getting interrupted 50 to 60 times per day, and **most of these interruptions are unimportant**. As a result, people are spending little time in what psychologists call "the flow state", a space where we're most productive. So, how do we avoid distractions in the office in order to take control of our days, do our best work, and improve our emotional well-being?

Constant distractions don't just affect the bottom line. They can also be detrimental to an individual's health. How can you address these workplace distractions before they become an issue? You need to start by identifying what's exactly distracting you. Knowing what the distraction is and how it is happening can help you make a plan to squash these interruptions. Here are 4 of the most common disturbances that you should address in your workplace -- ASAP.

**Smartphones** The tried and true methods are to put your phone on airplane mode or use the phone's "do not disturb" function. This action can be done on both Android or iPhone. You can also place your phone in another room or leave it in a desk drawer, bag or purse.

**People interruptions** Like background noise, interruptions from employees, customers, suppliers, and family are unavoidable. One way around this is keeping your office door closed when you don't want to be disturbed. For good measure, place a "do not disturb" sign on the door. If you work in an open office space, send signals like wearing headphones and **being honest**. If someone has a direct and work-related question, give them the answer and move on.

**Clutter** While in small doses a little clutter can encourage a creative mind, the fact is that a messy workplace affects your ability to focus and process information. Confusion and disorder are essentially a to-do-list that reminds you of everything that needs to be done. As such, it pulls you away from being present. Over time, this makes you more anxious and stressed.

The fix? Keep your workspace clean and organized. Toss out the items you no longer need. Place paperwork in the appropriate files. Ideally, you should put as much paperwork on the cloud as possible to reduce the number of filing cabinets. Make sure that all of your office supplies have a home and are returned at the end of the day.

**Co-workers** Conversing with your employees, colleagues, and business partners are all essential for building a friendly and collaborative company culture. However, spending too much talking about "Game of Thrones" or gossiping about what you did over the weekend isn't just a major distraction. Hearsay, itself, can also create a toxic workplace. No one should participate in gossip in the workplace.

If someone engages you in a conversation, and you're busy, politely tell them that you currently don't have time to talk, but you can catch-up with during lunch. Your co-workers do not want to be distractions for you. They don't want you to harbor ill will against them, especially if you haven't brought an issue to their attention. If your office neighbors do something that distracts you from work, have an honest conversation about what they're doing. Chances are they don't realize they're bothering you, and they'll want to do whatever they can to minimize your distraction.

## HOW TO BETTER LIMIT DISTRACTIONS

**Manage your time and space.** "Reserve regular blocks of time for work that requires concentration," Mufson says. "Try using the first hour at work to make headway in your most difficult project. Ask your co-workers politely for quiet time or decide as a team what hours will be "power hours", in which the entire department can focus in (other than emergency noise) silence.

**Make a plan to minimize distractions** Haberfeld says to pick your top two distractions and give two weeks attention to keeping them high on your radar and resolving them. "Create a strategy and keep honing it as you see what works and what doesn't."

**Make others aware of your plan** If you are prone to distraction (aren't most of us?), ask a friend at work to have a designated check-in time each week to go over your progress," Haberfeld says. Letting others know about your strategy to minimize distractions will help you stay focused.

**Take action** Consider blocking out meeting-free zones on your calendar, turn off push notifications or put your phone in airplane mode, and try to find a quiet space to work. Use a signaling mechanism to let your team know when you're in the zone and that they shouldn't disturb you unless it's legitimately urgent. This could be as simple as a pair of headphones, a cap, or a "Do not disturb" coat hanger on the back of your chair. Organizations that build a culture around minimizing distractions will enjoy the compounding benefit of a focused workforce and will leave their people feeling less stressed and ultimately more fulfilled.



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