

How the over-worked principal gained back time

Robyn Pearce

My expertise as a time management specialist is requested by all kinds of businesses and industries so I'm really fortunate to see many variations on this theme – the good, the bad and the very ugly. When there is a productivity leakage I've noticed that almost always there's a poor or non-existent system.

The overworked principal

Pat, the principal of a large secondary school was chatting to me. She was tired of working crazy hours.

"Tell me about your workflow," I requested.

"I do believe in being here for my staff," said Pat. "It's an open door policy round here."

As soon as she said that, I knew I had one answer. In my opinion, that particular management system, *if used without parameters*, is the cause of horrendous amounts of work-related stress and poor productivity. One problem is, the little darlings start to rely on a boss who's *always* available. Before they know it, bosses who run such a system end up doing (or constantly being involved with) the work of their team during the day. They only get clear time to do their own work early in the morning; by staying late, when everyone else has left for the day; at home; or by coming in on weekends.

The next day Pat pulled the staff together. They agreed to test a new strategy.

First thing in the morning she now meets with her PA, who now handles more phone calls, makes most of her appointments, and shields Pat from many more low-level interruptions. This may seem obvious, but the process constantly needs to be revisited. Many executives (not just educators) don't use their assistants effectively. When we do a task we could delegate to another who's paid a lesser rate, we effectively pay ourselves at that lower rate (and it's easy to slip into old habits). Do the math.

The other short early morning meetings are with her direct reports. She shares necessary information and takes any questions. Then, unless it's a crisis, she's instructed them now to save further questions until later in the day. No more wandering in with 'just a quick question.' Also, she now shuts her door when she's working on tasks that require full concentration. Other staff can see her if necessary – they make an appointment with the secretary (unless it's a crisis.)



Results

- ◆ Staff are more focused
- ◆ Interruptions have dramatically reduced
- ◆ Her team take more responsibility
- ◆ Work output for all, including Pat, has increased.

She still helps with staff needs at the appropriate time but because she's not so available people can't come rushing in the minute they have a problem. Surprise, surprise – they now solve far more of their own problems. The major issues are very rarely urgent, and anything they still need help on is sorted at regular intervals. Also, Pat's not hooked in to their work. The monkeys (alias problems) now stay on the shoulders of their owners, because they've been encouraged and helped to think more deeply before they ask for help.

What system do you have for assisting the people around you? Whose work keeps you busy? Is it yours, or have your subordinates or colleagues got you doing their work?

If they keep asking for help when they could work out the answers, look out – that's a danger

signal. When they ask you to finish something for them because you know more about it than them, or ask you to do errands as you go past, look out – that's taking up your head space on their work, not yours.

Where there is a productivity leakage, there is almost always a poor or non-existent system. It doesn't matter whether you are a teacher, the principal or the caretaker – it's always true.

You can't grow a good organisation without good systems



Robyn Pearce is a Certified Speaking Professional (top speaking accreditation in the profession of speaking and held by only about 800 people around the world). Check the resources on her website www.gettingagrip.com

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