

## How To Handle Common Interruptions & Distractions

### Let Others Know You're Not Available

- Use visual cues – closed door, a sign, or an item (raised flag, orange cone, etc...)
  - Close (and lock) your door and don't let people in unless emergency
- Have office hours (interrupting) hours or quiet hours
- Get up and lead people to the door (so they know it's time to leave)
- Be *accessible* (they can get a message to you), but not always *available*
  - Allow people to leave messages - phone, text, email, white board on your door, etc...
- Tell them - set a time limit (phone or in person)
  - Say, "I have just 2-3 mins and wanted to give you a quick call."
- Bookmark - when interrupted, write down where you were at so you can quickly pick up where left off



### Deal with Unexpected Meetings

- Negotiate for a different time (so it works for both people)
  - Schedule longer meetings (make it official!)
- Go to the other person's office so you can leave when you want to
- Get up and lead people to the door (so they know it's time to leave)
- Remove or block the guest chair (forcing them to stand)
- Let them know you only have 10 minutes
- Too many meetings?
  - Say No to meetings with no agenda
  - Block time on calendar for *your* projects so you have time to do them
  - Make sure you're the right person to attend
  - Ask yourself - Are you really needed? What would happen if you didn't attend?
  - Send someone else
  - Get the meetings minutes afterwards or ask someone for 3 bullets of what happened
  - Attend, but tell the organizer you have to leave after 30 minutes



### Handle Requests for Info (How can you handle this request in the future so it's less of a problem?)

- Create a template in *Outlook* that you can easily email
- Understand commonly asked questions
  - Create a checklist or streamline a process for common problems
  - Create Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on website or in Word
- Negotiate for a deadline that works for *both of you*
- Use recurring meeting with those who have frequent questions (so questions are batched)
- Share best practices with each other
- Create a subject-matter expert (SME) in the office and refer this type of question to them



## Control Emergencies

- Is it *really* an emergency or is it just *impatience*?
  - Define “emergency” and agree on the definition
  - Wait / Delay and give people time to solve their own problems
- Remember that we teach others how to treat us - we are training them!
- Allow room in your schedule to handle things (don't overbook)
- Understand what it is and when it's due - *don't assume it's due immediately*
- Track who is asking and notice patterns
  - Create a way to handle common requests and questions - FAQ's, checklists
- Use recurring meetings for those with frequent questions
- Provide additional training



## Deal with the Phone / SmartPhone

- Use Roll to VM, Do Not Disturb (DND), Airplane Mode or Silent features
- Cover red blinking light so not distracted by waiting voicemails
- Turn phone over so not distracted by a flickering screen
- Put phone in a desk drawer
- Create office (interrupting) hours or quiet hours when you roll the phone
- Return calls at certain times during the day
  - Change voicemail to let people know when you return messages
- Return calls after hours so calls are shorter or you're able to leave voicemails
- Tell people you have just a minute or two (preventing long conversations)
- Don't give out your cell phone number (or do so sparingly)



## Eliminate Email Distractions

- Turn off all email notifications (on Smartphone too!)
  - Use rules to handle exceptions (boss, VIP's, special types of emails, etc.)
- Check email periodically at set times during the day
- Ask to be copied on fewer emails
- Communicate! Respond to emails and let them know that you will look into it (prevents future emails)
- Train people how to treat you
  - Don't respond to emails the moment you receive them
  - Use “Out of Office” auto-responder to relieve expectations when you're not in the office
  - Change email signature “Thanks for your email, I respond within 4-6 hours.”



## Manage Instant Message (IM)

- Use Do Not Disturb (DND), Turn off, or Mark busy
- Train people to use IM *only for emergencies* (send an email instead)



## Train Other People (Set Boundaries)

- To batch questions
- To respect when you *only* have 1-2 minutes
- To end meetings on time and have an agenda
- That you always receive their emails (no need for a follow-up call)
- That a closed door or sign *means do not disturb*
- Interrupt *only* when it's truly an emergency

