Minimizing Workplace Distractions

In the few minutes it takes you to skim this article, chances are you might receive a new email or text message, someone may stop to ask you a question, or the phone will ring. Distractions in the workplace are not a new issue for businesses; however, as technology continues to advance, the issue appears to be worsening.

According to workplace studies, employees are distracted once every three minutes. Whether distracted by an outside source, or self-distracted, once an employee gets off track, it takes an average of 23 minutes to regain focus on the original task. The most common workplace distractions include email and other forms of social media, phone calls, visitors, noise, and meetings. While some distractions may seem inevitable, it is possible to take control of your work environment and improve productivity in the process.

Avoid the Multitasking Trap:

While you may feel busy doing two or more things at once, chances are, you aren't putting forth your best efforts when your attention is divided. Attempting to do two things at once, for example, finishing a report during a meeting or sending a text message while running a machine increases the chances of making a mistake or experiencing a workplace accident. An employee who can produce quality outcomes on one project at a time is more valuable than an employee who produces mediocre outcomes on multiple projects at once.

Kick the Email Habit:

Obsessively checking your email inbox has become one of the biggest productivity drains in the workplace. Schedule in a few times during your workday to check email and stick to it. If audible email notifications prove to be too tempting to ignore, disable them or turn the volume on your device to silent.

Escape Self-Distraction:

While working on a project or task, you become bored, so you reach for your iPhone, check your messages or surf your favorite celebrity gossip site. Maybe you are working on multiple projects and your mind is jumping from one to another. Set yourself up for success by having an organized "To-Do" list and concentrating on only one project at a time. If you momentarily lose focus, don't automatically assume you need a break to go chat with a coworker, instead, try to get back on track and make a mental note to take a break soon.

Create a Productive Environment:

If the office chatter, background noise, ringing telephones or the world outside your window makes concentrating difficult, take matters into your own hands. Shut your door, wear noise-cancelling headphones, listen to soothing music, or put a "do not disturb" notice on your phone and set aside time to answer non-urgent calls each day. Hang curtains in your window, cut down on messy piles of paperwork, and schedule office hours so others know when you are available for collaboration and when you would like privacy to work.