

HUMAN RESOURCES

How to... work smarter

By Audrey Macnaughton, director of HR at training and development consultancy Macnaughton McGregor Ltd.



Audrey MacNaughton.

WE'VE PROBABLY all heard the expression 'work smarter, not harder' but how do we actually do it?

First of all we need to fully understand what our desired outcomes actually are. This first step may sound obvious but it's often the one that is missed when we are embarking on improving our personal effectiveness or time management skills. It can be tempting to try a technique in becoming more efficient without thinking about what makes you effective.

Knowing what your key job purpose is and what your objectives or goals are for the next 12 months will give you the focus to prioritise your effort and plan your activities. Take time to consider what is important and if not already written down make sure you put

pen to paper as this will keep you on track..

Once you have your key goals, planning activities can be helped with a simple 'to do' list. This list will form the basis for prioritising your tasks by simply reviewing the list and identifying those that contribute to the overall goals. Remember, working life is full of lots of 15 minute jobs; we just don't have enough 15 minutes to do all of them so we need to know which ones are important and are going to make a difference.

The trick in managing a 'to do' list is to identify the three or four critical things that need to get done in a day – focus on them and get them done without getting distracted on other less important tasks.

The added benefits of operating with a 'to do' list are that you avoid wasting time between tasks, you can identify in advance the opportunities to get others to help you, perhaps enabling you to delegate tasks in a more proactive planned way, and from a stress management point of view you have the reassurance that all your tasks are written down and this can mean that you can actually switch off from work.

This focus on priority goals and tasks is crucial in identifying those tasks that may be urgent but in actual fact are not important. These deception activities can result in you falling in to the 'busy fool' trap, which is working extremely hard and being very busy but not actually making a contribution to a key goal.

Some examples of deception activities are meetings with no clear purpose, badly managed meetings, circular discussions with no agreed way

forward, picking up a task on a number of occasions but not making any progress, multiple journeys between sites, some emails, daily conversations and work rituals.

Once you've started to identify deception activities you can deploy the next technique in the working smarter armoury and that is the principle of treating your time as a precious commodity. It is a finite resource and it can be useful to think of time 'spent' quite literally as if it was a monetary commodity.

There needs to be a health warning here though, and that is to consider your colleagues and work contacts. Building up good working relationships takes time and effort and it is those relationships that are crucial in making sure business dealings run smoothly. So remember the saying "be ruthless with time and kind with people". People need to feel that you are considering their needs, listening to them and making time for them but this shouldn't stop you positively challenging work habits and changing non value-added activity such as unfocused meetings.

So why not try the working smarter techniques. By trying it out and being persistent your efforts will be directed at what you want to achieve, you will minimise activities that waste your time and you might just find yourself with more time on your hands – to spend wisely of course.

For more information, contact Macnaughton McGregor Ltd on (0191) 209 3362, email enquiries@2macs.com or log on to www.2macs.com

LIFESTYLE

Ask the concierge

Where to buy, dine, travel, and find... by Clare Rutherford, managing director of Regalo Concierge Service Limited.



Clare Rutherford.

I am looking for a reliable and professional service whereby I can have my Labrador taken care of and groomed for the day, while I attend meetings in Leeds.

Is there a good pet sitting service in the Northumberland area?

If you had asked this question a couple of years ago we would be struggling to assist with your enquiry - something we never like to do! However, the times they are a changing! With more and more pet services becoming available offering a wide range of pet sitting, walking and grooming services for our canine friends, we can better assist our clients' needs.

We recently trialed the highly recommended facilities at www.doggydaycreche.co.uk (tel 01670 716666) based in Cramlington, which falls nicely within your catchment area. We were most

impressed with the professionalism of this company, who not only assess the temperament of your dog but insist dogs are sociable enough to take advantage of some of the play/training sessions on offer. We were able to arrange for a pet taxi service (call Pet Taxis on 0191 421 0157) to collect our client's dog, transport them to the crèche, where they were entertained, groomed and fed before being returned, worthy of a place at Crufts, to their owner at the end of the day!

Can you recommend a reliable beauty therapist that offers Computer Aided Cosmetology Instrument (CACI) non-surgical face lifts?

I have yet to experience this particular therapy. However, I have recently seen the superb results of this procedure on my very own hairdresser! It is recommended that you take professional advice before trialing a new treatment, however the attentive and professional staff at Headlines at Greens Health and Fitness in Gosforth (0191 213 0052) will be happy to assist with your enquiry. They also offer a vast range of hair styling and beauty treatments in a very relaxed atmosphere.

We have tickets for my daughters to

see Westlife at Metro Radio Arena in April. Are their any hospitality packages we can buy or is it possible for you to arrange for them to meet the band?

After a little detective work it appears the only hospitality packages available for the Westlife Love Tour 2007 are on offer for the Wembley Arena dates. This is often a decision made by the tour management or simply that the venues are unable to offer packages of this nature.

In terms of meeting the performers, this would be by special arrangement through a competition, in conjunction with the local press or a charity auction prize. If you would be so kind as to supply your contact details, I would be happy to place a request with the boys' record company BMG, to see if we can assist with your enquiry. As with all our clients we promise to do our very best - no promises though!

If you have, a question for the concierge please email askclare@regalo-cs.com and we will be very happy to answer your question in the next issue.

For more information on the services we provide visit www.regalo-cs.com.