

Maintaining Clear Thinking at Work

By Ann N. Gatty, Ph.D.



For many employees, today's work pace is at full throttle. With looming deadlines, seemingly impatient clients, and overscheduled assignment load, today's workforce can easily become frustrated, fatigued, and experience job burnout. Additionally, employees consume a barrage of emails, social media messages, news accounts and the likes. In the average day, individuals in the US receive about 34 gigabytes of information. Between the large amount of information consumption and a growing expectation for immediate results, it becomes difficult to establish a productive work strategy that allows for clear thinking and quality decision making. Following, are three strategies to stay focused and productive. To maintain high quality productivity, effective work strategies need to be practiced regularly

Develop Clear Thinking Habits

The brain has a challenge trying to handle the large amount of information that it keeps processing. According to Daniel J. Levitin, author of **The Organized Mind** (Penguin Books, 2014), "Our brains do have the ability to process the information we take in, but at a cost. We can have trouble separating the trivial from the important, and all this information processing makes us tired." Since decision making is an important aspect of any employee's job responsibilities, information overload can have a deleterious effect. As a leader, ask your employees to offer examples when, in a middle of a major project, with a deadline looming, it became difficult to keep focused as they started thinking of other stuff they would rather be doing. I'm certain that you will hear a wide variety of examples.

Clients often ask for suggestions about how to alleviate the problem and encourage clarified thinking. Here's our first suggestion. Create a written project sequence which outlines each step that needs to be completed. Such a "to do" list should be created for each project, as well as, each job tasks including telephone calls! We encourage employees to get the data out of their heads and onto paper. Keeping a notebook or notepad handy to write down the stuff that surfaces allows the information to be captured and later posted to the appropriate project list or appointment schedule. In this manner, employees can keep focused and attend to the current task without being distracted.

Clear thinking habits develop when employees write information that they receive and want to remember but is not needed at the current moment. This allows the information to be stored, but not in the brain. Rather than taking precious mental energy trying to remember information for later use, they can focus their full attentive energy on the current work projects.

Clarify Priorities

The challenge with managing time is that it requires continuous monitoring and self-discipline. Using time effectively is a skill that is more proficiently handled with practice. A necessary component for time

management is the establishment of priorities. To clarify priorities at work, employees need to identify which tasks are high-payoff activities, and which are low-payoff activities.

High-payoff activities are those that will provide a significant valuable payoff in the long run. These activities are directly related to the business goals. Dealing with high-payoff activities can be difficult, because they are frequently large, complex or time-consuming tasks. In business, the average day includes very little uninterrupted time to concentrate on these sorts of activities, and so they often get delayed, ending up on a back burner. Employees must schedule these high-payoff activities so they are not over-ridden by lesser low-payoff activities.

Low-payoff activities are often short, quick and easy to do, crop up quickly and appear “urgent” in the moment. Examples of low-payoff activities are often the routine tasks completed daily. Frequently checking emails, spending prolonged time on social media, are examples of low-payoff activities. If the employees are fatigued from work overload, it becomes easier to tackle and complete low-payoff activities. Low -payoff activities are often distractions that cloud employees’ minds to think clearly.

Be Nice

Work overload affects employees’ health and well-being, so precautions should be taken to guard against fatigue. After each task is completed, encourage employees to take a break to re-set. Getting up from the desk, and grabbing a glass of water is a simple way to rejuvenate both the mind and body. Employees work best when they work at a pace that is comfortable for them. Obviously, some work faster than others, but the quality of work should not suffer. Employees should work at a level where they perform well, and should be limited to working above and beyond such expectations. Employees and management need to be nice to themselves and take care of both their mental and physical well-being. In this way, clarity of thought can prevail.

About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business success expert. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. She is frequently featured in the media and contributes blog posts for www.AllBusiness.com and www.WomenOnBusiness.com. Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.