

Greater Efficiency May be Right under Our Noses

Tuesday June 4, 2013. Reflecting on a recent article in Smart Company and an Ernst & Young report into productivity, Founder and Principal of Kameleons – Developing Leaders, Michael Peiniger said businesses owners don't have to look too far to unlock large time, money and productivity savings through small changes to work practices.

While the articles listed the main obstacles to productivity as staff engagement, well-being, motivation, reward and workplace recognition, Peiniger believes there are some additional, and very simple, ways in which productivity can be improved.

“Business leaders and managers are often looking for the *'next big thing'* when it comes to managing their staff, whether that is a program, an app or a product, when in fact the simplest ways to improve productivity may be right under their noses.” said Michael Peiniger.

Peiniger lists 5 ways that business can become more productive using what they already have, or by making minor adjustments. They are:

1. Use your day-to-day programs more effectively,
2. Prioritise your day into urgent versus important tasks,
3. Develop and follow meeting protocols for all internal meetings,
4. Develop and follow email protocols for all internal email communication, and
5. Use the people in your teams more collaboratively.

“None of these ideas are new or sexy, so they often get forgotten. But businesses that apply rigour to these areas have dramatically greater productivity than those that don't,” added Michael Peiniger.

Most business people are familiar with Microsoft Office suite of Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Mail, yet few use them to their potential.

Because of the pace of work, people haven't taken the time to work out many of the short cuts that save time within these programs. Peiniger suggests a tool like *KeyRocket* to help for once installed will passively instruct users on more efficient ways of using day-to-day programs, which in turn saves hours per week.

Stephen Covey (author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*), introduced the concept of *urgency* versus *important* to managing the work day more than 20 years ago, but many staff members lurch from one seemingly urgent task to the next, not focussing on what is important.

Michael Peiniger continued, “It is staggering how much time is wasted in a day by a lack of prioritising tasks. Focus on the important tasks first and give them the time that is needed”

Michael Peiniger believes senior managers have a lot to answer for when it comes to poor meetings and suggests the following 6 protocols for meeting effectiveness:

1. Clearly identify and state the objective of the meeting
2. Only invite those people that can help in achieving the objective – observers and *'for information'* attendees waste time
3. Set a realistic time for the meeting and stick to it
4. Start and end the meeting on time – don't wait for stragglers and don't repeat what has been covered
5. Control discussion so that it doesn't deviate from the objective, and
6. Assign tasks to specific individuals with realistic timeframes – you don't have to wait until the next meeting to follow up and complete things.

Email has become one of our most relied upon communication tools, yet we can drown each other with overuse and poor practices. Peiniger says "Email is often used poorly in businesses but by teaching people to only send clear emails to those that need it can unclog an Inboxes quite quickly".

"Often business hierarchies force people to think above and below them in the workplace, when the best time can be saved using those around you – your peers."

Repeatedly people at the same level of a business have to write similar reports, work in the same spaces and are managed by the same individuals, yet will work individually to get tasks done.

Michael Peiniger recently observed the workflow of a group of supervisors as they managed their teams, and all of them had a major end of month report to write. They were constantly interrupted by their direct reports with mundane tasks, so a report that should have taken 20 minutes took 4 hours to complete.

Alternating the time they wrote the report and directing their own reports to another supervisor for a short period of time would have saved hours.

"Businesses can make massive gains in productivity just by focussing on some of the little things that we take for granted, like email, meetings and prioritising. I received feedback from client who said by implementing just the meeting protocols for his team, they were saving 8 hours a week. Can you imagine creating an extra 8 hours a week to focus on core tasks?"

"It isn't just productivity that improves when implementing these simple measures. Drive and motivation also see sharp increases, as people realise their precious time is not being wasted on mundane and ineffectual tasks," concluded Michael Peiniger.

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