

INTERRUPTIONS - There Is An Art To Avoiding Them

You walk into your shop in the morning. The phone is ringing. You pick it up and spend the next fifteen minutes talking.

Immediately after hanging up the phone, someone is in front of your desk waiting to talk to you about a problem. You spend twenty minutes discussing ways to alleviate that problem.

Then you turn to some paperwork that must be done before you head to the course. On the way out of the door you see someone who stops and talks with you for thirty minutes.

All the while your work is waiting for you. As a manager you are being given a heavy dose of the interruptions. Interruptions often wreak havoc with a manager's effectiveness.

Interruptions are not always obvious - some are deceptive. They masquerade as legitimate concerns and we hesitate to label them time wasters. This presumption of legitimacy is attached to telephone calls as well as visitors.

You may say that callers and visitors wouldn't stop by without a good reason. But sometimes a caller or visitor simply wants to socialize or to procrastinate.

There are several ways to get an upperhand on the interruption syndrome. One is to manage your use of the telephone. Another is to gain control over shop conversations. A third is to plan for uninterrupted think time.

Good management dictates that incoming telephone calls be prevented from destroying a manager's concentration. Many callers ask for the superintendent because they identify

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his name with that of the course. The wise manager introduces his staff to clients, speaks highly of their competencies and suggests, "Jim is our expert on pesticide application. I depend on him to keep our members informed".

Consider the telephone a message machine and get off the line promptly. Avoid openings that invite long, drawn-out conversations. Instead of saying, "Hi, Fred. How was the golf game last Saturday?", say "Hi, Fred. I need a couple of quick answers if you have a minute."

Visitors can cause problems for managers, too. It is difficult to determine in advance the importance of a visit, so managing visits involves many alternatives. Consider some of these options:

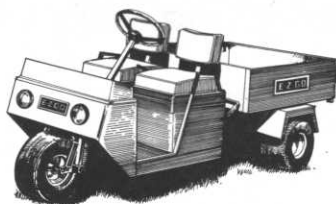
- a. Have fixed reception hours. This allows callers to know when you are available. It also gives your staff a fixed period of time when they can see you if they have problems.
- b. Face your desk away from the door so that you are not interrupted by passersby.

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- c. Meet the visitors outside your office.
- d. Confer standing up.
- e. At the outset, tell the visitor you have only a certain number of minutes to give him.....then adhere to that figure.
- f. Give the visitor your undivided attention. Do not allow interruptions.
- g. Hold occasional luncheon meetings to remove the pressure for social visits during business hours.
- h. Meet regularly with your staff. A well informed staff has less need to confer in an unplanned manner.

Uninterrupted think time allows the superintendent the time he needs for thoughtful planning. Some practices that may work for you include:

- a. Instituting a quiet hour at the start of the day.
- b. Coming to the shop early.
- c. Having a hideaway known to only one staff member.

Although interruption control and scheduled think time can greatly improve a manager's effectiveness, there is another tool available.... delegation of duties.