

# 4 ways to help employees work smarter, not harder

Alyssa Place | November 19, 2020 | Employee Benefits News



With the holiday season fast approaching and workplace burnout on the rise, getting employees to stay productive and focused on work is a huge challenge for managers this year.

“Everything is happening in our homes — employees are monitoring their children, doing their day jobs and taking care of the cooking, cleaning and grocery shopping,” says Carson Tate, founder of Working Simply, a workplace productivity consulting firm. “That takes a toll, and it's very difficult to consistently show up as your best self when you feel pulled in multiple directions and don't feel like you have the support to concentrate.”

To help employees move toward more focused and productive work, Tate suggests managers reassess traditional workplace practices like unscheduled meetings and last-minute deadlines, and create a more communicative environment for employees to express their goals.

“Get really clear with yourself and also with your team around what constitutes good enough. Now is not the time for the perfectionist to kick in,” Tate says. “My hope is that the pandemic will be a wonderful forcing agent. Finally, we will start to equate work to results versus busy work that we do to fill hours or make ourselves feel needed.”

Tate shared four ways employers can help their teams work smarter and not harder to navigate life during COVID-19.

# 1. Conduct a meeting audit

Look at the upcoming week and look for meetings that don't have an agenda. Those are meetings that you need to very thoughtfully consider declining or requesting an agenda for, because a meeting without agenda is like going on a road trip without a destination. Then look at the agenda and find your specific role. Do I have a purpose? Am I representing a constituency? Am I a subject matter expert? If you can't look at the agenda and discern why you were invited, there's an opportunity to decline.

Then ask your team to do that same audit and come together and look at recurring meetings to question the purpose and the return on time investment. Just because you have a standing meeting on Mondays at 9 a.m. doesn't mean it's still serving the purpose or is needed.

# 2. Be flexible with deadlines and check-ins

If you're giving an employee a deadline, employees should have the courage to say, "These were the three priorities I was working on this week. Please help me reprioritize and understand if this deadline trumps these tasks, or we'll move this deadline." That will help the manager understand what was on that employee's plate and think about the broader picture of what needs to get done.

Have clarity around what needs to get accomplished so that you can say, "Thanks so much for asking for a call, but I need 15 more minutes to wrap this up." Be willing in the moment to negotiate in order to finish the task.

# 3. Re-evaluate to-do lists

Use the "Stop, start, continue" method: Look at your task list and identify the items to stop doing. Those things either do not support the attainment of a team or company's strategic goal. They don't drive customer service and they don't support our job. Then when you're going through this, you might identify one or two tasks to start. Continue with the ones that are currently aligned to a goal that supports and drives revenue.

# 4. Be clear with your team about roles and outcomes

Employers have an opportunity to be open and receptive to these conversations around projects and task allocation of work and how work's done. Any ambiguity creates a lot of work for employees that they don't have the capacity for. So I challenge leaders to paint a very clear picture of what success looks like, and make sure it's also clear to your team. Then individual employees can get clear about what meaning and purpose looks like for them in their jobs.