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Too Busy for Productivity?



A desk stacked with papers; an inbox overrun with e-mails; incessant meetings; a never-ending to-do list; Does this scenario sound familiar?

The fast pace of the contemporary workspace has resulted in many misconceptions as it relates to productivity. While the average worker may consider themselves to be productive, they are more often than not

suffering from “**busy bee syndrome.**”

The notion of productivity as a vehicle for greater efficiency has become increasingly popular during the past decade. Notwithstanding this apparent popularity, there is still a general lack of understanding and confusion around the term and what it signifies.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines productivity as, “*the ratio between the output volume and the volume of inputs.*” In essence, productivity seeks to measure the level of efficiency with which inputs (e.g. labour) are used to produce outputs. One can therefore conclude that the overall objective of productivity, is to efficiently use inputs/resources and master the art of accomplishing more with less.

Why then is it that the employees within all sectors and at all levels within organizations, continue to harbour the belief that being a work martyr (*i.e. spending more hours working on multiple tasks*) translates to maximum productivity?

By understanding what productivity means and recognizing the symptoms of “*busy bee syndrome*” employers and employees can take the necessary steps to be truly productive.

Productive or Busy? – Here are some tips to help you recognize the symptoms of busy bee syndrome and suggestions on how to nip them in the bud and harness your productivity:

1. Too little time! So much to do!

It manifests itself in such a sneaky manner that you sometimes don't even realise what is happening. If you constantly find yourself talking about having ‘too little time and so much to do,’ chances are that you have already caught the “busy bee bug.” The good news is that there are remedies for this problem. Part of being

productive is understanding how to prioritize. There are only a limited number of hours in the work day. Planning beforehand what you wish to accomplish on a given day (developing a schedule), setting goals and prioritizing work will help you to keep organized and efficient. While unexpected situations may arise, by having a plan and leaving room for eventualities, you will not only feel less overwhelmed but also accomplish more.

2. Robot mode- No time for breaks!

Tempting as it may seem to never take a break (e.g. skipping meals), all in the name of producing more, this practice can actually be counter-productive. It may seem that you are losing valuable time every time you take a break, however, research has proven that taking a five (5) minute break every ninety (90) minutes not only allows you rejuvenate and refuel but similarly refocus your concentration and improve your productivity.

3. Master Multi-tasker

Have you ever heard the saying, “Jack of all trades, Master of none?” This is a perfect depiction of the effect that “multi-tasking” has on productivity. With the advent of technology, it has become increasingly difficult to resist the urge of answering every e-mail the moment it comes in, while responding to telephone calls on multiple devices. However, in the very same way it is impossible to be in two places at once, it is also impossible to give maximum attention to two or more activities simultaneously and anticipate an efficient/quality output. Handling one assignment at a time allows you to focus your attention, thus completing tasks in a more efficient manner.

4. Saying Yes To Everything (Otherwise known as “the-bend-til-I-break-disease”)

Considering the amount of time we spend at work, it undoubtedly feels good knowing that we have colleagues that we can rely on. Employees working for the same organization may be working towards the same overall goals/objective, however, owing to the nature of individual roles, they are bound to have different priorities. While it is important to be accommodating and help those we work with, we must understand that although it may be difficult, saying no is often necessary. It is important to assess every request and determine whether what you are being asked to do is high priority, whether it will affect any other high priority tasks you are currently working on and whether the time constraints will impact on the quality of your delivery.

Employees and employers alike tend to blur the lines between busy and being productive.” In the novel, *Financial Management for Nurse Managers: Merging the Heart with the Dollar*, authors Janne Dunham-Taylor and Joseph Z. Pinczuk state that, “*Contrary to popular beliefs, we need to learn how to slow down or thinking at times, not to speed up. [...] The never-ending checklist is always present and demanding attention.*”

There will always be work to be done. Productivity is understanding which work actually translates to achieving strategic objectives and meeting goals and which tasks are simply keeping us busy without any real gains.

About the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)

Established in October 2013, The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is responsible for the identification of key issues related to competitiveness and productivity in Saint Lucia.

The NCPC and its Technical Secretariat is committed to providing the necessary advocacy and research to produce timely and effective recommendations to policymakers on issues that affect both competitiveness and productivity on island.

For more information about productivity or on the NCPC, visit www.stluciancpc.org; www.facebook.com/stluciancpc, call 468-5571/5576/1587 or send an e-mail to stluciancpc@gmail.com.