

7 Ways to Get out of Work Earlier Today

Expert tips to get you focused and out the door faster

PUBLISHED: JUNE 27, 2014 | BY ASHLEY OERMAN



When it comes to pesky work distractions, you know the usual culprits: your buzzing inbox, beeping cell phone, and the weekly meeting that never ends. A new survey by [CareerBuilder](#) polled workers on the biggest nine-to-five productivity killers and found that these time wasters—and a few others—top the list of things keeping you at work longer than you need to be there.

For the survey, CareerBuilder asked more than 5,000 hiring managers, human resource professionals, and full-time employees from various industries to name the biggest productivity wreckers. Cell phones came in first, followed by gossip, the Internet, snack and smoke breaks, noisy coworkers, meetings, e-mail, co-workers who drop by, and co-workers who put calls on speaker phone.

We spoke with career experts about how to prevent these time suckers from prolonging your day—so you can head home ASAP.

Give Yourself a Hard Stop Time

To get out of work earlier than you usually do, it's important to give yourself a hard stopping point, says [Joel Garfinkle](#), author of *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*. Otherwise you might never get out of there. Make sure it's realistic; for example, if you always find yourself at the office until after 8 p.m., you might want to first experiment with establishing a hard out at 7:30. After you set a stopping point, create an alarm or notification one hour before that time. Use that hour to wrap up whatever you're working on and check in with your co-workers and boss. Besides helping you stay committed to getting out earlier, setting a stopping point for yourself helps you stay motivated, focused, and productive throughout the day.

Isolate Your Cell Phone

It may seem obvious that to keep yourself from getting distracted, you should avoid your phone. But then again, this was the top productivity killer named in the survey—so ignoring texts and calls is clearly easier said than done. To make your phone far less tempting, [Cali Yost Williams](#), a workplace strategist and author of *Tweak It: Make What Matters to You Happen Every Day*, recommends putting it in a drawer or place that's far from where you sit. The idea is that it should take some effort to go check it so you're less likely to pick up your phone every time you get a notification or text. If you use your phone for work, consider setting a special ringtone for calls from your boss or clients. Then, only answer your phone if you hear that sound. Your Tinder matches will still be waiting for you later—we promise.

Make Time to Clear Your Head

When you want to get out the door, you might think that you need to cut out all idle time from your schedule. But get this: Cutting out short mental breaks might actually make you less productive. [Andrea Kay](#), a career

consultant and author of *Works a Bitch and Then You Make it Work*, says that these brief intermissions for stretching, walking, or just stepping away from your desk help to give your brain a break and let you return to your work with new energy and a fresh perspective. In fact, Garfinkle recommends working in 90 minute bursts or "sprints" with short breaks in between; it can enable you to get more done because your mind has a chance to relax and refocus again, which can keep you from making silly mistakes or getting frustrated.

Put Up a De Facto 'Do Not Disturb' Sign

To keep co-workers from dropping by and distracting you during crunch time, come up with a signal to indicate that you are in the zone, suggests Yost. Whether it's popping a red sticky note on your computer, wearing a pair of headphones, or closing your office door, these will keep well-meaning colleagues from breaking your concentration.

Take a Break from E-mail

No matter what you're doing, when your e-mail chime dings, it instantly takes your mind off your work and into your inbox, says Yost. Although answering an e-mail or two while working on a project might seem harmless, she says that when you switch from an assignment to your e-mail back to your assignment, it takes a lot of brainpower to get reoriented. And that brainpower takes precious time that you probably don't have. To combat this pesky problem, carve out two to three 30-minute blocks a day when you won't check your e-mail at all. Whether that means you set your e-mail chime to silent or you close it altogether for a while, use those e-mail-free minutes to plow through work that needs your full attention.

Manage Your Meetings

If you have a meeting that is notorious for **running** long, it could be cutting some serious work time out of your day. Yost says there are a few things you can do to prevent them from running over. First, when you get the meeting request or it's the day before the reoccurring meeting, ask the organizer if they have a basic outline for what you'll be discussing. If they don't, offer to create one to help your group stay on track. And what if the person running the meeting isn't interested in taking you up on your offer? If it's possible, tell the organizer that you have a hard stop when the meeting is scheduled to finish.

Let Some Work Go

Sometimes you just need to pull a *Frozen* and "Let it go." Garfinkle says that occasionally you need to make peace with the fact that you might not get everything finished that you wanted to. It's important to give yourself permission to come back to an assignment the next workday because without it, you can become overwhelmed, make silly mistakes, or get sick—which would really put a damper on your productivity, says Garfinkle. Just tell yourself that you did the best you could and it will still be there to work on tomorrow.