




Where Was I?

Reduce office disruptions and regain momentum — By Beth Braccio Hering

What's inside

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It never fails: You just get into a groove when the phone rings or a colleague stops by. While interruptions are part of office life, limit their frequency and impact by using these tips:

Create a better environment

If you need solitude, close the office door or post a “Do Not Disturb” sign outside your cubical. Most people will think twice before interrupting. Also, think about the layout of your workspace. If you’re positioned in such a way that you constantly make eye contact with every passer-by, co-workers will be likely to stop or comment.

And don’t forget to get rid of electronic interrupters by killing incoming message alerts and letting phone calls go to voice mail. “These are tools, and you need to treat them as such—not as demanding

little bosses constantly crying out for your attention,” says Laura Stack, president of the time-management consulting firm The Productivity Pro in Denver. Noting that there is little one must attend to instantly, she suggests setting aside blocks of time to receive and answer messages all at once.

Anticipate disruptions

Does a colleague stop by every Monday morning to fill you in on her weekend? Does your manager return from weekly budget meetings with five new things to complete by the end of the day? Thinking ahead about likely interruptions helps you plan your day accordingly.

Mitzi Weinman, founder of Time-Finder, a professional training company that specializes in improving productivity, effectiveness and focus, recommends being prepared for disruptions by breaking tasks

into small, doable pieces. When interruptions happen, this detailed outline makes it easier to get back on track.

Master the art of saying “later”

Lastly, take control of your time by learning how to gracefully block and counter interruptions. Some phrases Weinman suggests include:

- “I’m not sure I can do that today. Can we do that at a later date?”
- “I want to do it the right way. Realistically, I don’t think it is possible today.”
- “I’m working on a deadline and can’t talk right now. Let’s schedule a time to speak about that.”

Then, follow up as promised at a more convenient time—and get back to work!