

4 ways to stop people wasting your time



Being organised and prepared will show you mean business.

People who waste our time have become the scourge of modern business life, hampering our productivity and annoying us in the process. Sometimes it's hard to escape, especially when the time-waster is your boss. But in many other situations, you can take steps to regain control of your time and your schedule:

STATE YOUR PREFERRED METHOD OF COMMUNICATION. You can often limit aggravation by proactively informing colleagues about the best way to reach you, whether it's via phone calls, texts, emails or even tweets.

REQUIRE AN AGENDA FOR MEETINGS. You can model the practice by writing an agenda for any meetings you chair and offering to share the template with others. In fact, you could push to establish company norms that include best practices such as eliminating generic "updates" and clearly indicating the decisions that need to be made as a result of the meeting.

POLICE GUEST LISTS. If you've been invited to a meeting, ask two critical questions. First, do I need to be there? Looking at the agenda, you can gauge whether your input would be valuable

or if you can just find out details afterward. Second, will the (other) right people be there? Make sure you understand who the real decision-makers are, and don't waste your time (or other people's) until they can be present and participate.

FORCE OTHERS TO PREPARE. Force is a harsh word, and that's intentional – because it's not burdensome for people who would have prepared anyway, yet it effectively weeds out the uncommitted. Debbie Horovitch, a specialist in Google+ Hangouts, has long offered complimentary initial strategy sessions, but realised that some people were taking advantage with irrelevant discussions. She's adopted a new policy: "Everyone who wants a call/chat with me must fill in an application" with specific questions about what will be discussed. Now that I've set my boundaries and expectations of the people I work with, it's much easier to identify the time wasters."

Will you face blowback by toughening up and putting clear boundaries around your time? Inevitably. But you may also find that people start to respect you – and your time – a lot more.

By Dorie Clark