

INSIGHTS FROM THE NORTHSIDE INNOVATION COMMUNITY  
FUTURE READY WHITEPAPERS | NORTHSIDE INNOVATION

# BETTER + FURTHER + FASTER + STRONGER PRODUCTIVITY IN THE WORKPLACE

WHAT SMALL BUSINESSES CAN DO TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY

Northside Innovation Meetups gather small business owners and entrepreneurs to deep dive into one forward-thinking theme. The meetup series was born out of the annual Northside Festival, Brooklyn's premiere Music, Content & Innovation festival. Now, in partnership with Dell & Microsoft, monthly meetups are held in NYC, Miami, Chicago, LA and Austin.



# THE PRODUCTIVITY PARADOX

Laptops. Tablets. Smart phones. We're living in a golden age of productivity. Or, at least, we should be.

While technology has the potential to make us more productive than ever, our frenetic, always-on work environments are often overwhelming us. The cost? Research has found that information-overload undermines productivity to the tune of \$10 million a year for mid-sized companies.<sup>1</sup> Another study argued distracted workers cost American businesses \$650 billion annually.<sup>2</sup>

The key to unlocking more productivity, however, isn't a return to old ways. It's in finding the right balance. It's about plugging in at the right times, plugging in with the right tools, and knowing when to disconnect.

<sup>1</sup> Entrepreneur, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Business News Daily, 2010



# CUTTING DOWN DISTRACTIONS

It's easy to feel productive when answering emails all day long. But is it the most efficient way to work? Consider the time it takes to fully switch your attention (and then switch it back) every time the phone buzzes with a new notification. Now add that time up.

**3HRS**

TIME 1/3 OF EMPLOYEES ARE  
DISTRACTED DURING THE  
WORKDAY <sup>3</sup>

**40%**

OF WORKERS DON'T RETURN  
TO A TASK RIGHT AFTER  
BEING INTERRUPTED <sup>4</sup>

**23:15**

MIN SEC  
AVERAGE TIME IT TAKES  
INTERRUPTED WORKERS TO  
GET BACK ON TASK <sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Telegraph, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Diary Study of Task Switching, Microsoft Research

<sup>5</sup> Fast Company, 2008

Yes, technology can be a part of the problem when workers allow it to become distracting. However, the right tech can be a big part of the solution too. Online, Microsoft's latest browser provided with Windows 10, **Edge**, has a feature called "Reading Mode" that clears distractions from online articles and enables people to focus on what's important. Embracing tools that minimize distractions can help workers stay on task.

*"Email is a useful tool, but we waste a tremendous amount of time around email. Imagine if your snail mail trickled in every three minutes, and every three minutes you got an envelope, you opened it, and you decided whether you wanted to look at it again later or not – that's kind of what we do with our email. It's a tremendous distraction." Peter Bregman, CEO of Bregman Partners*

Another common source of distractions are interrupting coworkers. Simple solutions, like keeping the door closed, holding office hours, or wearing headphones, can go a long way. Employers that want to help workers avoid distractions, and in turn, be more productive, should consider implementing private spaces in workplace design.<sup>6</sup>

**SWITCHING FROM TASK TO TASK WASTES TIME – INSTEAD, DEDICATE SPECIFIC BLOCKS OF FOCUSED TIME FOR THINGS LIKE ANSWERING EMAIL.**



<sup>6</sup> Harvard Business Review, 2014





# STRESS: SPEED UP BY SLOWING DOWN

It's simple: Too much stress saps productivity. Research from Towers Watson confirmed that stressed employees have lower engagement levels and miss work more often than their less-stressed counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

Though it seems counterintuitive, taking a break can make you more productive than ever before. Studies have shown that both taking time out of work to exercise<sup>8</sup> and taking a short nap at work can boost productivity.<sup>9</sup> Naps are just the start though – getting enough sleep at home is beneficial too.<sup>10</sup>

*"If you're pushing all the time - you really don't have any extra to push when you need extra to push. It's useful to allow yourself the slack when the slack exists because it gives you the stamina when you need it." Peter Bregman, CEO of Bregman Partners*

<sup>7</sup> H Forbes, 2014

<sup>8</sup> Stockholm University, 2011

<sup>9</sup> Business News Daily, 2015

<sup>10</sup> Inc, 2015

While deadlines can help workers focus, pressing through exhaustion does not. In order to continue working at peak levels for long periods of time, neuroscientist Daniel Levitin recommends a 15-minute break every hour or two.<sup>11</sup> Employers should not only allow periodic breaks, they should be encouraging them.

*“Work tools are already creating offline modes to address work-life balance, but at the end of the day, the expectations should be laid out by the employer. If you tell employees that anything non-urgent can wait until they’re back online the next day, then they’ll operate that way.” Michael Pryor, CEO of Trello*

**WORK-LIFE BALANCE ISN'T JUST SOMETHING EMPLOYEES WANT, IT SHOULD BE SOMETHING EMPLOYERS WANT TOO – IT CAN BE A PRODUCTIVITY BOOSTER.**



<sup>11</sup> Wall Street Journal, 2014



# MAXIMIZING TIME

Productivity is more than checking off items from a To Do list – it's about aligning where a worker's time is spent with where that time is most valuable. In other words, it's essential to spend the most time on the things that are most important.

*"Managing your time and managing your focus is the same thing. We need to be strategic and intentional in what we're spending our time on and how we're managing that time. To me, time management is a tool of focus." Peter Bregman, CEO of Bregman Partners*

While everybody has to spend time on things that may seem less important, these tasks should be outsourced when possible – to an employee, another company, or by investing in tech that will do it for you. For example, if you are wasting time trying to recover lost files, software that automatically backups to the cloud, like **Dell's Rapid Recovery**, may be the answer. If you're wasting time juggling different devices, embracing **Windows 10** and **Office 2016's** platform-agnostic capabilities can instantly make you more efficient.



Meanwhile, upgrading existing technology in the workplace can maximize time by cutting the minutes employees spend w...a...i...t...i...n...g.

**36%**

OF SMALL BUSINESSES  
HAVE SYSTEMS OLDER  
THAN 4 YEARS<sup>12</sup>

**44%**  
**FASTER**<sup>13</sup>

NEW PC UPLOAD SPEED  
COMPARED TO OLDER  
SYSTEMS



FORGET PASSWORDS – YOU  
CAN SIGN-IN WITH A SMILE  
ON WINDOWS 10

Need more proof that new tech can make you more efficient? A TechAisle study found 41% of businesses are using tablets and working faster as a result.<sup>14</sup> And research from the University of Utah has also shown that a second monitor can boost productivity for spreadsheet tasks by 29% and text-related tasks up to 44%.<sup>15</sup> Of course, technology is a tool that's only as efficient as we make it.

*"It's easy to spend the entire day in our tech tools, chatting and sharing updates. At Trello we encourage people to turn off the noise and take that 'heads down' time to really get things done. We recommend: Turning off notifications, closing out multiple tabs, and giving your team a heads up as to when you'll be back online." Michael Pryor, CEO of Trello*

Focusing on what's most important can help you filter out the stuff sapping your time. One common culprit? Meetings. Atlassian has found that the average office worker spends 31 hours a month in unproductive meetings.<sup>16</sup> If the meeting must go on, consider making them stand-up meetings; research has shown they can increase group performance.<sup>17</sup>

Maximizing your time can also be about taking advantage of the times it is appropriate to multitask – like when in the car or while exercising. In these settings, people can often do two things that don't require them to use the same part of their brains.<sup>18</sup>

**GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TIME REQUIRES PRIORITIZATION, TIME-MANAGEMENT, UPDATED TECH, AND ABOVE ALL ELSE – FOCUSING ON WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT.**

<sup>12</sup> Dell System Performance Claims

<sup>13</sup> Dell System Performance Claims

<sup>14</sup> TechAisle 2014 Global SMB Technology Study

<sup>15</sup> Monitor Size and Aspect Ratio Productivity Research, 2008

<sup>16</sup> Atlassian, 2016

<sup>17</sup> SPPSAGEPUB.com

<sup>18</sup> PeterBregman.com, 2015





# BETTER + FURTHER + FASTER + STRONGER

- **TECHNOLOGY BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY, AS LONG AS WORKERS ARE PLUGGING IN AT THE RIGHT TIMES WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS.**
- **MULTITASKING IS A MYTH. AND SWITCH-TASKING IS A WASTE OF TIME.**
- **WAITING TO ANSWER EMAILS AT SPECIFIC TIMES DURING THE DAY CAN SAVE TIME.**
- **IMPLEMENTING PRIVATE SPACES IN WORKPLACE DESIGN CAN HELP WORKERS AVOID DISTRACTIONS.**
- **OVERLY STRESSED WORKERS ARE UNPRODUCTIVE WORKERS.**
- **FREQUENT BREAKS, NAPS, AND EXERCISE CAN ALL HELP BOOST PRODUCTIVITY.**
- **SPENDING THE MOST TIME ON THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IS ESSENTIAL TO MAXIMIZING TIME.**
- **LESS-IMPORTANT TASKS SHOULD BE OUTSOURCED WHENEVER POSSIBLE.**

“HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES CREATE SPACE WHERE THEY CAN ACTUALLY GET GOOD, DEEP WORK DONE. ALLOWING THEM THE SPACE TO WORK ON THINGS IN AN UNINTERRUPTED WAY IS GOING TO HELP THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE ORGANIZATION REMARKABLY.”

*Peter Bregman, CEO of Bregman Partners*

