



# BUSINESS FIRST

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## Don't let interruptions ruin productivity

Interruptions can be the curse of a productive day.

Allowing people to step into your office to "quickly run this by you" can be fatal and end up costing you a precious hour of your time.

Learn to be firm with interrupters and limit them before they start with a definite, "I've only got five minutes, how can I help you most?"

**Strike while the iron is here.** If someone wants to call you later, stop them with, "No, I'll be busy later, how can I help you now?"

Make the time limit visible with a clear timepiece on or above your desk, and by making closing gestures such as shuffling papers when the time is up.

Keep a pleasant attitude by inserting humor to ease the brush-off ("I've enjoyed the break, back to work now I guess!"), and mark the ending point with a "thank-you," which always signals the close of a meeting.

**Notice what I'm doing.** Another way to close a brief meeting — make people aware of your other commitments by making them wait a moment while you make a note about what you're working on.

Inevitably, they will take the hint and offer to come back later.

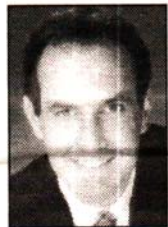
If nothing else works, interrupting a lengthy discussion with a startled "Wait — what time is it?" will help bring things to a close.

**Break big jobs down to size.** It's tempting to put off a big job. But by procrastinating, you only make your life and work more difficult.

Time management consultant Alan Lakein suggests that "if you divide the job into small increments and focus on

them individually, the task will not seem so intimidating." He calls this technique for punching holes in large jobs "the Swiss cheese method."

**See the end, endure the rest.** Much of what you need to do to achieve a desired outcome may not please you while you're doing it. Saving more and spending less in your department will not necessarily make you feel better on any given day.



**Success  
in the  
Workplace**

Jeff Davidson

One fine day, however, when your department has done the best job with the least funding, you begin to understand that less-than-pleasing means contributed to the highly pleasing outcome.

**Tackle me first.** One of the better ways to handle critical tasks that you prefer not to do is to handle them first. That way, you have something to look forward to because the more pleasing tasks await.

Anytime you have discretion regarding the order in which you tackle steps or subgoals on the way to achieving something, attempt to handle the seemingly unpleasant elements first.

If you don't, and if you practice the converse — doing what you like to do first, and saving the unpleasant things for last — the probability of procrastinating increases.

**Record it in black and white.** When you plot on paper what you're going to do and by when, you reduce the incidences of not getting started on time.

To break through any self-imposed limits to getting started on something, share your deadlines with others to engender the support they may provide.

Also offer yourself small rewards as

you complete certain aspects of the undesirable task, and set up rest or break times, so that the activity doesn't seem so onerous.

**Clear the decks.** If you're having a brutal time getting started, clear your desk of everything except the materials related to the task at hand.

The fewer visual distractions that you have, the greater the probability that you can stay focused on the task at hand.

Also look for a partner, even for a few minutes, who can help you get started. It helps especially if you can find a trail blazer, someone who's already had to tackle what you now face.

**Take a sneak preview.** If you have to tackle a project on Monday that you've been putting off, briefly viewing it on, say, Friday, is often helpful, so that when you return to it on Monday you have some semblance of familiarity with the particulars.

That also can work during the middle of the week, before you leave for vacation, and anytime a few days or a few hours will pass between when you preview the item and when you work on it.

**Leave it open-ended.** Have an open-ended amount of time to tackle the project.

For many tasks, once you get started, you'll want to go all the way to completion. You don't want to have to follow up everything because you didn't leave enough time during the day.

Hence, start early in the morning on a day when you have no other appointments or anything scheduled, so that you can devote as much time as it takes.

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