

Managing Cycles of Productivity

Linda won't transcribe tapes late in the day or anytime on Friday. As a matter of fact, she has established a personal work pattern or cycle in which specific tasks will be undertaken throughout the course of the week.

Susan, the production manager, rarely interferes with Linda's cycle unless an urgent report or letter must be completed. Is Linda an obstinate employee, undermining production needs of her office? Is Susan deficient as a production manager?

For either woman, quite the contrary is true. Linda is an exceptionally effective member of the production staff, and Susan manages the production department skillfully. Linda has long since determined her productive peaks and valleys throughout the course of the normal workweek, and hence, recognizes her personal *cycle of productivity*. For all but urgent assignments, Susan acknowledges Linda's ability to maintain high productivity by

handling assignments on those days and at those hours that help her achieve a relatively constant effort-to-task ratio.

Brenda, Linda's equally efficient production staff partner, also maintains high productivity by personally prioritizing assignments. While Linda and Brenda have similar production responsibilities, each have different strengths and weaknesses, each have varying energy levels (throughout the workweek), and each have long since gauged these factors so they know what can best be undertaken when.

Personal Cycles

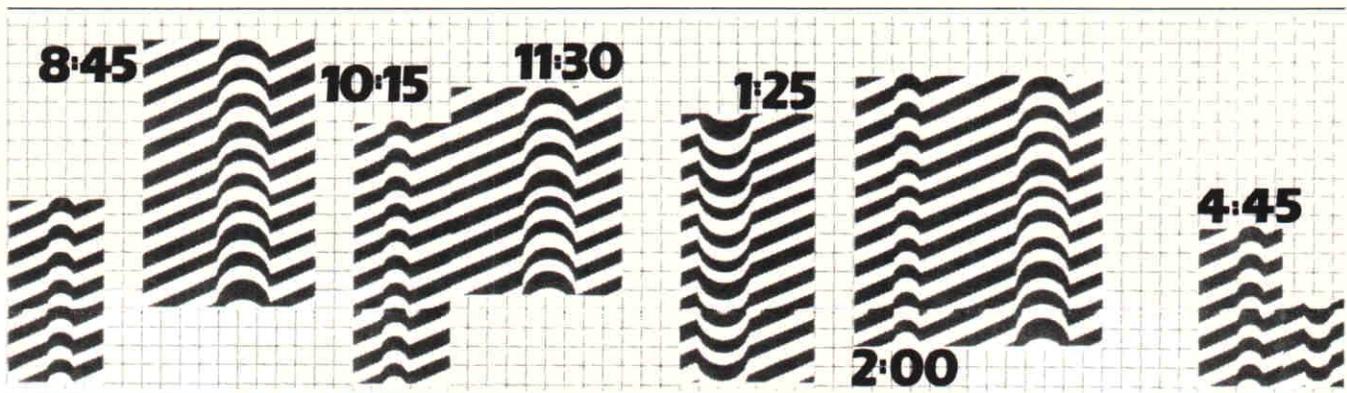
Good employees should be afforded the opportunity to establish their personal productivity cycles, and, within reason, they should be allowed to undertake assignments in a manner which best suits them. Many employees devise countless ways to diminish personal productivity by stretching out assignments, or by coasting

until the end of the workday. However, highly productive employees, such as Linda, Brenda, and Susan take pride in consistently maintaining high productivity. Enabling them to schedule their duties according to their own personal cycles of productivity results in high job satisfaction. Moreover, it can be argued, no other system of production can yield a greater long-range output.

Another reason to let productive people follow their own schedules is that they will be less fatigued. It is quite fatiguing to continually be meeting often arbitrary deadlines or to undertake selected tasks when one does not feel fully equipped to undertake them. Productive employees, allowed to pace themselves, can accomplish more and remain more vibrant.

Internal Time Grid

Productive employees may have an internal "time grid" that charts their cycle of productivity. Quite often, no formal sketch or chart is



ever made. Nevertheless, it does exist. Productive employees may also be reluctant to tell supervisors that they'd "rather not handle the DEF report right now" because they "can do a better job on it tomorrow morning," and the "GHI assignment could be better undertaken now."

Besides direct discussion of the subject, there are four basic ways to get the most from productive employees with personal cycles of productivity.

Provide enough assignments so the cycle can be used. If an employee only has one assignment, then, obviously, there is little leeway in undertaking the assignment at the most personally opportune time. With numerous assignments, a productive employee can strategically arrange his or her schedule.

Be flexible in due dates when possible. Productive employees will finish the important jobs on time. Assignments of lesser importance will be finished as soon

as possible. The more flexibility a productive employee is given in completing assignments, the greater the opportunity for him or her to execute assignments in accordance with his or her productivity cycle. More often than not, given flexible due dates, the productive employee will complete many assignments sooner than you expected.

Avoid late afternoon and surprise assignments. The productive employee, in concurrence with his/her cycle of productivity, intuitively allocates tasks for the late afternoon.

Always try to provide advance notice of assignments. Productive employees must be given sufficient time to schedule the new assignment in accordance with their cycles of productivity. If you usually provide flexible due dates, then the need for advanced notice is not essential.

The cycle of productivity of a good worker can be reprogrammed to meet the needs of the company

or department. For example, if an important report must be finished within four days, good employees will prepare themselves and will generate the requisite energy to successfully accomplish the task. In the short run, good employees can reprogram their cycles of productivity to handle a crisis. However, forcing a good worker to reprogram his or her cycle for an extended period is not recommended. Since he or she is already highly efficient, an extended variation soon becomes an imposition and can upset the delicate balance by which the productive employee remains productive.

Supervisors and managers have cycles of productivity too. After all, you chose to read this article at *this* particular time, didn't you? □

Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC, is a professional speaker and the award-winning author of 18 books, including *Breathing Space: Living & Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society* (\$10.95). For information on available speaking dates, call Jeff directly at (919) 932-1996