

Thriving Workplace

Got a Minute . . . ?

“Yes, of course . . .”, is the customary and anticipated response to that question when someone drops-in with a query, a problem or a story they want to share.

And why not?

Because to do so contradicts a basic rule of successful priority management. Two of them, in fact:

Yielding to unscheduled interruptions without first checking their importance, and attending to unsorted tasks in the order they catch the attention, contribute to eventually overdue and time-critical projects, fire fighting, emergencies and crises. These are amongst the ways we fail to keep the Main Thing the main thing.

“Got a Minute . . . ?” is usually an opening gambit or a code for what may actually mean, “I’d like you to help me clarify or work through something, or persuade you to a point of view; or have you listen a piece of gossip; or agree with a gripe I have . . . however long it takes. And I haven’t considered how long that might be.”

It may really take only one minute but it’s usually much longer.

I’ve trained myself to respond to the inquiry with questions designed to clarify the request or with statements designed to indicate my current limits:

How urgent is this? (Which allows me to consider adjusting my priorities to take account of others’.)

How much time do you need?

I have five minutes (or three or two or twenty). Will that do?

No. I’m not available right now but I’ll have 15 minutes at . . .

In order to treat others’ needs with the same respect and to model constructive practices when I am the initiator, I’ve also trained myself to first take care to clarify my intentions, and to realistically estimate my needs. I like to make my first question, *Are you interruptible . . . ?* If so, I follow up with statements such as these:

I want to discuss X . . . with you in order to Y . . .

I’m working on X . . . and need to involve you in the Z part of it . . .

How soon can you give 20 minutes (or 10 or 15) for this?

They’re simple techniques but not easy to apply if you’ve habituated yielding unquestioningly to *Got a minute . . . ?* Acquiring a new habit takes discipline and continual practice.

The techniques also apply to meetings. Far too often, workplace meetings begin with an unclear *purpose* (which is quite different from a meeting's *agenda*), little thought to their agenda or the order of agenda items, and frequently with no consideration to an appropriate duration:

Can we meet at 2pm? I'd like to go over your progress with the X project.

We have a regular a team meeting on Mondays at 10am.

Let's get together this afternoon to check-in with one another about work in progress.

Taking a moment to consider (i) where requests for meetings fit within our Bigger Picture and Main Thing; and (ii) requesting greater clarity or providing it ourselves, can save a lot of valuable time.

Try one or more of these practices, this week. Set out to create new habits, wherever you can.

You'll find detailed guidelines for these topics at, www.Thriving-Workplace.com. These days, 80% of the resources there are available at no cost and no subscription is necessary; you may dip-in at any time.

Here are some suggestions from elsewhere in this website, related to the topic of "saving time":

- [Manage Priorities, not Time](#) (eight pages) includes a discussion of *The Main Thing*.
- Articles (nine of them) on [improving the quality of meetings](#) (includes a *Meeting Planner* and a planning template).
- *Setting Limits and Holding Boundaries* – within the [Interpersonal Communication](#) pages of the site, to which payment of either a \$US30 or \$US45 fee provides full access. <http://www.thriving-workplace.com/interpersonal-communication.html>

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