

WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER

BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

"Simplicity means the achievement of maximum effect with minimum means."

Albert Einstein

The popular lifestyle phrase, "Work smarter, not harder," was coined by Carl Barks, a Disney Studio illustrator and comic book creator. But what does it really mean and how can we do it?

Work-smart experts advocate that we prioritize, delegate, set deadlines and goals, organize and plan ahead. But there is another philosophy that I call simplicity. Simplicity means working in an arena of ease. It's about removing complications from your life. When you do, you are freed up to carve a personalized approach for working smarter.

Does this sound too elementary? Too trivial? For some reason, we think a solution has to be dynamic and powerful to really work. But when it comes to working smarter, that's not the case. So what are the best ways to work smarter? If you want to save time, relieve stress, think creatively and improve the bounce-back factor after a setback, then consider these basics in simplicity:

Keep it Simple

Declutter your life. Create a "to-do" list and organize it logically. If some of the items fall under one category, group them together and work on them until that category is completed. This will help keep your thoughts and efforts focused. Identify items that seem like busy work and ask yourself if this item needs your attention today. Can it be deferred? Can it be eliminated altogether?

Go with the Flow

Walking with the wind at your back is easier than facing a head wind. The same notion applies to making smarter judgments. Do you tend to make a mountain out of a mole hill? Do you find yourself going against the grain and always rocking the boat? This can be adding undue stress to your life. Ask yourself, "Am I going with the flow?" Then figure out how to switch your position in favor of the wind.

Live Life King-Size

Life is unpredictable, so make sure you're having some fun along the way. Being overworked and stressed can rob your joy and make you sour. The first step is to do something simple - smile. A smile tells your subconscious to expect happiness and sets the wheels in motion. It will make you more approachable, which encourages others to want to interact with you. Chitchat at work can help you

build relationships while keeping you plugged into the office grapevine. Share an anecdote or personal story while waiting for a meeting to start. Have coffee with a coworker. Consider joining your office softball team or helping organize the annual toy drive.

Don't Make Work Harder than it Is

Many times, pressure is self-induced. We set unrealistically high goals or standards for ourselves and feel like we should be doing more. Remember that tasks get completed in a step-by-step fashion. Rather than focus on the entire project, break it into manageable steps. This can help alleviate those feelings of being overwhelmed and enable us to think creatively, freely and more clearly.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Why waste time duplicating something that has been created or optimized by someone else? Instead of spinning your wheels, tap into the experiences of others and learn from them. Take their ideas and solutions and build on them. Glean the basic concepts that can become the foundation for your own ideas. Now that's working smarter.

Listen More; Talk Less

Something dramatic happens when we relax and really listen to what someone is saying. It allows us to chill out and think clearly. We gather information about the person's feelings, wants, concerns and needs. When we interrupt, we get only part of the story. With only a portion to work with, we think ahead to solutions that can easily lead us down the wrong path. Remember, if your lips are moving, you are not learning anything new.

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