On top of it: Organization to keep stress in check

It's Monday morning and you come into work rested and ready to tackle all of the projects for the week ahead. Things are going great until you find yourself simultaneously trying to search for a missing document, answer the phone and look at your co-worker's baby pictures. All of a sudden it is lunchtime and you're no closer to finishing that assignment than you were when you left on Friday.



Finding focus

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Recent research suggests that workplace distractions eat up an average of 2.1 hours a day and that multi-taskers are actually less efficient than those who concentrate on one thing at a time. With growing demands and shrinking resources, however, it's no wonder that 80 per cent of those in the workforce say they feel overwhelmed at work. This type of pressure is not only physically exhausting, but can also take its toll on emotional and mental health.

How can you make the most of your time at work? Organization and prioritization can help keep your stress in check.

Make a list and check it twice. One of the best ways to keep your daily duties in line is to make a list of everything you need to do that day and cross off tasks when you've finished them. Being able to see your tasks in one place will prevent you from forgetting anything, and crossing something off when it's done will create a sense of accomplishment.

Crossing off your entire list in a day becomes a goal that you can work toward as the day progresses, increasing productivity and reducing stress. Don't become overwhelmed by a long list for a whole week. Make things manageable and take it one day at a time.

Rate and rank. Make things easier for yourself by looking at the jobs you have and assigning an order in which to complete them. Get the most important assignment out of the way first instead of putting it off until later to avoid the pitfalls of procrastination.

Tidy up. Having a clear, tidy workspace can help you stay organized and efficient. Searching for something not only wastes time, but also creates frustration, stress and panic. Take 15 minutes at the end of the workweek to tidy up your work area. This will ease your mind and set you up for success.

File away. One recent study revealed that up to 30 per cent of an employee's daily time is wasted looking for lost documents. Consistently filing papers in their proper place may seem tedious, but if it's done at the end of every work day, it only takes a few minutes and can save much more time in the future.

Tune out technology. Constant e-mails and phone calls have become the greatest time thieves of the workday. Based on trends, it's predicted that by 2009, workers are going to be dedicating 41 per cent of their time to e-mail management. Try to tune out the distractions of technology by blocking off specific times to answer phone messages and e-mail rather than constantly checking throughout the day. Cut out stress by leaving your cell phone or BlackBerry at your desk while on lunch, and relax during breaks.

Divert distractions. If it looks like a busy day, don't be afraid to politely let your co-workers know it. Verbalizing your stress and workload in a light-hearted way will let those around you know to hold off on telling you about their favourite show or asking you to take a coffee break. Decrease stress even further by closing the door to your office or moving to a quieter space where you're less likely to be interrupted.

By staying organized and learning to effectively prioritize your tasks, you'll operate more efficiently, feel less bogged down by work pressures and be better equipped to enjoy your time away from work.