

PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

October 2017

**Flexible working
can affect career
progression**

How to make
small talk – you
can do it!

**How managers
can create better
relationships
with their team**

Managing Meetings

Time management tips

The importance of email training

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Flexible working affects mums' ability to progress their career

Nearly half of working mums think working flexibly has affected their ability to progress their career, although almost three quarters identify flexible work as crucial to getting more women into senior roles, according to Workingmums.co.uk annual survey.

The survey of over 2,300 working mums, sponsored by Nielsen, shows the impact on women's careers if they work flexibly - whether part time, some degree of homeworking, flexi hours or some other form of flexibility. According to the survey:

- **47% of those surveyed think flexible working has affected their career progression with 28% saying it hasn't**
- **52% of part timers say they have missed out on career progression opportunities or training**
- **41% feel their flexible working is not viewed positively by their colleagues**
- **29% feel discriminated against because of working flexibly**

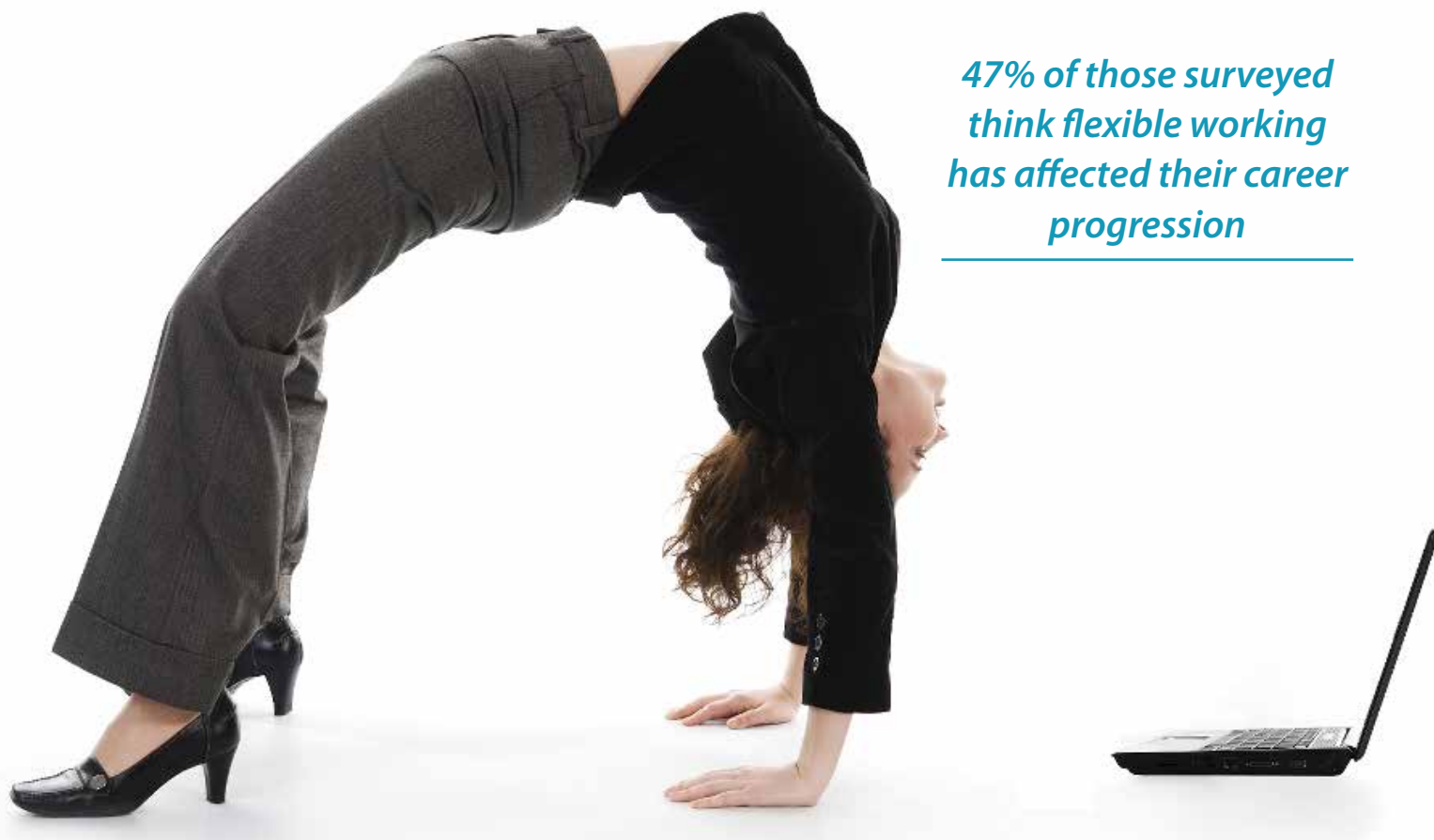
Yet it also shows that mums feel flexible working is vital for them to manage work and family life. In fact 60% of those who work flexibly would like more flexibility, such as more homeworking or more use of job shares, and 73% believe flexible working and flexi opportunities in senior roles are key to career progression.

Moreover, 51% are worried their flexible working will be taken away from them.

The lack of availability of senior flexible roles means many women have had to take pay cuts to get flexibility - 44% say they earn less than before they had children with just 27% earning more. The lack of women in senior positions in organisations is also a key contributor to the gender pay gap.

Far from the stereotype that flexible workers are less committed, 67% of mums feel they have to work harder because of unconscious bias in the workplace.

Workingmums.co.uk promotes best practice in flexible working and highlighting the benefits for all of normalising flexible working. That includes dads who research shows are keen to spend more time with their families. Some 24% of dads work flexibly, according to the Workingmums.co.uk survey, although only 4% of these work reduced hours, a figure that has barely changed over the last few years. Part of the barrier to dads working flexibly is the perception that it will damage their careers.



47% of those surveyed think flexible working has affected their career progression

One woman who has benefited from flexible working to progress her career is Vicky Sandry, General Counsel for the UK and Ireland at Sky, named Workingmums.co.uk Top Overall Employer in 2016. She says: "I've worked part time since returning from my first maternity leave in 2004 – first four days a week and then 3.5 days a week. Whilst working part time I've had two significant promotions, the first in 2005, to run the Regulatory & Competition legal team, and the second in July to my current role. It has been challenging, but I feel lucky to have the best of both worlds – an incredibly interesting and engaging job, and the ability to spend time with the boys and I wouldn't change it for anything."

The survey also shows that many employers are losing experienced women because they cannot accommodate their flexible working requests:

- 23% of women had had flexible working requests turned down by their employer
- 19% had left as a result
- 35% had the request turned down for a reason other than that allowed under flexible working legislation
- 57% of those whose flexible working request had been refused while they were on maternity leave felt they might not return to work.

Gillian Nissim, founder of Workingmums.co.uk, says: "There is a clear link between the availability of flexible working, women's career progression and the gender pay gap. Too many women are not achieving their potential because organisations just don't understand the benefits all round of creating good flexible

Continued ►

working opportunities. That is a waste of their skills and a loss to employers. It is not enough to retain women after maternity leave or attract them back through returner programmes. The culture has to be sufficient to enable them to stay. It is not just women, either. Growing numbers of dads are feeling frustrated at the strait jacket of 9 to 5 and want more input into family life. A work culture that does not recognise that the majority of employees have or will have families is not a culture that is fit for the future."

CASE STUDIES:

Lauren Powell works in recruitment in Berkshire. She has a two-year-old daughter. She came back from maternity leave after seven months and worked four days condensed into three. However, her workload remained the same and her salary was reduced by more than a pro rata sum. She says she was made to feel that she should be grateful to get flexible working. She was soon told that the condensed pattern wasn't working and that she had to increase to four days. She was not allowed any homeworking, but was expected to pick up any extra work on her day off. She says it took 18 months for her workload (which was greater than other full-time workers) to be reduced. She adds that she has been passed over for promotion so she is about to change jobs and move out of the recruitment industry. Her new role will be full time, but with lots of flexibility and home working. Asked what needs to change she said: "Attitudes need to change. People are stuck in the past and HR need to address this bias across every company. Flexible workers are often bullied and have no one to turn to. HR should conduct a review of all flexible workers every so often to make sure everything is okay."

Rachel Nurse works in retail management and lives in Derbyshire. She has a seven-year-old daughter. She says before she had children she was next in line for promotion to store manager, but after she fell pregnant that was

never mentioned again. Because she has to pick up her daughter from the childminder by 6pm she cannot go for any roles higher up the ranks because the main company hours are 8.30am to 6pm. Rachel fixed her rota after having her daughter so she could manage childcare. This has been more difficult in different stores where the person doing the rota has decided that she needs to be 100% fully flexible and has changed her rota on a weekly basis. She would like to see more fixed shifts. She relies heavily on her parents to help with childcare, but they are often not available so on several occasions in the last year she has had to take her daughter to work with her.

Justine French (not her real name) works in the private sector and lives in Bradford. She has a three year old child. She says there have not been any flexible positions advertised at her workplace at all in the six years she has been there and that only full timers who work standard hours get promoted. She knows a part-time worker who has been there for 17 years in the same job role. After returning from maternity leave she put in a flexible working request, but it was rejected. She was told her job couldn't be done part time and her suggestion of a job share was also turned down. She says she asked for homeworking and it was not even discussed. She had to go back to her full-time role or change department and start again as a trainee, which is what she did. Asked what needs to change, she says: "I think employers need to understand that times have moved on. Women no longer stay at home to raise children because they also want a career and it's impossible in this day and age to survive on one wage. Job shares would work absolutely fine and loads of women would jump at the chance. At the moment I feel flexible workers have jobs rather than a career and this is what needs to change."

More details: www.workingmums.co.uk/workingmums-annual-survey-2017

SmallBusiness.co.uk launches new grant competition offering £5,000 a month

Businesses at least one year old and turning over between £50,000 and £500,000 now have a chance to win £5,000 in a new monthly cash competition.

Small Business Grants is a free-to-enter initiative from leading business advice website SmallBusiness.co.uk, giving promising businesses the chance of a cash prize in return for filling in a single online form.

Whether you are running a cafe, operating a business from home, or perhaps managing a franchise, you will need funds to establish and grow your company. Depending on the type of business, this requirement may vary from a few hundred pounds to multiple thousands.

However, it is often the case that business owners struggle to find the funds they need. The Small Business Grants initiative, in association with Travelers, Shelley Stock Hutter, Melt and A City Law Firm, will help small businesses in this area, offering monthly financial assistance and benefits to maximise their chance of success.

The application process is simple - all business owners have to do is fill in a form talking about their business. They should detail key achievements, using figures and examples where possible, such as turnover growth, key contracts won, partnerships forged, or anything else that helped their company move forward.

At the end of each month, a shortlist will be compiled of the top applicants, which will be sent to a panel of judges, made up of leading entrepreneurs and industry authorities. The



winner for that month will be announced in the middle of the following month.

In addition to receiving cash, grant winners will benefit from editorial coverage exploring how they used the money; articles that offer an interesting insight into just how a cash injection can benefit small businesses and help them flourish.

Whether you need the money to market your offering, invest in technology, or perhaps take on some part-time staff, Small Business Grants is an easy, free, and exciting way to further your business.

Ben Lobel, editor of SmallBusiness.co.uk says, "For years, our readers have been asking how they can get hold of grant funding, and while there are a few initiatives out there, they often require applicants to jump through hoops to get the money they need to invest in growth.

"Small Business Grants offers monthly cash to leading small businesses of any sector, no strings attached. All you have to do is fill in a single application form to give yourself a chance of winning. It really is as simple as that."

Applications for the Small Business Grants initiative can be made by visiting britishsmallbusinessgrants.uk/apply. Only one application per business per quarter is permitted.

How to make small talk - you can do it!

Social communication is a very important part of our social skills. Your ability to interact with others in a free and easy way, with the other party feeling comfortable as well, can be an invaluable asset to you. From time to time, people find themselves in situations where they have to start or engage in informal discussions. This is often known as small talk.

By Trevor Johnson

While there are some people who seem to instinctively know how to make small talk, others lack the required social skills to cope with small talk effectively or even at all. Since small talk does not focus on any particular topic, many people find it difficult to manage smoothly without stalling like a deer in headlights or just retreating somewhere else, out of sight.

Situations that call for small talk

There are certain situations where people will be involved in informal conversations. Social settings and events account for the bulk of instances when you will be required, largely by social behavior expectations, to interact with others.

Mostly, these will be with people you know little or nothing about other than maybe their name.

For instance, conversation starters will come in handy at a party, in an office environment, in striking up a conversation with a member of the opposite sex and when you meet strangers, be it at a bus stop or while you are on a flight. In such cases, how well the conversation goes will be largely determined by how one or other of you breaks the ice.

Advantages of chit-chats

The advantages of these conversations and discussions cannot be emphasised enough. A chat of this nature may lead to many benefits in future. In fact, small talk is one of the best ways that you can meet new people.

In addition, through small talk, you can develop a new interest, friendships can blossom, networking opportunities can be created and everyone involved can be inspired, making them better people in the future.

With the benefits that these seemingly unimportant (even trivial) chit-chats carry, it is important for people to learn the social skills necessary for such informal communication.

Tips on how to make small talk

Using the following tips will result in friendly chats with strangers being fun, informative and memorable rather than scary events that are best avoided at all cost.

- **Avoid questions that require yes or no answers - open-ended questions have the advantage of allowing the conversation to flow. Questions that require yes or no answers**



may just end the talk after the answer, leaving an embarrassed silence.

- **Build the conversation** - you can ask about the activities or interests that your conversation partner mentions in the course of chatting. This will help you build the conversation.
- **Keep abreast of current affairs** - small talk is not based on any one particular topic. Therefore, keeping up to date on various issues will help you keep your conversations interesting and informative. Just be sure to avoid controversial issues such as religion or politics.
- **Listen to the other person** - this is an important communication skill regardless of whether it's small talk or a more in depth conversation. Paying attention will help you be a good listener which is an equally important skill.
- **Keep your body language in check.** Simple things like not crossing your arms, keeping a

respectable gap between you and the other person and smiling all help.

- **Practice** - being shy does not improve your social skills! However, practice will help make you a better person to converse with.

All in all, the next time you are at the dentist's office, in a bank queue, at a party or a wedding, or any other public event where you meet new people, striking up a conversation should not be difficult.

With the tips I've just given you on how to make small talk, you should begin to find things gradually getting easier.

If you'd like more help with making small talk then check out how you can use hypnosis to improve your small talk.

You may not become the life and soul of the party but it should help you come out of your shell more often!

Time Management:

A crucial tool to succeed as an entrepreneur

The golden rule of business says that effective time management is the key to success. Today's entrepreneurs will tell you that it's all about the "grind" and the "hustle" – working long hours and through the night with little or no pay. It's well known that if enough work is put in, it will pay off in the end. That's the recipe.

New research from a survey by Instantprint of 500 small business owners reveal that in an average week, a typical business owner is finding only 12 hours to pursue activities dedicated to the growth of their business. Over half (53%) find that most of their time is ebbing away under work admin and report writing.

Lack of time is also forcing businesses to turn down opportunities. A number of senior decision makers claim they're often forced to turn down opportunities to concentrate on existing customers (35%) leaving them with no time to grow their consumer pool and build new relationships.

Given the research findings, fellow entrepreneur and co-founder of Instantprint James Kinsella said "We all know how it feels to fight the clock. There are only so many hours in the day to get everything done and SMEs are feeling the squeeze. It is interesting to see from the research that it is the management of our hours, minutes and seconds that have the biggest effect on the running of a successful enterprise."

"Every business is unique, but improving time management and optimizing working hours can only bring positive outcomes."

So how can business owners and entrepreneurs make sure they're getting the most out of their time? Here are some tips:

Find out your most productive work hours

The majority of surveyed business owners claim they're most productive between the hours of 9am and 12pm (51%) compared to other hours of the day. Finding your most productive time is crucial, and can be achieved by listening to your body's natural energy spurts. Things that kill productivity include: routine activities and continuous work will demotivate you. Go a maximum of two hours and then tune out to tune back in.

Just say no

Many of us are just too polite, but sometimes it's important to simply say no. Distractions steal your time from important tasks. People may ask you to do a quick thing here and a quick thing there, but suddenly your hours disappear. If you've got an important task, keep at it and don't let anyone interrupt, you're busy. One in three decision makers claim they struggle to do everything they need to in a day, so make your "everything" list shorter.



New research has revealed that the biggest obstacle that small business owners are constantly facing is poor time management.

Go step-by-step

Don't think of your to-do list as one huge item to complete. It's overwhelming and will only put pressure on you. Take one thing at a time and this will allow you to give each task the attention it deserves. As a bonus tip, make sure you establish a method to classify tasks that need to take priority over others.

Know what gets you through

Some days you'll need a boost to power through your workload. Whether it's because you had a bad night sleep or you're especially busy that day,

find what gets you through. Nearly half (46%) of those surveyed say having coffee or tea on the go helps them through their daily tasks, and 1 in 3 have a playlist set up to get them in the zone.

Exercise and eat well

It may seem unrelated but taking care of yourself will have a direct impact on your mood and concentration. A healthy diet with regular exercise increases dopamine in the brain, making you feel better and more alert. Also sitting at a desk all day can really take a toll so it's important to get moving when you can.

Lack of email training is costing employers dearly

According to a new report the majority of PAs and secretaries have not been offered training on using email effectively – costing companies around 20 days in lost productivity. Dr. Monica Seeley gives her top 5 tips on saving time with email.

Three quarters of all employees are spending around half of their day dealing with email – and of these a quarter are spending more than four hours a day, according to the latest survey on Email Management.

The report, conducted by email management consultancy Mesmo, also revealed that virtually none of these UK companies has trained their employees in how to use email effectively. Indeed, 92% of PAs questioned said that neither they nor their managers had been offered any form of email training, whatsoever.

“This is an outrageous waste of a company’s investment in people and needlessly adds to workplace stress” says email guru and Mesmo, Managing Partner, Dr Monica Seeley.

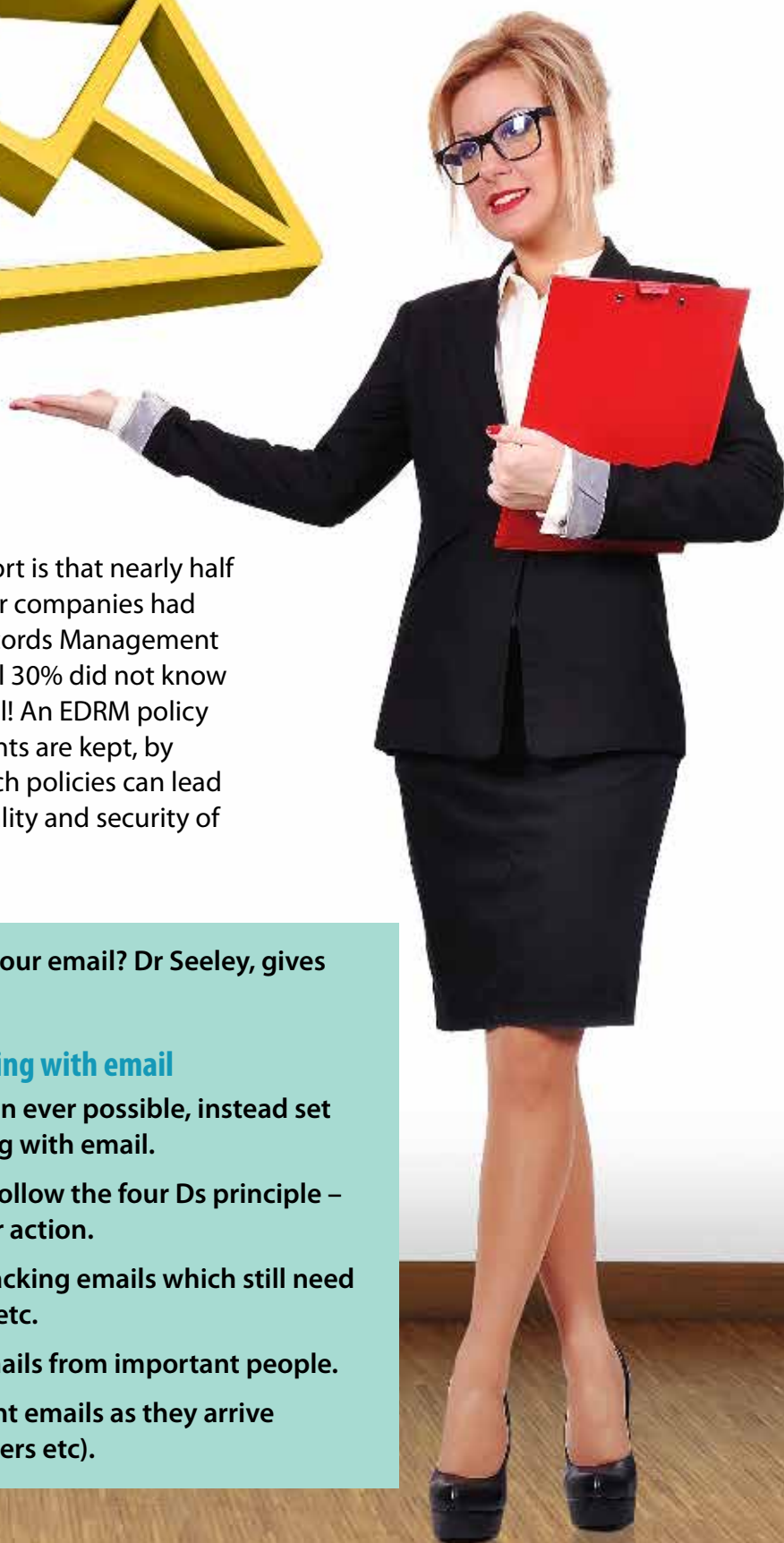
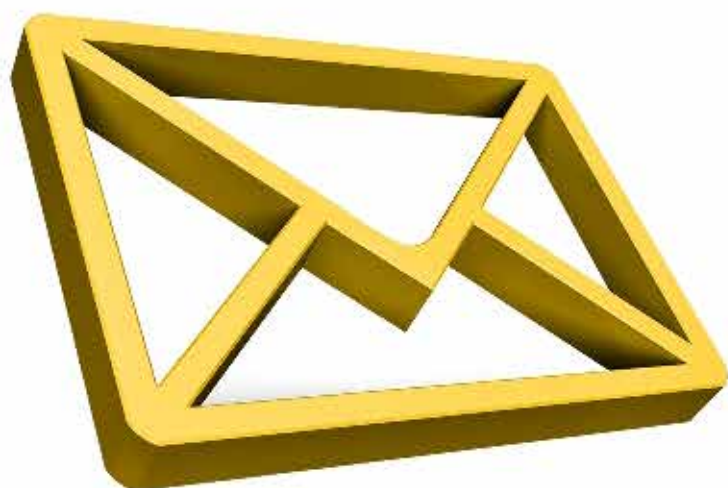
“When you combine the survey findings with Government and independent research which show that each of us wastes at least 45 minutes a day dealing with unwanted email –we are losing around 20 days a year of productive working time. Training quickly gives back this time and more.”

Commenting on the growing time people are

spending on their email, the lack of security and the poor use of email as a communications tool, Seeley continues:

“People and organisations without training use email inefficiently. Organisations tend to produce a constant stream of communication and often make inappropriate use of the medium. One example from our survey is that 81% of people think others do not use the ‘cc’ function correctly. My work confirms this as we see far too many people ‘cc’ing to cover their backs and sending email out indiscriminately. They are not thinking who actually needs this information before they press send.”

The length of emails sent is another problem – they’re just too long. 62% state that the optimum size for an email should be no more than 4-5 sentences. Seeley advises, “people need help and guidance with softer issues such as style, clarity, brevity as well as content of emails i.e. what is and is not appropriate to put in writing in an email.” She continues, “Many users do not understand how insecure an email is and that inappropriate comment in an email can be regarded as defamatory.”



Concern also revealed by the report is that nearly half of respondents reported that their companies had no Electronic Documents and Records Management (EDRM) Policy whilst an additional 30% did not know if their company had a policy at all! An EDRM policy defines what emails and documents are kept, by whom and until when. Lack of such policies can lead to serious breaches of confidentiality and security of company data.

So, how can you get on top of your email? Dr Seeley, gives her top 5 tips to saving time:-

Top five ways to save time dealing with email

- Avoid dipping in and out when ever possible, instead set aside specific times for dealing with email.
- Handle each email once and follow the four Ds principle – deal, delete, delegate or defer action.
- Establish a reliable way for tracking emails which still need action, eg flags, create a task etc.
- Use colour to differentiate emails from important people.
- Use rules to sort less important emails as they arrive (eg out of messages, newsletters etc).

Daily lives of one million Brits blighted by avoidable sight loss

Eye health experts have marked National Eye Health Week with a stark warning that a million people in the UK are living with avoidable sight loss severe enough to have a significant impact on their daily lives – leaving them unable to do things such as drive. And worryingly, this number is forecast to rise by a third by 2030, if we don't take action now.

David Cartwright, Chair of National Eye Health Week explains: "Eyesight declines as part of the natural aging process and some cases of sight loss are still sadly unavoidable but for many simply going for regular eyes tests and adopting a healthier lifestyle could prevent sight loss having a significant impact on our lives and help people to live well for longer."

Your lifestyle can impact your eye health regardless of your genetic predisposition. Being physically active has been shown to reduce your risk of visual impairment by 58 per cent versus somebody with a sedentary lifestyle; whilst ditching a diet high in meat – more than 3.5oz daily (the equivalent of two small sausages) – could help cut your risk of cataract.

Research published in the British Medical Journal reveals as many as one in five cases of Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), the UK's leading cause of blindness, are caused by tobacco consumption. Making smoking directly responsible for around 120,000 cases of AMD in Britain today.

There is also growing evidence to suggest that what we eat and drink can play a role in triggering the onset and progression of AMD. One research study has shown that eating just one portion of fish a week could reduce your risk of developing AMD by as much as 40 per

cent, whilst, heavy drinking (three or more standard drinks per day) has been associated with the development of early AMD.

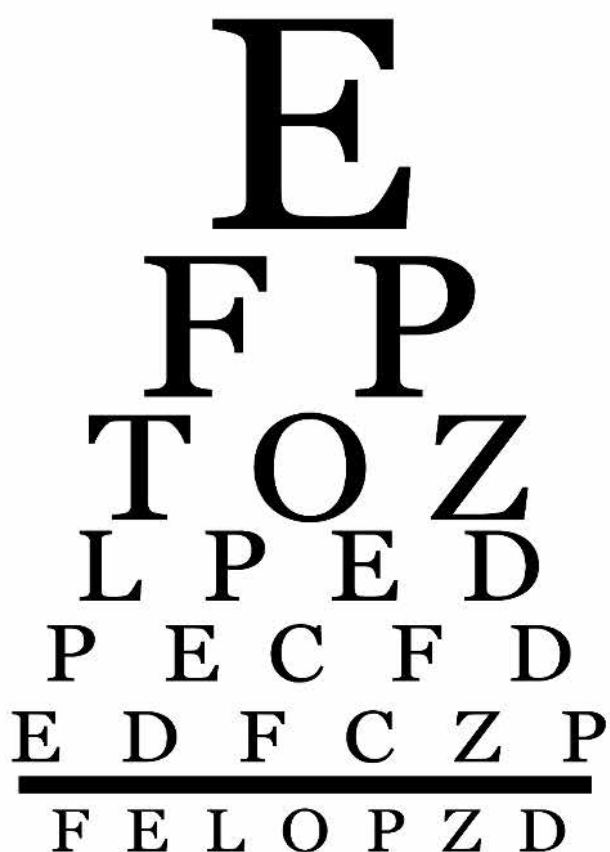
Poor uptake of regular eye tests, once every two years unless advised otherwise by your optometrist, is also a big risk factor for unnecessary sight loss as the early detection and treatment of common eye conditions like glaucoma is essential to avoid irreversible sight loss.

Almost 14 million (13.8) of us fail to have regular eye tests yet your optometrist can spot signs of glaucoma years before you may notice a change in your vision. In fact, there are an estimated 300,000 people living in the UK with undiagnosed glaucoma because they have not had a recent eye test.

SIX SIMPLE SIGHT SAVERS

Quit smoking. Smokers have a significantly greater risk of sight loss than non-smokers. Toxic chemicals in tobacco smoke can damage the delicate surface and the internal structure of the eye. This can lead to an increased risk of many eye conditions including AMD; nuclear cataracts; thyroid eye disease; dry eye and impaired colour vision.

Most of us have no idea that what we eat can affect how well we see, however, eye-friendly



nutrients found in many fruit and vegetables and fatty acids derived from fish, nuts and oils can all help protect your sight. Vitamins B and E can help protect against cataracts whilst Omega-3 fish oils help maintain healthy blood vessels inside the eye.

Watch your weight. More than half of all British adults are overweight however maintaining a healthy weight helps preserve macula pigment density, which in turn, helps protect the retina against the breakdown of cells and the onset of AMD. Obesity also puts you at increased risk of diabetic retinopathy and damage to blood vessels in the eye caused by excess body weight has been linked to glaucoma.

Get fit. Aerobic exercise can help increase oxygen supplies to the optic nerve and lower any pressure that builds up in the eye. Reducing intraocular pressure can help control conditions such as glaucoma.

Cover up. Exposure to UV light can increase your risk of developing macular degeneration

and cataract. In fact, frequent use of sunglasses has been associated with a 40 per cent decrease in the risk of posterior sub-capsular cataract.[11] Always wear sunglasses when the UV index rises above three and check your sunglasses filter AT LEAST 99 per cent of UVA and UVB light. Look out for a CE or British Standard or UV 400 mark when choosing your sunglasses as this indicates they provide adequate UV protection.

Be screen smart. On average, we spend more than eight hours a day[12] staring at a screen so it's no surprise that 90 per cent of us say we experience screen fatigue – tired or irritated eyes, blurred vision, headaches and poor colour perception. Avoid eye strain by using the 20-20-20 rule, especially if you're using a computer for long periods of time. Look 20 feet in front of you every 20 minutes for 20 seconds.

And, don't forget to book an eye test if you haven't had one in the last two years.

For more information and advice about looking after your eyes visit www.visionmatters.org.uk

How managers can create better relationships with their team

If you're a manager but simply not feeling the love from your team, why not try these tips to help get them backing your corner, from leadership coach Margo Manning, author of The Step Up Mindset for New Managers

HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE -

Whilst your attitude alone will not determine success, it plays a large part in the success process. Attitude is key, and it is vital to have the right attitude for the right outcomes. Influencing your own attitude will result in changing your behaviours, and in return impact on outcomes. With a positive attitude you will be able to recognise obstacles as challenges rather than allowing them to be the finishing line. You can look beyond what may be in your way and see your possibilities.

DON'T BE A DREAMER...

If you are overly positive and optimistic, this leads to problems. Having an extremely optimistic view means that you may ignore issues and real concerns. Your outlook, whilst positive, may not be realistic. There is always balance, and realism must be included within an optimistic mindset. You will make the odd wrong decision, choose the wrong person, carry out the wrong task: that is called 'being human'.

STOP BEING A MATE

It is often difficult to transition from being a mate into a managerial role successfully. Never, ever overestimate peer loyalty when it comes to

management. Your mate to manager transition must be carried out with understanding and empathy for the team that you are now managing, and this could mean starting from the beginning again in getting to know them. Strange as this may seem, you are their manager now. There are different dynamics and a different mindset in place for you and for them. As well as assertively delivering processes and procedures, giving instructions, delegating, telling, etc., you must now deliver communications that your team may not like, without getting caught up in the gossip and whinging.

STOP LOOKING UP!

Following a promotion, it can be easy to fall into the trap of wanting to please your line manager and this can result in knee-jerk responses that could alienate you from your team. It is important to consider the repercussions of any actions and the impact new decisions will make on the team. Sometimes as a manager, when there is no room for discussion, the instruction must be delivered. It won't please everyone; however, the trick is to work out how best not to displease everyone.

NOTICE YOUR REFLECTION

As a manager it is hard to miss how your own attitude, behaviour, and possibly more so your

mood impacts that of your team. It is very difficult to maintain motivation within your team when you yourself are feeling demotivated and potentially miserable within your role. As a manager you will be motivating or demotivating your staff through your own motivation, energy and emotional state. You, as a manager, have a greater influence on your team and productivity that you may possibly well imagine. Your team may very well just be mirroring your state. When one person's mood is contagious and impacts emotions and output this called social contagion. When managed correctly though, social contagion can be a plus for all, individuals, the team, you as a manager and of course the business, due to increased motivation and productivity.

SELL THE SIZZLE, NOT THE SAUSAGE

Great managers know how to engage their team. They know how to get the best from the team, and they do this by 'selling the sizzle and not the sausage'. By that I mean they sell the benefits of carrying out a task or project rather than the functionality. This is an old sales' methodology: sales people promote the benefits to the buyer not the functionality. Find out from one-to-ones what makes the individual tick, why are they at work? And then support them on this and see how the task and then gain their buy-in. Remember, it is their why not yours that will get their buy-in.

HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Whilst attitude alone will not determine success, it plays a large part in the success process. Influencing your own attitude will result in changing your behaviours and in return, impact on outcomes.



DON'T BE A DREAMER

Being overly positive and optimistic leads to problems as you may end up ignoring real issues and concerns. Your outlook, whilst positive, may not be realistic. You will make the odd mistake, it's called being human!

STOP BEING A MATE

It is often difficult to transition from being a mate into a managerial role successfully. Never, ever overestimate peer loyalty when it comes to management. You'll need to start again as there will be different dynamics and mindsets for both you and them.



STOP LOOKING UP

Following a promotion, it can be easy to fall into the trap of wanting to please your line manager, causing knee-jerk responses that could alienate your team. Make sure you consider the repercussions and impact of any new decisions on your team. In the end, decisions have to be made, but the trick is how best not to displease everyone!

NOTICE YOUR REFLECTION

It can be difficult to motivate a team when you are feeling demotivated and miserable in your role. As a manager, you have greater influence over your team and productivity than you may think. They may just be mirroring your own state...



SELL THE SIZZLE, NOT THE SAUSAGE!



Getting the best out of your team is about selling the benefits of carrying out a task rather than the functionality. Find out what makes them tick and support them. Remember its their 'why' not yours that will get their buy-in.

Source: The Step-Up Mindset For New Managers by Margo Manning
(£14.99, Panoma Press)
www.margo-manning.co.uk



Things the over 60s do not miss about being younger

Ferrying the kids around, having a boss who breathes down your neck – and the daily stress of running a family home, have emerged among a list of things the older generation DO NOT miss about being younger, according to a new study.



Worrying about your weight, being woken up by the sound of an alarm clock, and the constant juggle of work and childcare also emerged as aspects of life the nation's retirees are more than happy to have left behind.

Researchers polled adults aged 60 and over and asked them to list the life activities they do not

hanker after, including sitting exams, worrying about what people think of you, cooking meals for the family every night - and waiting for pay day.

Ironing school uniforms on a Sunday night and hosting the family Christmas were also we are glad to see the back of in our golden years.

Of those polled, 87% said, although they enjoyed their youth and miss certain aspects of it – they are just as happy now as they ever were, with nearly two thirds (63%) saying they are happier now than they have ever been.

More than half said their relationship with their spouse was at its best now – with half saying it was due to not having the stress of work and running a family home.

Nearly three quarters of those polled said they were happy with what they had achieved in life with marriage, children, owning a home and travelling the world among the biggest accomplishments.

A spokesman for retirement housebuilder, McCarthy & Stone who commissioned the survey of 1,500 over 60s, said: "Many of the things the older generation don't miss involve work – and that comes as no surprise. We are all looking forward to the day we don't have to endure the commute to the office and deal with the stresses that our jobs place on us.

"But it is interesting to see the stress of running

a family home and the struggle to get on the property ladder also both made the list of things older people DON'T miss about being young. For many, getting older means downsizing and that's a welcome move."

Of those polled, 28% have already downsized with nearly nine in ten retirees claiming it has made life much easier. A quarter went as far to say it's the best thing they ever did and they wish they had done it sooner.

Other plus points of selling-up the family home for a smaller property included cheaper utility bills, less DIY and maintenance and not being put upon to host all the big family parties.

Freeing up equity in the home and having a better social life were also listed as benefits of downsizing according to the over 60s.

The poll found 67 was the perfect age to downsize; but of those who haven't, four in ten said they can't face the upheaval of a move. And 15% said their current property has many emotional ties.

A spokesman for McCarthy & Stone added: "Deciding on when to downsize takes a lot of consideration. It's a big step, but once the decision has been made many retirees have a whole new lease of life.

WHAT THE OVER 60S DO NOT MISS ABOUT BEING YOUNG

1. Being at work five days a week
2. Having to get up to an alarm clock
3. Having to be up and out the house at a certain time
4. Revising for and sitting exams
5. Enduring the daily commute to work
6. Financial worries
7. Having to dress suitably for work everyday
8. Having to spend your working week with people you don't like
9. Having a boss who breathes down your neck
10. Getting children up and ready for school
11. Juggling work and family commitments
12. Waiting for pay day
13. Tidying up after the children all day long
14. Worrying about what other people think
15. Having awkward first dates
16. Never having a lie-in
17. Ironing school uniforms on a Sunday night
18. Not being confident in myself
19. Packing everything but the kitchen sink for family holidays
20. Struggling to get on the property ladder
21. Juggling afterschool activities and parents evening etc
22. The stress of running a family home
23. Worrying so much about my looks
24. Worrying so much about what the scales say
25. Cooking large family meals every night
26. Competitiveness amongst friends
27. Having to do DIY at the weekends
28. Cooking several different meals for the family every night
29. Doing a big weekly food shop
30. Having to host the family Christmas
31. Having to socialise with other parents
32. Spending all day staring at a screen
33. Being called out as an emergency service when kids breakdown

Managing meetings

The secret to being an excellent meeting organiser is having a system that works, and works with ease. We all know that the key to a successful meeting is planning. A wise owl once told me that “if you fail to plan, you plan to fail”. So how do you prepare for a meeting (or five!) without it taking over the rest of your working week?

By Suzanne Brown

Let's take a look at the three main stages of meeting organisation.

Planning and organising

A significant part of meeting planning is scheduling. Whether it's for five or 50 people, we all know that diary management can be a nightmare. To eliminate the time wasted by finding a slot when the participants and the meeting room are all free at the same time, try having a regular slot for meetings if possible - and circulate a meeting schedule for the next six or 12 months. I like to get in early and book people before their diaries fill up!

If you can't book up early, or have ad-hoc meetings to arrange, why not make full use of technology? It may sound obvious to some, but synchronising everyone's Outlook calendars is a great way to cut down on planning time. If necessary, ask the reception team to use Outlook calendars for the meeting rooms too - that way you only have to look in one place for all your scheduling information.

Distribute the agenda and circulate background material, lengthy documents or articles prior to the meeting. But remember that it's all about timing. Documentation sent a month in advance will probably end up buried on desks, however sending it a day before the meeting may not give enough preparation time.

Develop the agenda together with key people attending the meeting. Think of the overall

outcome that you want and what is needed to reach it. Why not try adding a sentence/ paragraph at the top of the agenda stating what you want to gain from the meeting? It will give a good reference point and help to stop discussions getting sidetracked.

If possible design the agenda so that participants get involved early, by having something for everyone to do, or discuss, right away. Allowing one person to have a half hour spiel at the beginning of every meeting will give some people an excuse to come late as they know they may not miss anything relevant to them.

Don't rely on e-mail for meeting reminders. From past experience, I know it can often save time to give a busy participant a call to remind them of a meeting rather than sending out a routine email reminder, which in most cases will be deleted as soon as it's read (that's if it is read!).

Attending

Ask for only constructive and non-repetitive comments. Keep focused on the topic and try to tactfully end discussions when they are getting nowhere or becoming unproductive - take an active role in the meeting, and manage the time you spend there effectively.

To be sure about who said what, make a map of the seating arrangement, and make sure to ask for introductions of unfamiliar people. I always make a point of asking for business cards from outside guests before they leave, then I always



in your mind. You can then circulate them within hours of the meeting, not just making yourself look super-efficient, but also cementing the meeting in the minds of the attendees so that they keep any assigned tasks in their thoughts.

Does your company have an intranet? Why not use it to your own advantage and put copies of your meeting minutes and agendas on there. It will stop people pestering you for a copy of the minutes or asking you what their actions were over and over again.

Take 5-10 minutes at the end to evaluate the meeting – perhaps if it is a large gathering you could ask participants for their feedback and what they would like changed or skipped in the future. Be warned though, you're likely to get some sarcastic comments, but it may be worth it if you get even one or two useful tips.

Meetings can be a very effective and powerful way to communicate and solve issues in a company if managed correctly. Hopefully these tips will help keep your meetings going in the right direction and stop the attendees heading in the direction of the exits!

have their correct names, job titles and companies.

You may be a note-taking whiz, but why not try using a recording machine during important or technical meetings as a backup to your notes? You can then be sure you won't have any grey areas or

sketchy patches in your notes.

Progress

Always schedule more time in your diary than you expect the meeting to take. That way you'll have time straight after the meeting to process the minutes when they are fresh

Suzanne Brown is a freelance secretary, writer and mum. Between nappy changes and sleepless nights she can be found chained to her laptop working on her latest masterpiece...