

Five Tools to Boost Office Productivity

By Monica Premo

With corporate downsizing and increased demands at work, getting the job done in the scheduled work hours is often a challenge. Most business processes are repetitive and predictable, yet we waste time re-creating documents, rewriting proposals, redefining expectations, and revising our methods over and over again. All of that rework results in less work getting done and more frustration for you and your employees.

Five tools that can boost your productivity are procedures, templates, forms, checklists, and scripts.

These tools can help you work more efficiently, increase your effectiveness on the job, provide consistent information to your customers, improve the quality of your services, serve as training and evaluation tools, and increase your own and your employees' professionalism. Invest the time to create your business tools once and realize a positive return on your investment every time you use them.

Procedures are simply written documentation of how you do things. Written procedures clarify expectations and responsibilities for you and your employees. They provide a consistent training aid and valuable reference for new employees, cross-training existing employees, and evaluating employee performance. Written procedures ensure that the knowledge of your business practices stays in the business instead of walking out the door when an employee leaves the company. While it will take some time for a new employee to get up to speed on the business processes, especially if the predecessor is no longer with the company, she will achieve confidence and proficiency much sooner when she has written policies for training and reference.

Templates are basic documents or files with a pre-set format that can be easily customized. When you have invested the time and money to create these basic documents that are used regularly in your business, you want to maximize the return on your investment by using the same document over and over. Contracts, lease agreements, proposals, etc. are examples of templates that are commonly used in business. Templates can have many other applications, depending on the nature of your business. Follow-up letters, product inquiry replies, general business service information, standard e-mail replies and more can be customized with drafts stored on your computer and updated quickly with your customer's information.

Forms are documents with blanks used for gathering data that is important to your business operations. Forms ensure that you gather the same information, in the same sequence, at one time, without missing anything. They can provide easy retrieval of information because it is always stored in the same place. Forms are used for reference, data entry, product specifications, information gathering, problem-solving and many other applications.

Checklists are lists of things to be done, checked, or remembered. They provide a written reminder of the tasks or steps that need to be done, and each task or step is checked off upon completion to ensure that nothing is skipped or forgotten. Checklists support your business policies and procedures and can be used to document that work was completed and procedures were followed. They can also provide accountability when work is initialed and dated.

Scripts are copies of text to be read which help you deliver a high-quality, consistent, and complete message every time you give standard information. Scripts are often useful when giving product features, descriptions of services, pricing information, and standard responses to initial inquiries. With a written script, you don't have to think about what to say, remember what to say, or worry about leaving out key information because it is all written out in front of you. A script can help you present yourself professionally and confidently every time.

Think about how you can use these tools to work smarter and more efficiently and make each day Practically Perfect!

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