

# The Successful SUPERVISOR

2010

October

Tips from  LifeSolutions

*In this second part of The Successful Supervisor series on Time Management, we are discussing the very common phenomenon of procrastination. Leadership frequently consults with LifeSolutions about the work habits of employees who can't seem to meet deadlines or who are continually putting off the work they need to do. What is not always clear is the role a manager can play in supporting employee time management. Managers/supervisors can assist an employee by helping him or her to identify stumbling blocks, work habits, attitudes, or behaviors that contribute to inefficient use of time. As always, we are interested in your questions and comments. Please e-mail LifeSolutions at [ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com](mailto:ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com) or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.*

*Annette Kolski-Andreaco, LSW, MSW, MURP - LifeSolutions Account Manager*

Procrastination can be a psychological or personality issue (part of that individual's general style) or a more task-specific or technical issue. It is important to distinguish between the two. If the employee generally prioritizes well and gets tasks done in a timely manner, but seems to be dragging with a specific assignment or project, you are looking at task-specific procrastination. This may be due to the task being perceived as too difficult, the employee lacking confidence in his or her ability to perform the task, lack of adequate information or structure, or a task that may be seen as boring or meaningless, to name a few possible causes. On the other hand, if the employee's default position is to *always* put off doing tasks, this is more likely a reflection of style or habit or an indication that other issues are interfering.

In order to determine what is interfering with the employee's ability to tackle the work, it's first important to identify the thoughts and behaviors that may be occurring when the employee confronts the avoided activity. Below are some common causes of procrastination, along with corresponding questions that can be asked to challenge the avoidance head on.

## Common Causes of Procrastination:

Identify the basic feeling and then ask yourself the questions that follow:

- ◆ Feeling indecisive: What is my big-picture goal?
- ◆ Feeling "not ready" to start: What steps will get me ready?
- ◆ Feeling overwhelmed: What *smaller* steps can I take?
- ◆ Feeling aversion: "I hate this task!" Whom can I get to help me with this? How can I give this a short time limit? How can I make it more enjoyable?
- ◆ Feeling de-energized: When will I have more energy? What is the best time of day for me to tackle this?
- ◆ Feeling unmotivated: What really motivates me? How can I reframe this so that I feel motivated?

## Coaching Toward Successful Time Management:

As a manager or supervisor, you can coach an employee to become more aware of self-limiting habits and behaviors and help him or her to design effective counterstrategies. This involves identifying your employee's strengths

and talents and then showing how to maximize them. You can also point out unhelpful patterns you have observed. By using the sample questions, a manager can begin to help identify the procrastinator's negative habits.

For example, you might recommend that the person minimize distractions by closing the door and not taking phone calls or answering e-mails for a designated period of time. You can clarify the positive outcomes that unfold from completing the task on time or, alternatively, the negative consequences of a missed deadline. If anxiety seems to be a factor, you can encourage the employee to use relaxation techniques to regain focus.

You can also recommend that your employees use tools that are readily available. One of these is the online Skill Builder course called "Time Management." This self-paced course is one you and your employees can take individually. Then you can discuss the modules, their usefulness, and your employees' experiences with them during individual sessions or even as part of staff meetings. In this way, you'll learn which work habits are most troubling to your employees and you'll have provided the tools to help them help themselves.

You can always recommend our coaching and counseling services to an employee whose difficulties with time management and procrastination have reached the level of diminishing returns, which might become a job performance issue.

*Call LifeSolutions if you have any questions or you want to consult with our team. In the next issue of The Successful Supervisor, we'll probe the components of "social intelligence," a set of competencies essential for effective leadership.*



As leaders, what we do and say can have significant impact on those around us. *LifeSolutions* offers a series of self-guided online courses specifically developed to equip managers and supervisors with the appropriate tools to help make a positive impact in the workplace.

***In keeping with the theme of this month's The Successful Supervisor, we offer the following Skill Builder course:***

## Time Management

Are you increasingly feeling stressed because the days are going faster and faster but you aren't making headway on your "to do" list? Time, our most valuable and transient resource, is either used or lost. Maybe it's time you took control of the situation.

In the Time Management course you will learn:

- ◆ **Ways to determine the best payoffs for you**
  - How to identify the goals that you will invest time to achieve
  - Methods for determining how you are currently spending your time
- ◆ **Ways to plan your activities to save time**
  - Tips on how to identify low-payoff activities
  - How to write and prioritize "to do" lists
  - Methods to schedule daily activities that will save you time

## ◆ Effective ways to control time wasters

- Ways to minimize drop-in visitors
- Tips to increase the productivity of meetings
- Ideas on how to organize materials and surroundings to save time and effort
- Insights on how to overcome procrastination

---

**Follow the steps below to learn more and to get started:**

- ◆ Access [www.lifesolutionsforyou.com](http://www.lifesolutionsforyou.com).
- ◆ Click on the *WorkLife* login at the top right.
- ◆ Enter your company code. If you do not know your code, call 1.800.647.3327.
- ◆ Locate *Site Search* on the right-hand side of the page.
- ◆ Type in *time management*.
- ◆ Scroll down to the *Skill Builder*.
- ◆ Select View All and then select Time Management.

If you have questions, call **1.800.647.3327**.

---

Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your company's policies related to information covered here.