Eight ways to make your staff more productive

Productivity consultant Cory Cook provides advice for small-business owners.

Cory Cook (right) is a leading expert on increasing productivity through improved time management and better use of workspace. "There's no one-size-fits-all productivity solution," she smiles. "We each have our own circumstances and working preferences, and various factors can either support or hinder our productivity". Here she explains how you may be able to encourage your people to be more productive…

1 Be more flexible

"Allowing greater flexibility over how, when and where employees work can benefit them and you. Degree of flexibility depends on the nature of the work, but define your expectations to ensure good results. People appreciate a collaborative approach and involving employees in deciding a more flexible arrangement can be better for both parties. They're likely to be more engaged and feel greater ownership over their role."

2 Give your people the tools they need

"Your people must be well supported and have everything they need to do their work successfully. Is your equipment and technology helping or hindering? Where necessary – and budget permitting, of course – invest in new equipment and technology that enables best performance. Where necessary, arrange training so they can make best use of your equipment and technology."

3 Create a better physical work environment

"We're all greatly affected by our physical environment. Productivity can plummet or soar depending how we feel. A poorly lit, dull or uninspiring space can sap our energy, while a chaotic, disorganised or distracting space can inhibit our ability to focus. Create the best working environment possible. Staff will appreciate it and it could boost overall productivity, well-being and attendance. Let in as

much natural light as possible. If natural light is limited, ensure your people take regular breaks outside – the fresh air will help, too. Add lots of healthy green plants, because they improve air quality and can reduce stress. Temperature is something else you need to get right.

"Also make sure the working environment is clean and tidy. Visual 'noise' is distracting. If you have busy shelves or messy covered surfaces, move stuff into cupboards or drawers. Encourage all team members to tidy up and minimise clutter. There should be easy movement throughout your premises. Designate at least one room or area for meetings and group collaboration. Let people use it as a quiet area in which to work when they really need to focus."

4 Give your people more responsibility

"Constant micro-managing damages morale and productivity. Employees want to feel trusted. Frequent interference is not only deflating, but it also interrupts workflow. Accept that your people may do things differently, but communicate your expectations up front. Set criteria and deadlines, but then allow your people to get on with the job. Let them find solutions and make decisions. They'll feel more empowered and gain more from knowing you trust and value their judgement."

5 Give more thanks, credit and praise

"Thanks, credit and praise rank at the top of things employees consider important – often over money. Even a simple 'thank you' shows you value them and that their efforts don't go unnoticed. It's about giving meaningful recognition when warranted. People like to know they make a difference. Showing acknowledgement and appreciation boosts morale, and when morale is good, it boosts productivity."

6 Invest in your people's skills

"It pays dividends in many ways. Your people will appreciate you helping them to gain knowledge and skills, which enables them to make a greater contribution to your business. Learning new things can also revitalise people and make them more determined to achieve better things."

7 Listen to your staff more

"Ask them how they think they could contribute more. Ask what training they need, and what technology or equipment could enable them to be more productive. Ask them what obstacles they're experiencing. Carefully consider their feedback, because they'll appreciate this. Listening to their opinions and involving them in important decisions can prove much more successful than simply imposing your ideas. Have individual and group meetings dedicated to finding ways to become more productive. Brainstorming can be a great way for you and your people to bounce ideas off each other."

8 Minimise meetings

"While meetings can be highly productive, if unnecessary or allowed to go on too long, they can steal many hours of productivity. Many meetings will be essential, but some can be pointless or unnecessarily long. If a meeting is necessary, make sure only people who need to be there attend. If one person is only required for part of the meeting, only invite them for that part. Have a strict agenda, limit the time, and remain on topic. The more organised your meetings, the more likely focus will be maintained, with good progress and decisions made as a result. And the sooner meetings are over – the sooner people can get back to work."

Read more: