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Can You Really Improve Office Efficiency by Adjusting Inter-Office Communication?

July 2, 2011 By [laceystenson](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

In today's tech savvy world it can be a nightmare communicating with your staff, when traditional methods of communication are challenged by new short-cut alternatives. We have all experienced it: There's an email in your inbox, while a harmonizing facebook message shortly appears moments later, only to realize the same employee is attempting to grab your attention via text message as well. When you finally have five minutes to read one of them, you realize the issue is not urgent. So how do you swim in an oversaturated market and respond effectively without tweeting yourself out of a job?

Below is a crash course in office communication techniques; when to respond and what method to use. Learn these guidelines and you will always follow proper etiquette. ***These are listed in order from most effective to least efficient:*

1. Email

This is the most effective and efficient form of communication among employees. E-mails can be saved, archived, tagged, flagged, color-coded, labeled, organized, etc. In a law firm, this is very important, as the information provided in the e-mail may be pertinent to a case and needs to be documented accordingly.

(Learn how to use the "To Do" task feature, and similar alerting features. If you are operating Outlook, tutorials can be found [here](#).)

You can typically expect a response by email within 24 hours. If the received email requires a longer response time, send a simple email acknowledging receipt and indicating you need more time to respond. Example text: "Thank you (name here) for the email. I want to ensure I answer and address your question thoroughly. You can expect a response email in the next two days. Should anything change in the interim, please let me know. Thanks for your patience. "

If it is URGENT, send a text or IM indicating you sent a EM re: urgent matters as follow up.

2. Voicemail

Another very efficient way of communicating to minimize the risk of interruption. Ask your HR and/or IT personnel how to bypass the ring option by using the DND feature on your office phone, and/or how to record and send a VM to another office extension.

You can typically expect a response time end of day. Again, remember this tip: you can respond via email acknowledging receipt of their sent vm to indicate you need more time to respond.

3. Interoffice Mail (Memo's)

If the matter is not urgent but requires written record of concern. Interoffice memo's can be out dated, so ensure that your office still utilizes this method of communication before using.

4. Instant Messaging (Facebook Messages, Twitter Messages, etc.)

If you are sending an important e-mail that should be checked right away, an *Instant Message* should follow the sent e-mail. This lets the recipient know that they should view the e-mail and/or answer as soon as possible. (Please note; instant messages cannot be saved.) IM can be a great resource to obtain a quick and short response, i.e. client in the lobby, phone call on hold, confirming meeting time, etc.

If your office is using software which includes IM features (such as gmail, Time Matters, Quickbooks, etc.) – address this topic with your staff at a firm meeting so everyone is operating under the same expectation.

5. Phones

Phones are a great way of communicating throughout the firm if you absolutely need to speak with that person immediately. Attempt to schedule conference calls in advance to ensure availability and attention to the matter.

6. Walk-In / Impromptu meetings

Walking into another individual's office should be avoided as often as possible. However, if the matter is urgent and needs to be addressed immediately this would be an acceptable form of communication as well. If you remember nothing else from this article – reinforce this to your staff: “Walk In Meetings” and “Open Door Policies” can be detrimental to the success of your firm. Get rid of them, and get rid of them now.

***Social Media such as Twitter, Facebook, FourSquare should rarely be used for work.** It's better to only answer in one of these forums if you've been enticed by your boss and/or colleague to engage. Try to divert the conversation back to a more formal work forum, such as email.

Take these tips and implement them at your office to increase office efficiency drastically. No more spontaneous meetings! Say goodbye to wordless emails! To download a template for creating an office policy geared towards these communication techniques, please visit our [resources section](#).

To learn how reThink Law Firm Consulting can continue to increase office efficiency at your office – call or email our office to schedule an assessment today. [Contact Us!](#)

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