



DAILY INTERRUPTIONS BLASTER

Understand the Source of Your Interruptions!



aspiration
COACHING

Interruptions take time away from whatever you're working on. Sometimes this is a good thing - we need a break, but at it's worst an interruption can throw us off and we can lose a creative thought, forget something critical or even lose a deal! This exercise will help you understand the SOURCE of your interruptions, so you can take action to more effectively manage moving forward.



Part 1: Keeping an Interruptions Log

INSTRUCTIONS: Over the course of the next week or so, complete the table below whenever you get an interruption. You may have to do this afterwards - perhaps at the end of each day or when you have a break. Fill out **ALL** the columns and **print as many of these pages as you need** to record all your interruptions...

What is the Interruption? Name your interruption & briefly describe it	WHO IS the Interrupter? Remember, it could be you!	DATE & TIME Include day of the week	Approx. TIME SPENT on Interruption	WHO BENEFITED from the Interruption?	How IMPORTANT is the Interruption? Score out of 10 (where 10 is high)	An URGENT interruption?	NEXT TIME: Jot down any ideas that spring to mind
					..... / 10	Y / N	•
					..... / 10	Y / N	•
					..... / 10	Y / N	•
					..... / 10	Y / N	•
					..... / 10	Y / N	•
					..... / 10	Y / N	•
					..... / 10	Y / N	•



Part 2: Reviewing Your Interruptions Log

After a period of a week or two of observing your interruptions - and your response to them, let's do a quick review.

List below the 'themes' or recurring interruptions you notice right away:

1.

2.

3.

Take a closer look. What **common threads and patterns** do you begin to notice?

(This could be times of day, days of the week, WHO is interrupting, are they VALID interruptions or are they always urgent so you HAVE to stop what you're doing? Or perhaps you notice something else?)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What else would you like to make a note of here?

Part 3: Taking Action to Ease Your Interruptions

When it comes to interruptions there is a never-ending realm of possible actions.



The KEY with ALL interruptions is to PAUSE before you take any action.

STOP, take a deep breath and evaluate the situation.

Ask yourself, "Is this interruption more important than what I'm currently doing?"

What you choose to do depends on many things including WHO the interrupter is, whether it's URGENT or not, whether the interrupter is a repeat offender, whether it benefits YOU or not, whether the interruption is valid, whether you are in a state of flow etc. And if you find you are actually welcoming interruptions AND not getting things done, you may need to have a deeper review around your motivation.

Finally, remember, **Say "Yes" to the person but "No" to the task - if necessary.**

Respect is essential - whether you are dealing with yourself or someone else.

Interruption Action Plan:



It's time to plan what to do with future interruptions. Below, list your common interruptions or interrupters and what you will do in future. Review your initial thoughts in your interruptions log where it says, "NEXT TIME I could" and check-out our Appendix for ideas and thought-starters.

Interruption/Interrupter	WHAT I WILL DO when this happens again:
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Finally, let's look at bigger actions to reduce or avoid those interruptions altogether:



You may also need to set up some new processes for other people so they interrupt you less. For example if you're interrupted because a customer refund needs authorizing you could empower your employees to authorize the refund if it's less than \$50. Or you could schedule regular meetings with people and ask them to save their 'interruptions' for your meeting. Get creative!

List here any larger one-off actions to avoid future interruptions:

Action	By when I will complete this action:
1.	
2.	
3.	

SUMMARY: Interruptions can be frustrating or they can be stimulating - giving you a welcome break. To handle interruptions more effectively you need to stop reacting on autopilot and instead take a deep breath, giving yourself a few short moments to evaluate how you are doing and then make the best decision for you.



Appendix

Ideas and Thought Starters for dealing with Interruptions

"In the moment" Strategies:

- **Say "No"** to the interrupter's request.
- **Delegate the interruption.** This could be delegating back to the interrupter, a team member or to someone you know would really enjoy - or even benefit from the experience of - dealing with the request.
- **Reschedule the interruption** or request for a time that suits for you. Try "I'm just in the middle of something/a tight deadline. Can I get back to you tomorrow?"
- Ask the other person to **schedule a meeting** with you **to discuss it.**
- **Prevent the interruption** (great for set periods of time where you really need to focus)
 - Put your answer machine on and/or switch the phone ringer off.
 - Close distractions like social networking sites, email programs and email 'pingers'.
 - Turn your personal cellphone off.
- **Ask** your interrupter, **"Is this urgent?"**
- **Share what you're doing** and ask if the interrupter's request is more important than what you're working on. *This is a good strategy if it's your boss who is regularly doing the interrupting.*
- **Ask the interrupter for 5 minutes** to make notes so you don't lose where you are.
- **Offer the interrupter a set period of your time** to work on the interruption, after which they must schedule another time with you.
- **Ask the interrupter to summarise the issue or request in an email** - including what they want you to do about it (you may even find they will go away and deal with the issue themselves once you do this!)
- **Buy yourself some time** and ask them to come back in 30 minutes/an hour.

Prevention and Reduction Strategies:

- **Ask that when people interrupt you they are specific** with a) what they want from you and b) when they need it by and if applicable c) their own suggestions and ideas around resolving the problem or issue.
- **Empower your team** or colleagues. Like the refund example on the previous page, think about your regular interruptions and where you could empower your team or colleagues to resolve the issue themselves.
- **Set up regular meetings** with your team or team members. Make issues and suggestions part of the agenda so that people know there is a time when they can bring things to you.
- **Have some sort of sign or signal that tells others you are not to be interrupted** unless it is urgent. This could be that your office door is closed, wearing some sort of hat (this is a real company policy!), you have your headphones on etc.
- Offer to **help the interrupter with a part of their issue** or request (but not the whole).
- **Ask friends to call you at specific times** of the day (eg. lunchtime) or in the evenings.
- Take a little extra time and **show them how to deal with their issue themselves**, so they won't need to interrupt you again for the same thing.