

Marginal Improvements

10 Actions You Can Take Today

Success isn't a giant leap. It's a small step, taken right now.

When we're reviewing processes and making changes, it's easy to become obsessed with a big picture idea. Yet more often than not, all that is really needed is fine tuning and process improvement. That's where this guide comes in. With these 10 actionable tips, you'll save time, resources, and make the small gains that compound into big wins.

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Manage Your Meetings

We're passionate about working smarter, not harder. Part of that, is avoiding the several hour meeting. They leave everyone feeling frustrated, they achieve very little and more often than not, could have been an email. Here's our top 3 points on running the perfect meeting:

Get out of the office

Controversial perhaps, but holding your meetings in the same room, on the same table just adds to the drudgery. Got a park nearby? Hold your next meeting there. If your local climate doesn't suit (we're based in Edinburgh, Scotland – current temperature = 1°C), why not head to a café? If your meeting requires the creative juices to liberally flow, the fresh air or lively surroundings could go a long-way to ensuring that's the case.

Bring something to the table, or don't come at all

Now there's a statement! [Al Pittampalli](#) is the author of [Read this Before our Next Meeting](#) and encourages people to “turn up in mind and spirit and contribute something”. You don't want to be the person sitting staring into space, contributing the sum-total of zero! In order to combat this, Al recommends that you warn attendees that they won't be invited to future meetings if they don't add to the discussion and required outcomes of the gathering. Harsh, but fair.

Have an agenda

Every meeting should have a leader, and that leader should be guided by a tight agenda. I bet you've been in many meetings that meander along, jumping from point-to-point? Disastrous! You need an agenda – it doesn't have to be 'War and Peace', just ensure it has the key points and that it fits within the timescale for the meeting. If you have regular meetings that need to address the same areas, create agenda templates; this will save you time and make life a lot easier. Once you have your agenda, make sure you send it to all attendees in advance and offer them the chance to make comment/ additions, that way, there won't be any curveballs thrown your way during the meeting.

Want more meeting tips? [Click here!](#)

Automate Communication

Did you know that we send over 50,000 emails a month on behalf of our clients? That saves 75,517 sheets of paper (or 9 trees) each month. Environment, you're welcome.

In practice, a large chunk of those emails are entirely automated, and have had next to no human involvement. We've crafted the text, but the sending, changing names, and scheduling is all taken care of.

[Communication triggers](#) mean that you can target the right person, with the right message, at the right time. Whether it's a student, instructor, or administrator, you can tailor your communication channels to suit the recipients. Administrate enables you to message by email and SMS, allowing you to maximise the reach of your message (do your current methods get a [98% open rate?](#)).

Communications can be planned, or triggered by events (like a new student signing up to a course). This means that you can craft unique messages for each circumstance, and deliver a higher level of customer engagement. You can also create and use templates in order to ensure a consistent message and brand voice. Never again will you have to worry about content when you're on holiday – you can have it all set up before you go! Being able to prepare your triggers and associated content also enables you to plan for the worst case scenario – need to cancel a session at short notice? Build your email and SMS templates, and have them send the very moment an event is called off!

Why would you want to trigger communication about negative events? Because believe it or not, there's real value in letting a customer know when things go wrong. Research into the [service recovery paradox](#) shows that customers who receive poor service and have their issues resolved display greater satisfaction and loyalty than those who don't. Couple this with the fact that a 5% increase in customer retention can [increase profits by over 25%](#), and the value of a service recovery tool becomes clear. Through automated communication triggers, you're not only saving time, you're generating profit while delivering better service.

Delegate Tasks

A key to good management is effective delegation. That doesn't only apply to delegating to staff, it applies to delegating to machine.

Why is this important?

Delegation of tasks means that more can be achieved in the same amount of time. That means more contact with existing and potential learners, and better engagement.

The value of an effective engagement strategy has never been higher, with research group McKinsey showing that companies with a high number of digital touchpoints convert sales at a [2.5x higher rate](#) than competitors. To increase your touchpoints, customers need to be contacted across multiple channels at the optimal time. Here's just one way you can achieve this through Administrate:

- Create email templates for your most common sends.
- Define a delivery schedule. For example, arrange a SMS text 2 days before the event.
- Administrate sends the emails and tracks the receipt, whether the customer opens the email, and whether they click on any links you've included.

Of course, you're not only driving revenue – the time savings really start to add up. Let's say you send 7 communications to each student you encounter, from the welcome email, to end of course. At 3 minutes per email, try and tackle the following tasks:

- Find your template you've saved, or create an email.
- Fill in all the blanks from your CRM or Excel spreadsheets.
- Grab the correct email address.
- Quickly double check for errors.
- Send the email.
- Handle bounces.

How long do you think it would take? We've done the maths, and to send 7 communications to 10 students on 10 courses would take 35 hours!

That's almost the entire workload of one employee for a week! Surely there's a better use of their time? In fact, we know there is – check out how [Administrate helped Lo Wright accelerate her training career](#).

Track Your Time

Ever reach the end of the day, and wonder where the day went? We know the feeling all too well. Preparing content and scheduling courses can be a long and time consuming process, and unfortunately, not all of it will be as effective stickable as we hope. How can we find more time and deliver stickable learning?

We see teams spending significant amounts of time in areas unrelated to training – mainly administration and clerical work. Creating a streamlined and efficient process for paperwork is increasingly key for the modern training organisation, and through training management systems, providers can generate additional training time. This allows for more input into methods and content, and better results for the organisation.

Of course, it is possible to run a successful training company or education institution without a tailored process or system. However, with the growth of new age training providers, the chances are that these days are numbered.

Evaluate How Time Is Used

Technology has fundamentally changed how students interact with course content. Ever stuck a bit of gum to the underside of a desk? Well, even if you won't admit it, chances are one of your friends and colleagues will have. Unfortunately, getting a student to stick to their desk and work in the conventional way is far more difficult. That's not the fault of the learner, it's the fault of trainers who can't accommodate different learning styles. Whether you're teaching digital natives or digital immigrants, the role of the trainer remains the same – to make learning engaging, informative and accessible.

In order to achieve these goals, teams should look to utilise the full extent of their resources. Flexible working has been extensively shown to boost productivity, and the same can be true in training. Flexibility breeds happiness, and in the words of Evernote CEO Phil Libin;

“The only way you can get people to do more is to make them relatively happy.”

To get a free time tracker, and manage your day better, [click here](#).

Consolidate Your Software

Let's explore some key reasons why consolidating your software down to as few systems as possible will help your business grow.

Multitasking

Utilising multiple platforms and systems for learning delivery can result in both teachers and students having to multitask to achieve their learning goals. There are many who believe that multitasking is counterproductive to effective learning, with one study into in-class multitasking, by Reynol Junco, noting;

"...research in cognitive science shows that there are clear performance decrements when trying to attend to two tasks at the same time"

And, while there's been much discussion over the impact of the increasing role of technology within training, and the emergence of 'digital natives', most experts have concluded that members of the 'net generation' are no better at multitasking than older generations.

Attribution

It can often be a significant challenge to measure the performance contribution of each tool when working with numerous technologies and systems in training delivery. Having this level of transparency is vital in order to ensure that every aspect of the setup has value.

A single system, with comprehensive reporting, should allow for better attribution of success (and failure) to allow you to learn and make much faster, qualified, decisions on what is and isn't working. Ideally, you need access to efficient reporting within a single system, where, in under 30 seconds you can understand key performance metrics and find the answers to questions like;

- How many students do you have on your courses?
- How much money are you making / losing on each course? (if you're a training company)
- Who needs to come back for another course?
- What courses are being offered online?
- Where all of your internal staff are on their learning journey?

For even more reasons to consolidate your software, check out our blog post on the subject by [clicking here](#).

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Turn Off Your Phone

It can be hard to switch off your devices after you finish work - everyone's been guilty of checking email when they know they shouldn't. However, the benefits to turning your phone off after work are far further reaching than productivity - it's incredibly important for your health and wellbeing. It's for this very reason that workers in France are now legally allowed to [ignore work email outside the office](#).

There have been many studies that show the damage of constant work, across a number of areas. From relationships to stress levels, it's bad news across the board for those who struggle to switch off. Psychologists even have a term ("[telepressure](#)") for the compulsion to answer emails and notifications on our phone.

A study out of Lehigh University and Colorado State last year connected out of hours emails to an increase in burnout and stress. Make sure that you don't fall victim to the demands of day to day work, and give yourself time away. Perhaps even switch to a [four day week!](#)

Sleep Well

What if you could give your students a better chance of learning and retaining the information taught in your classes? What if you could teach them one technique that would help them more than any review method, technique, or tool?

Spend a few minutes and teach them good sleep habits.

Too few people realise how important sleep is! Since the 1920s, it's been well known that sleep improves recall in learning, but it's only been in the last decade that research has illuminated the fact that sleep is necessary for learning ([Stickgold 2005](#)).

According to the folks at [Supermemo](#) (a memory training program great for learning and memory retention) who have assembled what could be one of the [definitive collections of sleep research on the internet](#), sleeping better isn't an option, it's a mandate. Their summary is clear: "By cutting down on sleep, we learn less, we develop less, we are less bright, we make worse decisions, we accomplish less, we are less productive, we are more prone to errors, and we undermine our true intellectual potential!"

If you have the time, their full article is an amazing summary of the history of sleep, the state of current research, and a commentary on various sleep techniques and habits.

Regarding the effect sleep has on learning, they state: “Sleeping well appears to be one of the most important factors underlying success in learning!”

Here are 2 core principles that won’t take more than a few minutes to share with your students:

1. There is only one formula for healthy and refreshing sleep: Go to sleep only when you are very tired. Not earlier. Not later. Wake up naturally without an alarm clock.
2. To get sleep that maximises your learning effectiveness: go to sleep no earlier than 15-19 hours after awakening from your previous night’s sleep, and make sure you go to sleep at the time of day when you usually experience a rapid increase in drowsiness (your circadian rhythm).

Improving a learner’s sleep habits could be one of the best things to happen to them! We’re sure there’s a few tired instructors out there who could benefit from these tips too!

Eat Well

It’s easy when we’re on the go to think of food as nothing but a hunger deterrent. But in fact, the food that we consume has a major impact on our ability to be productive. Think of the human body as a high performance sports car. If you put the cheap petrol in the engine, it can’t perform to it’s best. But, if you put in the high-octane fuel, it’s certain to thrive!

Make your eating decisions before you get hungry. If you’re going out to lunch, choose where you’re eating the night before or in the morning, not at 12:30 PM. If you’re ordering in, decide what you’re having once you’ve had breakfast or a snack. Also, try drinking water before deciding to eat, as the brain sends the same signal when the body is hungry as it does when it’s thirsty!

Exercise

Ok, this one isn’t a revelation. But from a productivity standpoint, it’s one of the most important. According to Livestrong, being in your best physical health will help improve your overall work ability. Not only can exercising help lessen the risk of medical conditions, you

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also will have improved cardiovascular health, which will give you more stamina to meet the physical demands of your job. This will also reduce your risk of becoming injured on the job and allow you to meet the expectations required for your position. Get at least 30 minutes of exercise daily – up to five days a week.

Another way to be more productive on the job is to have improved mental health. Regular exercise can help curb feelings of anxiety and depression. When you exercise, your brain releases serotonin that helps you feel better and improves your state of mind, making the stresses of work easier to handle. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter in the brain that sends messages to the body to stimulate mood and emotion, according to the University of Cambridge. Regular exercise may also help you better deal with stress – which is common in the workplace. When you are able to deal with stress constructively, it can lead to improved relationships with your co-workers and a more secure future with your employer.

Use Your Holidays

It's important to foster a company culture that's positive to taking time off, and part of that is to lead by example. There's a number of reasons why people don't take their holidays, but the impact can be incredibly bad, with implications on mental health and productivity. Here's two of the most common

Heavy Workload

Staff often feel that they have so much on their plate, that they can't afford to take a holiday - they'll fall behind without their involvement. Or, if they do take a holiday, they fear the pile of work waiting on them on their return, and fail to relax while away from the desk. To combat this, make sure that staff know the importance of working for each other, not just with each other. A culture of collaboration will encourage holidays to be managed more effectively, and increase productivity.

Employees don't feel they need a break

This can be difficult to manage, and is one of the harder aspects for team managers and culture drivers to handle. Many employees choose to "cash in" annual leave where possible, don't take it at all, or do so when they need it to handle a personal issue or crisis. Make sure that you have policies in place to cover prolonged sickness and compassionate leave, and encourage company leadership to set a good example by exhausting their holiday allowance.

Get In Touch

Contact Us

Could Administrate help advance your training? Get in touch via the following channels:



USA
Bozeman

+1 (406) 322 3312

info@getadministrate.com



UK
Edinburgh

+44 131 460 7350

info@getadministrate.com



MENA
Beirut

+961 71 419 404

info.mena@getadministrate.com