

Transcription - Working Smarter

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're going to explore what it means to us when we asked the question, how do I work smarter?

For a long time the catch cry in management training was work smarter. Not harder, but no one really identified particularly what that meant. How would you work smarter rather than harder? But certainly there are a lot of issues around time management and using the resources and the tools that were at your disposal better to make your day more efficient.

And perhaps that's what it means when we talk about working smarter, are we talking about working more efficient? We are talking about working more efficiently, but that is in itself a broad heading. So we need to look at what does that mean? I mean there's lots of advice, work to a pattern, start off your day by going to your emails or definitely don't go to your emails, there's various views.

I think the best solution is really the one that suits the individual. So to start off, what's best for an individual is for the individual to say, well, how does my brain work? How do I work? So some of us are very early people, you like to get up and start doing things and you're most productive and innovative first thing in the morning, others are opposite. They do that in the end of the day. So you use your way of processing things and acting on things to come up with the best ideas. So if you're a morning person, which I am, I definitely don't want to do my emails first thing in the morning, I want to look at the most three important things I want to achieve that day. I want to look at what is very, very key to what we're doing now and if it's not done it's going to create more problems. And that's when I come up with most of the, if you like the lateral thinking, the good ideas etcetera. So for me that would be the morning.

Also, the other thing I'll take into account is what's my style during the day? During the day, I really like a lot more interaction with people. So I like people to come to me anytime, no limitation. So in that way then I know I'm not going to actually get to my emails during the day. So I have to do it in a way that that is the end of the day for me and they go into my prioritization. So that's just to touch on that for now. But I like the idea of looking at when you worked best because we're talking about how we work smart, the bottom line for that is looking at yourself and looking at what your pattern of working or your pattern of the best times of the day for you.

So if I look at it for myself, I too am a morning person, but I think a lot of that is as a result of training in my teenage years when it was not the case that I was a morning person and the rule of the house was that I had to get up at six o'clock and that time between six o'clock and when the family had breakfast was my study time. My dad used to come in and he used to wake me up at six o'clock every morning so that I could get up and that was a routine that they thought would work for me.

And certainly it's a habit that has stayed with me and I do find that I think and work well in the morning, but equally as importantly, I can identify that the time between four and five in the afternoon is my flat time. It's the lowest point physically for me in the day, I can often come good after five o'clock and party on, as the saying goes, but for me that period between four and five o'clock is the time where I really don't want to be focusing on anything that's too important a decision because I just, and it doesn't seem to relate to when I eat, what I eat, that's just bio rhythmically which was a big thing in the late eighties biorhythms, for me at that time of the day is the lowest point for me to be doing anything. So I know that I should avoid activity that requires me to think too much, to make decisions at that point in the day because I won't be at my best. So I guess when I think about how I work smarter, I think about what is the best time of day when I work or how can I work better than I am working now.

And so I'm suggesting that we look at how you think of yourself in terms of the best time of day, the best location for you to be working. For some people sitting in front of the computer is the best way they can think and for others being able to sit back in a chair and not have to look at the screen, regardless of the size of the physical environment, is a better way for them to be thinking about what they have to do and so that for them working smarter is not sitting in front of the screen, not using the technology necessarily to make your day more efficient.

Another one that I had to train myself on is distractions. What I mean by that, say, as I said earlier in the morning, I'm working on the three top goals for the day. I am in front of the computer and I'm trying to plan or address a certain issue. Initially you see a bing, you hear the bing, which means an email has just come in and you've got the heading, showing what the email is. That to me is a distraction because if that heading catches my attention, I couldn't help myself but click on it and then I'm already getting very excited about what I'm reading or getting very unexcited, needing to deal with it.

It's an interruption. It is exactly what that word means, interruption. It interrupts the pattern of what you are doing and sets you on a different path. So rather

than a distraction which might take you away, it's an interruption that cuts through what you're doing already rather than swerves onto a different path softly. It's a harsh break in the thinking patterns and with anything that is a harsh break in what you're doing, it takes longer to recover. So a distraction you might recover from faster than if it was an interruption. So I think it's always useful to use the word that creates the picture for you of what that activity is doing.

So I think that's a good interruption now. So you can turn that buzzing noise off. You can turn your emails off, whatever you need to do to stop it becoming an interruption. So that would be the key for that sort of thing.

That's interesting that you talk about doing your goals at the beginning of the day, I actually find for myself that it's better if I do it last thing at night. And it's always been the case.

I do have software that helps me do it these days. So it doesn't matter where I am rather than write my list down, I do have a folder and the software allows me to do that too. I write down for the next day what the three goals are that I'm going to achieve and then sometimes it's more than three things but there's three things that will make a difference. So not necessarily goals because it's one of those words that I'm not so fond of, it's going to go on the list, on the blacklist, goals, because we think of it in different ways and not that we don't need them but I like to identify them differently. I'll write down the three things that are going to make a difference the next day to whatever I'm doing. So we will move forward in a business or an activity that I'm part of. Something that has to be done to complete an activity whatever it is. But it's three things that will make a difference the next day, they then go on to the list for the next day. So that at the end of that day when I'm looking at it I can look at that piece of software and edit it so that it moves those tasks from the things that I wanted to complete today to the ones that I have completed, the ones that don't get completed don't get moved but this gives me a sense of achievement for what I have completed that day as well as the planning tool for the next day.

So I find that if I sow those seeds before I go to sleep that I'm ready for the next day. When I wake up I know what I have to do. I don't have to stop and think about it for any period of time and that works.

For some of the other tools that we need to look at, are we using the right tools to do the right jobs? That goes into technology. It goes into the process and people we are allocating the work. Are we delegating enough? Are we delegating to the wrong person? Are we equipping the people that we're delegating to with

the training, the technology, process, whatever it is for them to do their job and to do it efficiently and properly?

So one of the things that I spend a lot of time on is total quality, process improvement which means yes you can always improve your process, you can always keep improving it. It's continuous improvement which we all heard about but sometimes we are just too busy to do it because it's not just your part of the process that you need to change, it's the process end to end, starting with the customer, ending with a customer whether it's an internal or external customer.

The other thing is that I think sometimes we do need to step back and look at is our own education, our own development. Would I be working smarter if I did something to learn about somebody. Yes. Like I just did learning about how to do a podcast before you do it and how to convert stuff and all terminology, that technical stuff that was totally foreign to me. So it really does help you get your job done and it gets the job done better. So you have better quality, less time wasted and you'll feel better about it.

We keep coming back at this point in time to email but it is a large part of our work processes every day for every one of us I think. So there are ways and means of dealing with email and I guess for us it's a matter of working out again what is the process that takes away the automatic side of it so that I don't have to be involved in what is not necessarily a job for me.

So working smarter in that instance is identifying the process that you don't need to be part of. I don't need to be part of. And I heard a lovely story about a CEO who had determined that as part of his process of working smarter and he gets just internals not even looking at the external emails. He gets internally quite a lot of emails each day from his staff asking questions because that's the culture that they can ask questions. He has a management team, that's what he calls the CEO team and it does read each of the emails. He reads them three times a day. So first thing in the morning, lunchtime and at a certain time in the afternoon. So not the last thing in the day, but at a certain time in the afternoon. So everyone in the organization again knows that that's the times when the email happens. And it's something that we used to do with telephone contact with people in the nineties, we would say to people, if you want to work smarter, don't play telephone tag, don't just keep ringing people back and forwards in the hope that you'll catch them. If you leave a message for someone to say when you'll ring back or you ask them to ring back at a certain time or if you can't do that, then you catch them at times where you could reasonably expect that they're at the desk.

So it's an hour before lunch hour, after lunch or the half hour because you know that at that time of the day, they're probably going to be coming back to their office or their desk or someone will be there to take a message for you.

So in the same way, if we extend that to the email, what this fellow has done is he has the questions that come through, often the same or very similar questions. So he set himself up a portfolio of answers. Now these are his answers. He determines what the answer is. He writes down the answers, but he keeps that in a folder so that his ceo can answer the emails for him. They're still getting out his answers and they prefaced the answer by saying thanks for sending in your query, Frank's response is this. And so the person knows that's not coming, the email itself is not coming physically from Frank, but Frank has given this person the answer. And for the most part they don't know that it's part of his portfolio but that really doesn't matter. It wouldn't matter to them because they've got the answer to the question that they asked. When he gets an email that has a question that he hasn't answered before, that then becomes a new entry in this portfolio of answers.

And so for him to work smarter, what he's set up is a process that allows the activity to continue. But he isn't involved in the automatic side. He's set up a process that provides an automatic process for someone else to take over. He's still involved in developing it in a smart way. Actually, that's a great example of working efficiently.

Another thing with emails. Sometimes we think we're being efficient by copying other people in on an email. I think we should ask ourselves - relevance. What am I doing by copying 20 or 30 people in, what would that lead to? Is that going to be productive? Is it FYI only, is it somebody's gonna come back and I'm gonna be answering 30 people all at once? What's the point? Is it better to have a meeting and discuss a topic rather than do emails and progressive emails? And if the answer is yes, I have a meeting. But again, make sure that the purpose of the meeting is clear, that is working smarter, make sure the relevant people are at the meeting, the people that are able to reach a decision at the end and have the power to implement it.

So again, it's everything we do every day that we sometimes are too busy to step back and look at that would lead us to working smarter. Working smarter is about planning what you're doing, it's about looking objectively at what you have to do and asking the question, am I the person that should be doing it? Am I the best person to do it? Do I have the best resources to do it, whether that's physical

process or people, and if I'm the best person to be doing it, what is the best way to do it?

And that's working smarter, because you're actually looking at tasks rather than just going through the motions and this is the next thing in the process, this is the next thing. So I think it's a combination of planning and of questioning and then looking at what support mechanisms are in place so that the end result is that you're working smarter with the resources that you have and it might then lead to you identifying that you need other resources to be able to work smarter. It's not always about working with what you've got. If you can identify a better way to do something that might need more resources than you have, justify that so that you can get the resources to be able to work.

Say I decided that the resources are going to be external, like whether to get a consultant and outsource etcetera, one of the arguments is that by the time I go through the selection process, by the time I identify what I need, it's as fast to do it myself. The answer is yes, it might if you're only doing it once and but look at the time to do it.

What is going to suffer in the meantime if you do that, if you focus on this, what gets lost? Exactly and then you're looking at once I spend or invest the time upfront in setting up this arrangement, whatever it is, then how much more efficient will that be in the long term, continuously? I'll get more mileage out of it that way. Another one is to demonstrate, to share anything that you know, tips that you have about how you went from A to B and in a more efficient way, share that, share it with other people. Ask people, don't be afraid to ask for help, even if you seem to have full control over this thing.

I see you working on this really efficiently and for me, that's how I learned a lot from other people and their generosity in sharing that with me. I think it's good to remember too that you don't have to find a solution from within your own industry and you don't have to be not aware of what other people are thinking and doing. And I like to think that we keep our minds open and we look at every situation we're in and see if that can apply to us to see if we can use part of that and adapt it to our own work environment to help us to work smarter.

And so that's about working smarter and not in terms of time management or planning or any of the other single words, things that have risked going on the blacklist, but it's about education and it's about being aware of the opportunities that are around us to take on things that might be in other industries. There are always activities and processes that are being used in other industries that we

would never think of, never look at in terms of our own environment, unless we remain open to thinking about working smarter.

It's about education, but not necessarily education directly related to the industry or what we are particularly doing. Working smarter is not just about your work at work. There are your personal aspects and you've got to look at the totality of what it is your life because if you don't, you'll end up fueling one area more deeply than another. So if you decide, I'm just gonna work those hours and the reality is when I finished at five, I'm able to concentrate on my family. If that is the case and you're able to do that and that works for you, then that's fine.

However, with the technology distractions and interruptions that we have, most people can't resist having the mobile phone nearby or something and they're able to, as soon as they hear anything coming in, whether it's a text or an email, they go straight to it. So when you're planning about how does your body, your mind work every day to make sure that you plan both aspects of your life, the personal and the professional and certainly in some of the other podcasts, we're going to talk about the balance between work and non work activities.

From my own experience, early in my career, people used to be very concerned about the distances that I've traveled and you know in Australia, it's not such a big thing and I guess because I have a bit of a country background, distances are not as daunting to me as they might be to some others, but I did in my early career spend probably an hour on a bus or a train each morning getting to and from the work location. And it used to concern people that I would travel that length of time, that amount of time was being taken out of my day. But what it did for me in the mornings was it gave me an opportunity, gave me an hour to plan, to process what I was going to do in the day, to think about the order of tasks, to think about what other implications.

On the way home, it gave me time to shed the workday, to think about all the things that have happened, to think about what I needed to focus on the next day but also to prepare for what was going to be out of work activities, that wherever I was heading and for most of those years that was back to children and cook the dinner, talk to the boys, to get the homework done, get the project done for the next day and read the notes that have been in the bottom of the school bags for last week, take out the old lunches that hadn't quite been finished, all of those activities that mothers do with boys particularly.

So that time was precious to me because it allowed me once I was at work to work smarter because I was focused on what I was doing. Had I had a shorter

period of time to travel, it might have been enough, but maybe I would have adjusted to the time that I had. But what it's given me now is that whenever I have an activity that I'm going to, my travel time is my planning and preparation time, so that that doesn't cut into my out of work time. I consider my travel time as part of my work time, I'm going to a place and my travel away from the work environment is my preparation for out of work activities and I can still do it when I'm driving and certainly for a lot of years where I was driving the same route to and from work, I condensed it to a certain point in the drive where I would think about home until I got to this point geographically and when I turned this corner I went through this set of lights, I was on work time was work thinking that had to happen and it's a discipline.

For me, working smarter is also about being disciplined because you do need to be disciplined to get any kind of balance.

A couple of other key factors to working smarter. Are we getting enough sleep? Different people need different amounts of sleep. So I get it, but you've got to recognize what is that for you and make sure you are getting it because if we are rested enough, we all know we're a bit more tolerant. We're more creative, more rested, so we are more productive.

The other one is, how much are we taking down time? In other words, social activities, exercise. All of those are ones that if you're away from work and you focus on something else, you end up being more productive when you come back to whatever you're doing, whether it's private, the project you're working on or the business project, whatever it is. So those two key elements is sort of like I'm too tired but I don't recognize it. I'm too busy to sleep. I'm too busy to go out. I'm too busy to, you know, to do whatever hobbies I have. They don't help in the long run, the catch cry, I don't have enough time. There isn't enough time in the day. The day flies by. I've got all this stuff I have to do. So we get back to time management.

So far we've identified all these things that working smarter can be. And I think that if we look in summary at what they mean to each of us, perhaps for me, working smarter means having that open mind so that any information that comes to you that will help you be more productive for the things that you have to do or that you should be doing is important.

Time management is important and a big one on time management and lists and we're going to another podcast about discipline. I think you need to be disciplined about your day. For me it's understanding my pattern of work for the

most productive and innovative time for me during the day or night.

Secondly to keep stepping back and seeing I haven't fallen back into old habits and that I continue to challenge myself into meeting what I think is the best for me to work smarter.

This is such a broad area of conversation that we're having with you and I know that there will be some of you who will want to explore some of those things in a little bit more depth. There's a huge amount of literature around about podcasts and videos and all sorts of things about working smarter. What we'll do is put together some of the resources that we recommend and where there are recommendations that are associated with any of these podcasts you'll find them listed on the website underneath where the podcast appears. So you can either follow the link if it's something that we've got a direct interaction with or just the suggestions and you can go and find those things for yourself and consume them in whichever way works for you.

Well, that's all about how to work or how we work smarter I should say. Well, how we think we should work smarter. Thanks for joining us. I'm Kim Baillie she's Fulyana Orsborn. This is Inside Exec.