Is Your Workplace Disorganized?

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Digital marketing is not a career for desk holders – ideally, there should be notes, planners and other instruments of productivity in plain view. Obviously, disarray is different from dirt. If every inch of the office has a Pig Pen-like cloud hovering around it, things need to change, but don't let a messy desk lead you to think your employees aren't getting anything done.

Instead, the signs of workplace disorganization are usually verbal and include factors that may not be visible to the naked eye, like email and interoffice communications, to-do lists and things "behind the screen".

How to tell if your employees are disorganized

From your employees, you'll want to keep a sharp ear out for questions or comments like, "Who's heading up this project again?", "Have we gotten any follow-up? I've emailed 46 times!", and my favorite: "Wait, sorry, when is our meeting?"

If there is a general feeling of confusion surrounding all of your campaigns, nip it quickly before it spirals out of control. Also, be on the alert for frequent comments regarding stress or having too much to do. Some people are naturally gifted when it comes to time management, but others may begin spinning out the minute their plate gets a little bit heavy.

Being an effective manager means being able to balance these two kinds of personalities.

I've found the best way of keeping harmony is to separate your employees into two categories: box checkers and long haulers. These sound negative, but I promise they aren't. Both types are incredibly useful employees when managed well and are essential to a functioning business.

Box checkers are your left-brained, micromanager types. They keep copious notes, supervise the workload, and schedule for the rest of the team. If something is due next week, they'll have it done yesterday. Box checkers aren't especially creative but they have a Terminator's commitment to accomplishing tasks on time. For regular office upkeep, recalling who needs to be on what meeting and remembering which client is having what highly-specific technical issue, your box checkers are your best friend.

Your long haulers are typically going to be your creatives. They don't work well with short turnaround times and feel substantial anguish if they feel like a project hasn't been completed to the best of their ability. You can give them several tasks at once, but give them enough lead time and factor in a feedback and revision process for every project. From my experience, most long haulers need to go back to the drawing board at least once. Not only does constructive criticism help them develop a better result, but a constant cycle of "This looks good, approved" will leave your long haulers feeling like they're on a hamster wheel of content rather than a valuable part of the campaign process. Be sure to collaborate frequently with this group, as they have a good overall outlook on how to reach the client's goals.

By defining who's who among your team and assigning tasks accordingly, you're going to cut out 90 percent of the personality clashes and stress that lead to disorganization.

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How disorganization affects your agency

As you scale your agency, you're going to have less and less time to devote to looking at the minutia of every campaign. This is a good thing, as it's a consequence of your business growth and increasing success. However, you need to offset this lack of time with employees you can depend on – ones that feel empowered, take action, solve problems independently and are honest.

The best employees aren't the kind who never make mistakes – those kinds of employees don't exist. The best employees are the ones who are brave enough to come to you and say "I really messed up," or "I let this task get out from under me and I need help." So be sure to instill that culture and turn mistakes into good coaching experiences.

If you're constantly sweeping up an employee's mistakes or carelessness, it's time to make an executive decision about whether or not that employee has a place on your team. Hopefully, you can instill a comfort level in them before this happens, as it's far better than them trying to hide a situation from you that's spinning out of control until it's too late.

Nearly all problems spawn from some level of disorganization. If your employees are handing in sub-par work, spending too much time on low-priority tasks or are missing deadlines, it's likely not because they're incompetent at their jobs, but rather that they don't have practice in managing their time, and thus needlessly rush through everything.

As a result, clients will get frustrated and leave if you

don’t step in and take the reigns. But you don’t have time to step in on every client. So, what do you do?

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How to teach organizational skills

If some or all members of your staff need a little help developing key organizational skills, there are some quick ways to teach them and bring office and production efficiency where it belongs. Here are a few:

- Have one of your more efficient team members help you establish protocols and operating procedures that can help all employees understand what tasks need to be completed and how to effectively communicate.
- Use an app like Slack or Basecamp to keep all essential employee communication in one spot and make use of task-tracking and to-dos for accountability.
- Hold daily meetings until it seems like you’re making headway at becoming a better, more organized team. Once you feel you’ve progressed, scale it back to bi-weekly or even just weekly meetings.
- Finally: Get everything in writing so that what your team did or didn’t do has a paper trail.

Being organized may not come naturally to some, but it’s a skill you’ll need for your employees to develop if you have any hope of scaling your business, maintaining a reputation and consistently producing quality work. Try to remember, disorganization isn’t the mark of a poor employee – just the sign of one who needs some firm training.

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