PA ENTERPRISE

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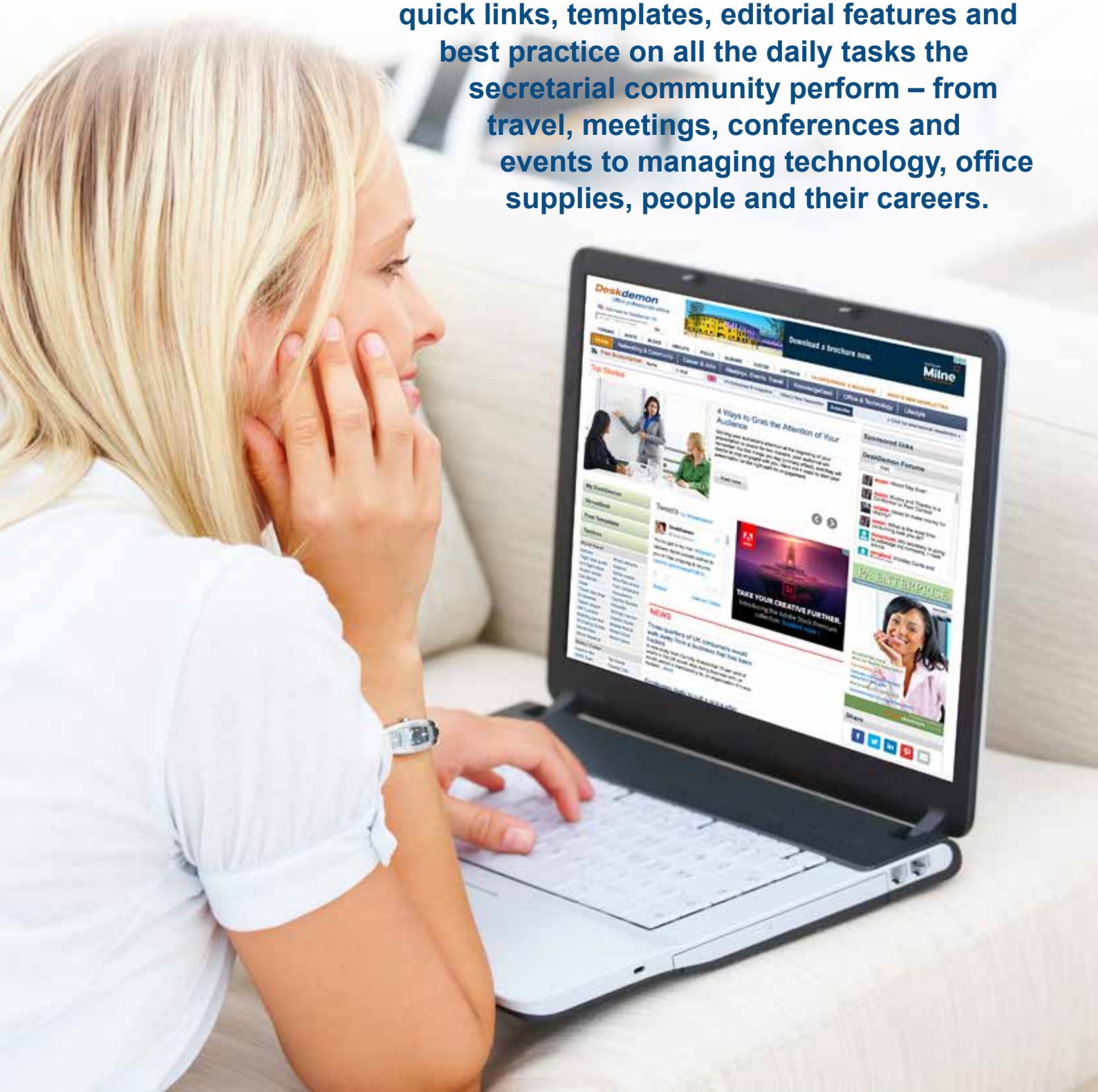

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New Year's Resolution Ideas:
Career goals you'll be able to keep

It's time to look forward to the upcoming new year. For many, that means looking for New Year's resolution ideas and setting new goals. But if you're like most people, that also probably means seeing those resolutions fly out the window before Valentine's Day (if you're lucky). Don't let this year's resolutions be empty promises to yourself.

It's great to make resolutions; they're a way for us to look forward to the new year with optimism that is active, rather than passive. It's a proclamation of how you want the new year to be better and how you're going to do it. The problem comes when those resolutions are too generic and impossible to measure.

This year, look at your career and set some firm, measurable goals that you can actually track and achieve. Here are 17 workplace goals for the new year that will make it your best work year ever.

1. Do five things to stay healthier at work

Everyone is concerned about health, and losing weight is one of the most common New Year's resolutions out there. You spend a lot of time at work, so consider what you can do for your health while you're there. Try to think of five simple ways to stay healthier at work. Pack a sensible lunch. Take the stairs. Get up and stretch every hour. Test out a standing desk. Switch your office chair for an exercise ball. Think small and you'll find that those little things add up.

2. Learn a new skill

No matter what field you are in, there are hundreds of new skills you can learn that could benefit your career. Is there one you've been meaning to learn? Set it as one of your work goals for the year and get it done. You won't regret it. If it can enhance your work in your current job, your company might even be willing to pay for it!

3. Read one career-related or motivational book

Reading does wonders for your mind. No matter your job, there is a book out there that can improve your performance, your outlook, or your personal habits. Even if you think you already know what you need to know, reading a great book on professional development can give you a new perspective.

4. Update your resume

When is the last time you gave your resume a thorough look-through? Is the style of your resume modern and still current? Is the information correct? Make it a work goal for the year to review and edit your resume, even if you don't plan on applying anywhere. It's always best to update your resume periodically before you lose track of the information you need.

5. Create at least one new professional networking connection per month

There's no downside to increasing the size of your professional network. You probably meet people all the time, but do you take the time to listen, grab their business card, and connect with them? Try to find at least one person per month to add to your LinkedIn connections and watch your network blossom.

6. Review and improve your LinkedIn profile

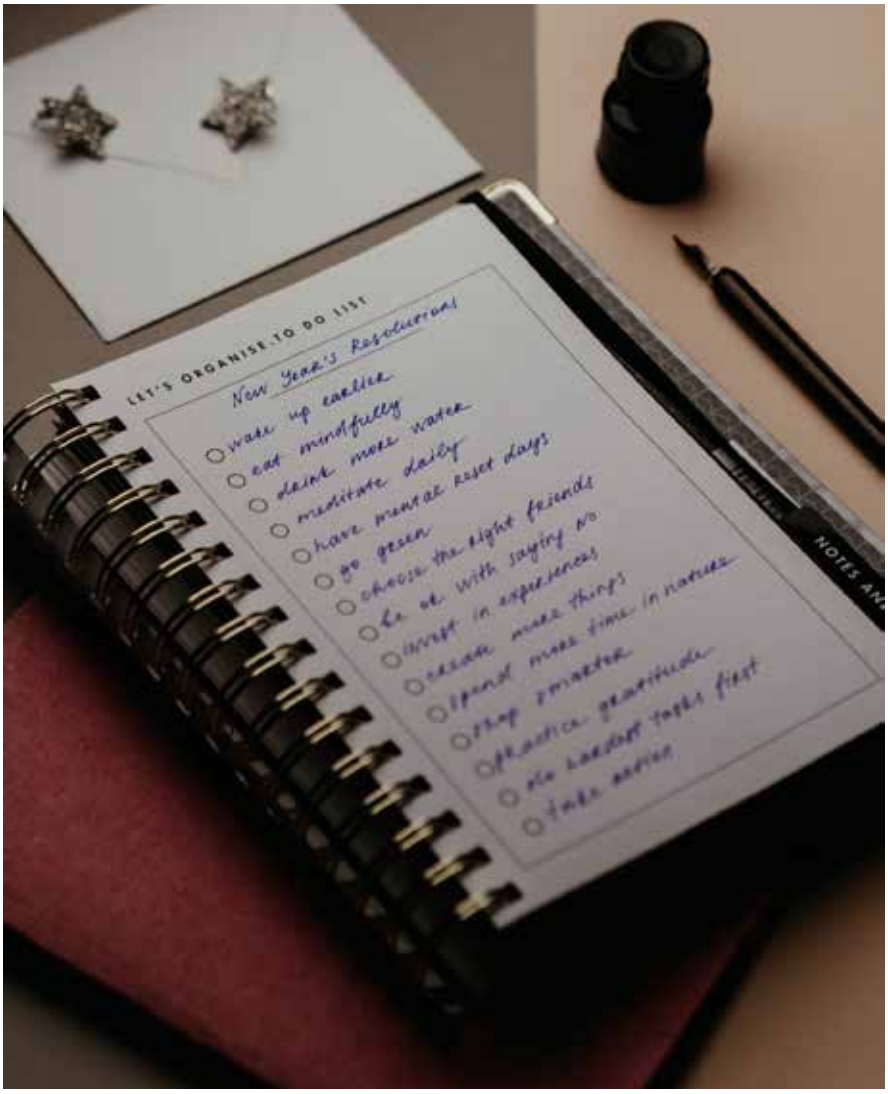
Speaking of LinkedIn, how does your profile look? In the professional world, LinkedIn is crucial to your overall personal brand. Just like your resume, you need to keep the information, tone, and look of it up to date. Check out some of your connections' profiles and see if they're doing anything different that positively grabs your attention. If so, tweak your page to create a similar effect.If you don't have a LinkedIn profile or want help writing a winning LinkedIn profile for your job search, consider investing in TopResume's LinkedIn Makeover service.

7. Clean out your physical and digital file cabinets

This New Year's resolution idea can double as one for home too! Many of us have file cabinets that are filled with old papers that are not remotely relevant to our work anymore. It doesn't take long to clean them out, and you'll be glad you did. Weed through those files, recycle what you don't need, and organize the rest. This goes for your computer files, too.

8. Sign up to follow one relevant blog

There is a world of free information, insider tips, and great motivational writers online. Find a blog that you enjoy, whether it's specific to your industry or just someone who puts a little pep in your step, and sign up to follow it. Don't know where to find one? Ask around the office. If you find one your co-workers like, it also becomes a topic for conversation. Win-win!



9. Find a work mentor

The right mentor can be a powerful tool to propel your career forward. Is there a person at your company — someone who is a step or two above you — who you highly respect? Don't just look up to them. Ask if he or she is willing to be your work mentor. It works best if it is a recognized relationship between the two of you. Set workplace goals together for the new year and have a little fun while you're at it.

10. Get a new professional headshot

If you cringe every time you look at your profile photo on LinkedIn, then consider the new year to be a great time to invest in a new one. Depending on your career goals and the type of company culture you like best, your profile photo may be casual or professional in its nature. The key is to select a photo that is high quality — at least 400 x 400 pixels, no larger than 8MB in file size, and does not exceed 20,000 pixels in height or width. Most importantly, you want a picture that truly represents who you are both personally and professionally.

11. Send at least one thank-you note per month

Sending a handwritten thank you is a great way to show your appreciation and professionalism. It feels good, too! Buy a box of thank-you notes that you like. Then, each month, think of someone who did something nice for you. It could have been a LinkedIn recommendation, an introduction to a valuable networking connection, a free lunch, or a

small, kind gesture at the office. Even if it's not related to work, sending a thank you to your mother-in-law for the soup she made when you were under the weather will make you feel good about yourself — and that positivity will show in your work.

12. Join a professional organization

Yes, professional organizations usually cost money. However, the benefits you can receive from the connections you'll make and what you can learn is often well worth the cost. Look for one that is focused on your favorite part of your career and check out any conferences they hold. A good conference can help you expand your network significantly and boost your work energy for weeks. Not sure how to find a professional association that's right for you? Start by finding out which groups your colleagues and managers are active in. You can also check out resources like Meetup, 10times, and the Directory of Associations for more options.

13. Measure your work-life balance

We all hear about work-life balance, but how do you measure it? The first step is deciding that you want to see where you are at. Look over your results and maybe discuss them with your family and friends. With the survey results and the feedback of your loved ones, you can start working towards finding harmony in your work and personal lives.

14. Volunteer

Volunteering has many benefits and is a great way to positively affect the world, and it's also another way you can feel good about yourself. Find a cause that is meaningful to you and sign up to contribute. You can feed the homeless, pick up trash in a park, raise money for a new local pool, whatever you like. If you really want to step up your game, see if you can get your office to make an official event of it and recruit co-workers to volunteer with you.

15. Get one new professional certification

Is there an empty spot on your resume where you wish you could put "XXXX Certified?" Stop wishing and make it happen! This is a great idea for one of your work goals for the new year as it can advance your career. If it costs money, just think of it as an investment in your future. You can do this!

16. Clean out your email inbox

Just like that file cabinet, your email inbox is probably flooded with old, useless emails. But there are also some in there you can't lose. Organize your email files, sort those emails, and delete what doesn't need to be there anymore. You'll feel a little bit lighter every time you log in.

17. Attend one professional networking event

Networking events are a great opportunity to meet other professionals in your industry that live in your area. You get to make new connections as well as stay on top of what's happening in your field. Of course, networking events are not comfortable for everyone, so you don't have to attend them every week. But it is a good idea to put yourself out there at least once per year so you can reap the benefits of these professional gatherings.

Now that you've made your New Year's work resolutions, it's time to put on your party hat and ring in the new year!

Face-to-face learning and development opportunities could bring more people into the office

The legacy of Covid means that many staff are still working remotely or on a hybrid basis; with 72% of office workers saying that access to face-to-face training and development opportunities would encourage them back into the office.

According to the whitepaper – ***Learning and mentorship in the digital age*** – published by Unispace, a global leader in creating bespoke workplaces, employees want more in-person learning and development opportunities and more connection to their colleagues. The study of 3,000 employees also found that 78% of employees feel disconnected from colleagues, and 75% said they would feel happier returning to the office if they knew that their team was there. What this means is that office spaces need to be re-imagined to facilitate connections and provide separate areas for group learning, mentoring, and private study.

The study found that 72% of office workers would like the opportunity to access face-to-face training and development, while half would appreciate in-person mentoring opportunities. Less than a third of employers said that their staff had access to online training and development opportunities when working from home.

The survey also revealed a disconnect between the employer and employee's perception of the suitability of their office space for training and development. 81% of employers felt that their workspaces were designed to facilitate training and development for their staff. However, 38% of employees said they do not have access to dedicated break out areas and almost a quarter revealed that they had no communal areas for joint learning and collaboration.

Emma Forster Mitrovski, CEO Australia & New Zealand at Unispace comments: "While online training has come a long way in terms of break out rooms and virtual interaction, it is clear from our survey that there is no substitute for learning with your colleagues in a physical and collaborative environment."

"Remote working has provided a significant opportunity for the workforce to obtain a better work-life balance and have more autonomy over when, where and how they work. However, the value of in-person connections and face-to-face training cannot be underestimated. Our study shows that employers are not confident in virtual on-boarding and training and that employees value the opportunity to connect with colleagues for in-person learning and mentoring."

Simple mistakes on job adverts costing businesses top talent in a skills crisis

With UK vacancies continuing to rise and the skills gap growing at a concerning rate, recruitment software provider, JobAdder, has highlighted the need for more effective job ads.

With competition for top talent rife, employers could be falling at the first hurdle by failing to include details that are paramount for the modern-day worker. JobAdder has highlighted three key steps employers need to implement to help fill vacancies in the current skills-short climate:

1. Company culture: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the workforce, changing what people want from both a job and employer. An increasing number of job seekers are prioritising culture when choosing a company to work for. To stay on top of these demands, it's important for a job ad to highlight a firm's ethics, mission and values.

2. Salary and perks: Despite COVID-19 changing the priorities of the workforce, salary remains a dealbreaker for candidates. Job adverts that don't indicate at least a salary range will go ignored by a significant number of candidates. Showcasing the right perks is also going to be critical, but these need to be aligned with the wants of today's workforce.

3. Transparency: With an abundance of roles available, job ads need to be direct and informative, shedding complete clarity on the position. At a base level, this must include location specifics, start dates and what skills/ experience if required. If these are flexible, then job adverts should highlight this.

Rob Brodie, Head of Corporate Sales at JobAdder comments: "As we navigate the new year, skills shortages are still a great concern for recruiters and hiring teams across the UK. The pandemic has certainly altered what candidates want when searching for a new job and it's important that this is reflected in job ads if businesses hope to bypass the competition and secure top talent."

"Now more than ever, highlighting a salary range in your job ad is incredibly important for attracting your ideal candidate, yet there are still a significant number of ads failing to include this. Applicants need to know they aren't wasting their time and excluding this critical information from a job ad will limit the success of a hiring campaign. The same goes for other crucial details that many job ads are still failing to include, such as the location and start date."

"While the skills crisis we're facing won't be solved easily, addressing the basics can't be forgotten, including the impact of powerful job ads."

5 New Year's Resolutions for the Workplace

Personal New Year's resolutions are great but have you thought of your professional resolutions for work? Most of us spend about a third of our lives at work, so positive changes made in the workplace are bound to have an effect on other aspects of our lives.

As we ring in 2023, it is the perfect time to focus on what improvements can be made going forward whether you are in the office, working from home, or doing a hybrid of both.

In order to work productively and efficiently there must be a healthy balance between your work-life and personal life. Below we've highlighted some New Year's resolution ideas for the workplace in 2023.

1. Tidy Up

Whether you work from an office desk or from a work from home office space, it is important to start 2023 by tidying up. Put away or dispose of last year's notes, documents,

and paperwork. Anything you think you might need, save a digital copy of it on your drive/ server. You'll be surprised at how good you feel afterward. Getting rid of office clutter is a rewarding, fresh start to the new year.

2. Take A Lunch Break Every Day

When there are important deadlines due or last-minute changes to a project needed by end of the day, preparing and eating a healthy lunch usually gets put on the back burner. Oftentimes, many employees will not even take lunch due to their busy schedules. It is even more difficult stepping away as an employee working remotely, but that is where work-life balance comes into play.

According to a survey conducted by Tork, employees who take a lunch break every day score higher on a number of engagement metrics compared to those who do not take regular lunch breaks. That is why this year, it is important you schedule out time every day to step away from work and enjoy lunch. If you are a manager, consider enforcing a mandatory lunch break for your employees to ensure they are taking the mid-day break they need. And even if you don't feel like eating lunch, go for a walk, just take a break!

3. Go Above And Beyond

The position you hold could potentially grow into something bigger and better. One of the most important New Year's resolutions ideas to consider is to push yourself at work. Do the extra projects you wouldn't normally do. Small tasks will add up fast and make you look like a new and improved employee and possible promotions could be on the horizon. As a leader, you can go above and beyond for your team as well. Remember to set goals and hold yourself to the same standards as your employees.

Set achievable goals for yourself. For example, if you often don't speak up in meetings, try to make it a point to do so. If you feel you speak too much, maybe encourage others to offer their thoughts more often.

4. Plan Employee Activities For Your Team

Something you can't forget on your goal sheet, are your ideas for team activities for the year. List out some ideas that you and your team can do together. Whether it be a simple lunch, holiday parties, giving back to the community, an fun event, or a corporate retreat, the options are endless. Allowing your team to grow together is the best new year's resolution idea for work of all. Check out our free downloadables here for more ideas, or see what other companies are doing on our most popular events page.

5. Be Positive

Work on becoming a more uplifting and optimistic worker as your new year's resolution. It will rub off on others in the office and help boost everyone's mood. Be the positivity that your coworkers need at work and look forward to being around. Make sure you are focusing on your mental and physical wellness. and celebrating yourself for even the smallest of successes. While you make a change for yourself, you'll be helping others change around you.

Start by really focusing on a couple of these New Year's resolutions ideas for work, and then cover the rest. And, of course, add your own to the list! Wait and see what the New Year will bring to you.

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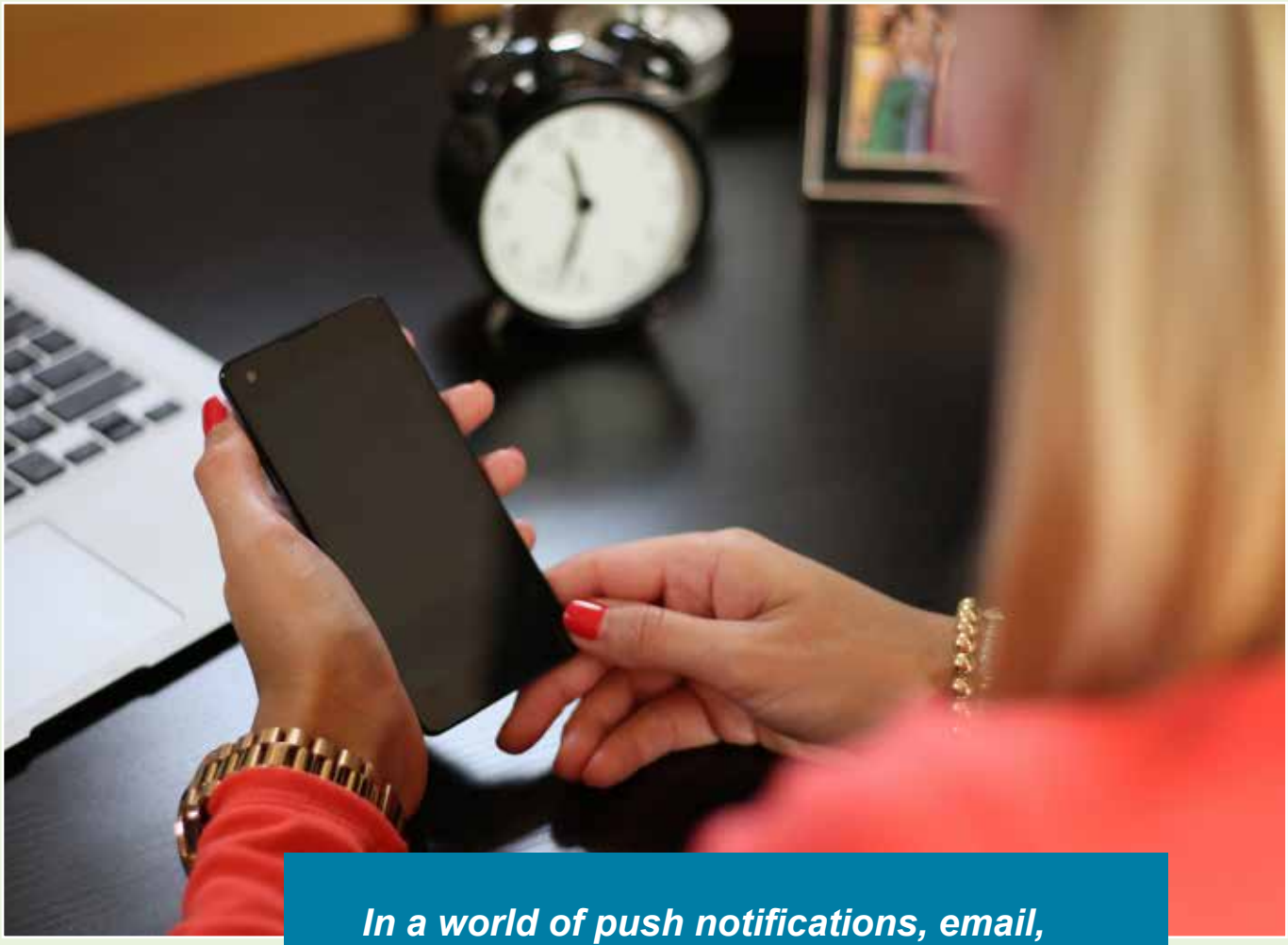
10 quick tips for avoiding distractions at work



In a world of push notifications, email, instant messaging, and shrinking office space, we're becoming increasingly distracted at work.

The average employee is getting interrupted 50 to 60 times per day, and about 80% of these interruptions are unimportant. As a result, people are spending little time in what psychologists call “the flow state,” a space where people are up to five times more productive, according to research from McKinsey.

The constant distractions are not only leaving people less productive, but also more stressed than ever, with a lack of control over one’s work being cited as a major contributor to workplace stress, according to the American Institute of Stress. So, how do we avoid distractions in the office in order to take control of our days, do our best work, and improve our emotional well-being?

1. Practice Asynchronous Communication

When you get an email, it’s actually OK to think: “I’ll get to this when it suits me.”

Aside from the benefit of giving people more time for uninterrupted focus, asynchronous communication predisposes people to better decision-making by increasing the amount of time we have to respond to a request. When you’re on a phone call or video chat, you’re making real-time decisions, whereas if you’re communicating via email, you have more time to think about your response.

In order to practice this successfully, we must do away with the arbitrary “urgency” that still plagues workplaces the world over, almost a century after Dwight D. Eisenhower, who, quoting Dr. J. Roscoe Miller, president of Northwestern University, said: “I have two kinds of problems: the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent.” This “Eisenhower Principle” is said to be how the former president prioritized his own workload.

To optimize an asynchronous message and to avoid a lot of follow-up emails, include the following in your initial request:

- Sufficient details
- Clear action item(s)
- A due date
- A path of recourse if the recipient is unable to meet your requirements

2. Batch Check Everything

“Just quickly checking” anything, even for one-tenth of a second, can add up to a 40% productivity loss over the course of a day, and it can take us 23 minutes to get back into the zone after task switching.

Rather than sporadically checking things throughout the day, we should batch check email, instant messages, social media, and even text messages, at predetermined times.

If you struggle with self-control, tools like Gmail’s Inbox Pause plugin enable you to pause your inbox once you’ve checked it and only unpause it when you’re ready. Blocksite and the Freedom app also allow you to block access to specific websites and apps during specified intervals.

3. Do Not Disturb

If you’re reading this and thinking: “But I work in an open-plan office, and it’s impossible to avoid interruptions,” try using a signaling mechanism to let your team know that you’re in the zone (or trying to get there) and

that they shouldn't disturb you unless it's legitimately urgent. This could be as simple as a pair of headphones.

4. Avoid Calendar Tetris

In today's workplace, it's a widely accepted norm that others can book time in your calendar, usually at the expense of your own priorities.

Basecamp CEO, Jason Fried, told me on an episode of the Future Squared podcast that at Basecamp, you can't book time in someone's calendar without first getting buy-in. This means that most meetings just don't happen because the would-be meeting organizer usually opts for a phone call or an instant message instead.

Alternatively, consider blocking out meeting-free zones on your calendar, or using a meeting scheduling tool such as Calendly so that people book meetings with you only during scheduled windows, leaving the rest of the day free for focus, and ensuring that you avoid the email tennis matches that scheduling meetings often degenerates into.

5. Close the Loop on Meetings

Instead of risking follow-up interruptions and a meeting to discuss the previous meeting, ensure that you leave each meeting with actionable next steps, clearly assigned responsibilities, and due dates.

6. Stop Using "Reply All"

Reply All, used as a mechanism to share accountability, only adds unnecessary chatter to people's inboxes and headspace. Take more ownership over your decisions and only email people who need to be informed.

7. Use Third Spaces

As Sue Shellenbarger wrote for The Wall Street Journal, "All of this social engineering (open-plan offices) has created endless distractions that draw employees' eyes away from their own screens. Visual noise, the activity or movement around the edges of an employee's field of vision, can erode concentration and disrupt analytical thinking or creativity."

If you're struggling with open-plan offices, then try to incorporate more third-space work into your day for critical thinking; try to find a quiet space in the office, a serviced office, or negotiate some time to work from home.

8. Turn off Push Notifications

The average executive receives 46 push notifications per day. To avoid our Pavlovian impulses to respond on cue, simply turn off your push notifications. Find out how here.

9. Use Airplane Mode

You can also use airplane mode to limit text message and phone call interruptions during certain times of day. If the idea of doing this gives you anxiety, you can always exempt specific numbers, such as those of loved ones or valued and important business associates. You can set "Do Not Disturb" mode on an iPhone to allow your designated "favorite" contacts to get through, while silencing other calls or messages.

10. Limit Layers of Approval

While harder to implement, becoming a "minimum viable bureaucracy" — stripping away unnecessary layers of approvals required to get trivial and not-so-consequential things done — means that there will be less

paperwork to move around, which means fewer interruptions for people.

Awareness Is Key

Environmental changes aside, human beings evolved to conserve energy in order to stand a shot at surviving on the savannah. As such, we are predisposed to picking the lowest hanging fruit or doing the easiest thing first — think checking email instead of working on that presentation. Becoming more aware of our tendencies to pick the low hanging fruit, getting distracted by low-value activities, is step one towards changing our behaviors.

Organizations that build a culture around minimizing distractions will enjoy the compounding benefit of a focused workforce and will leave their people feeling less stressed and ultimately more fulfilled.

Steve Glaveski hbr.org

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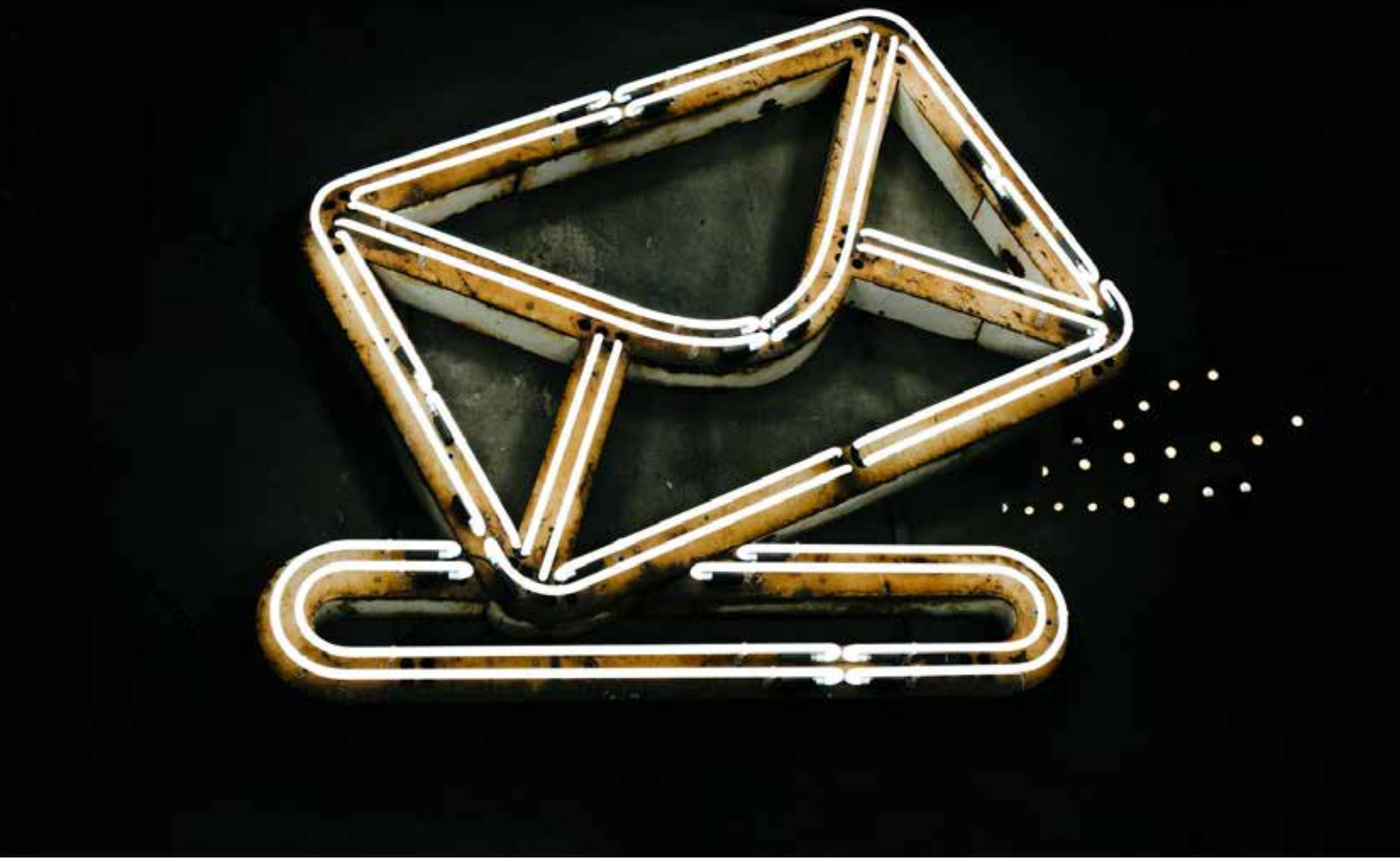
Guidelines for professional email etiquette at work

Emailing in the workplace is a regular form of communication for many people. Using the right email etiquette helps you communicate clearly and shows that you're professional. If you send and receive a large number of emails each day, it's more likely that an error can arise, but a clear understanding of etiquette can help to prevent this.



What is email etiquette?

Email etiquette refers to how you conduct yourself when sending or responding to emails. Expectations vary depending on the organisation and your audience, but there are some general email rules that apply when you're at work. As with all professional communication, the way you conduct yourself via email at work is different from when you're writing to friends and family.

Why does email etiquette matter?

Email manners are important because a small mistake can have serious professional consequences or cause confusion. Therefore, it's wise to have a thorough understanding of the appropriate etiquette when you're sending emails. Some companies have best practice rules for email communication. The purpose of this is to promote efficiency and clarity and to give a professional image to individual employees and the business as a whole.

The way you communicate also reflects the type of employee you are, including your work ethic and attention to detail. Email correspondence might be the first impression some people get of you. For example, if you work at a very large organisation or use email to contact external partners and clients. This means that the right etiquette is essential for presenting yourself well.

Etiquette guidelines for writing emails

We've compiled a list of 14 rules to follow for good etiquette when writing emails. Apply these rules regardless of whether you're communicating with colleagues, clients or partner organisations. Remember your organisation's company culture and communication best practice guidelines as well so that your emails are professional but also appropriate for the environment you work in. Follow this list of 14 rules below:

1. Use a professional email address

If you're an employee at a company, you likely have a company email address. Use this rather than your personal email address for all work-related correspondence. If you do use a personal email address, for example, if you're a freelancer, choose the address carefully. Your name or a slight variation on this is a sensible choice so that you still present yourself in a professional way. Save humorous email addresses for personal correspondence.

2. Always include a clear and concise subject line

A clear subject line means your recipient instantly knows what your email is about and allows them to prioritise it accordingly. Subject lines that are vague or very long can be confusing and could mean that the recipient misses important correspondence. Good examples of an email subject line are 'Rescheduling today's meeting' or 'Question about your presentation'.

3. Use standard fonts and formatting

Use standard fonts, formats and colours in every email. This means that it looks professional when the recipient opens it and is easy to read. As a general rule, black is the most appropriate colour to use for text unless there's a good reason for using another colour. Be aware that pasting text into your email can cause formatting issues. Make sure you clear formatting or only paste unformatted text to ensure your email formatting is

consistent. Similarly, only use emojis if your recipient has done so in their emails to you and you're certain that it's acceptable.

4. Use punctuation appropriately

Overusing punctuation like exclamation marks could indicate overexcitement, so use it in an appropriate way. One exclamation mark at the end of a sentence is sufficient, but in general, keep your emails somewhat formal. Similarly, only use sentence case when sending emails unless there's a good reason for doing otherwise. Typing in all caps can seem aggressive and imply that you're shouting.

5. Use appropriate greetings and sign-offs

Use professional greetings and sign-offs in all of your emails. Different organisations have different ideas about what's appropriate. Using 'Hi' or 'Hello' is acceptable in most workplaces unless the email is very formal. If you've started a new job and you're unsure about the right etiquette, read your emails carefully to see how others address you and other colleagues. This is a good guide to what to do.

6. Consider your audience

Considering your audience is important, especially if you have international colleagues, clients or partners. Different cultures communicate in different ways. By being aware of this, you can tailor your own correspondence accordingly. Professional contacts from some cultures, such as China or Japan, normally expect to get to know you before conducting business, so their emails may be more personal than you expect. Other cultures are more direct and expect to deal with business immediately. If you're not sure, follow the example of your recipient and mirror their way of communicating.

7. Be cautious about tone and humour

Some recipients can misunderstand tone and humour when it's written in an email. It's essential to make sure your emails are always polite and professional in tone. Similarly, humour and jokes might be misunderstood in emails unless you know the recipient very well. For professional emails, maintain a serious tone unless you're certain the recipient can understand and appreciate the joke.

8. Include a signature

Adding an email signature is a great way of making an impression and looking professional. It also gives the recipient some information about you, including where you work and your contact information. Make sure that your email signature includes all the essential information and also fits into your professional image. Most companies have an email signature template to use. It's recommended to use standard fonts and colours if you're designing your own.

9. Think before using 'reply all' or forwarding

Make sure that using 'reply all' or forwarding an email is the right thing to do. It can be distracting to receive emails that are intended for someone else because other people are using the reply all button. If you're doing this regularly, it could affect your reputation as a professional, so always think about whether it's necessary.

This also applies to forwarding emails. Some emails are only intended for you, so think about whether forwarding them on is appropriate. If you're forwarding a lengthy chain of emails, provide a summary in the email you send so that your recipient can

quickly understand what you need from them.

10. Enter the recipient's email address last

Enter the recipient's email address after you've finished writing and checking the email. This gives you the certainty that everything in the email is correct before you send it. Doing this also stops you from sending it before you've finished writing it. Some email programs have a delay before actually sending an email, so you can undo it, but it's better to get it right the first time.

11. Proofread your emails

Always proofread your emails to make sure your spelling, grammar and formatting are correct before you send them. Small errors can have an impact on the impression you make, so getting this right is really important. When checking the content of your email, make sure you've selected the correct recipient and check any attachments too. If you're sending attachments, check that you've definitely attached them before you send the email and make sure that you've attached the correct files as well.

12. Reply to your emails

It shows good manners to always reply to your emails. Even if you receive an email sent to you in error, it's good etiquette to respond anyway and tell the sender that they've contacted you by mistake. This means they can quickly contact the correct person instead. Aim to respond within 24 hours of receiving an email. If sending a detailed reply requires more time, send a response within 24 hours to tell the sender that you've received their email and intend to send them a more detailed response later.

13. Remember that others may see your email

Emails always leave a trail. There's also always the possibility that your recipient forwards your email or shows it to other people. Keep this in mind when you're writing emails and stick to positive, polite and professional language and comments. A good tip is to assume that people other than the recipient can see your email, so write accordingly.

14. Use your 'out of office'

When you're away from work, make sure you use the 'out of office' function. Always set up an informative 'out of office' reply that explains when you're back in the office and able to respond to emails. Also, include information about who the sender can contact whilst you're gone if their query is urgent.

Why a new approach to workplace mental health is needed for 2023

Every employer has a responsibility to look after the health and wellbeing of their staff at work. This duty often focuses on physical safety, especially in sectors such as utilities and logistics where manual handling and heavy machinery are involved, but it is important to also give due consideration to mental health.

Mental wellbeing has not always received the attention it deserves. This is particularly the case in male-dominated workplaces or among transient workforces, where talking openly about mental health is not traditionally common. However, there is a growing awareness that this is a trend that needs to be challenged.

With the pandemic having reframed the conversation around mental health, forward-thinking employers in every industry are looking for ways to introduce new and improved measures to ensure that staff get the support they need in 2023 and beyond. Here, we will explain the reasons why, while looking at some of the steps that businesses can take.

Why 2023 is a year for action on mental health

As we head into 2023, there is little doubt that workplace mental health has become a much more pressing issue in recent years. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around 15% of working-age adults were estimated to have a mental disorder as of 2019. Overall, it is estimated that 12 billion workdays are lost annually due to depression and anxiety, costing the global economy nearly $1 trillion.

The causes of stress, anxiety or poor mental health in the workplace are numerous, with some of the most common including:

- **Excessive workloads**
- **High-pressure environments**
- **Workers' dissatisfaction with their performance or the performance of others**
- **A lack of managerial support**
- **Bad relationships with managers and colleagues**
- **Overlong working hours**
- **Uncertainty and upheaval in the workplace**
- **Violence, threats or intimidation in the workplace**

Research carried out for Lanes Group's 2019 whitepaper, "The Current State Of Mental Wellbeing In UK Workplaces", offered further evidence of these trends. Our survey of more than 1,000 working adults showed that:

- **80% of respondents said they are required to work outside of their contracted hours**
- **22% have had to take time off work due to stress during their careers**
- **27% do not feel able to speak to their manager about mental health issues**

As high as some of these figures are, these trends have only gotten worse since the start of the pandemic The WHO estimates that COVID-19 triggered a 25% increase in general anxiety and depression worldwide, with workers across all industries experiencing stress, upheaval and uncertainty during the lockdowns, whether due to the risk of losing their jobs or the pressures of working from home in relative isolation.

Since then, the workplace mental health crisis is only deepening, due to the cost of living crisis, the looming recession and broader anxieties about the war in Ukraine and the climate emergency. This is driving thousands of people out of the workforce, with analysis from Sky News showing that levels of economic inactivity among the long-term sick jumped by 537,500 between the year to June 2019 and the year to June 2022, of which 454,300 can be attributed to mental health conditions.

With the number of employed people with long-term mental health conditions also rising by 816,400 over the same period, it is clear that mental health needs to be at the forefront of conversations about how companies can better support their workforce.

How employers can better support their staff's mental health

Amidst the rising prevalence of mental health conditions, current workplace support policies are proving insufficient to prevent the mental health crisis from spiralling. As such, employers must get creative about revamping their mental health policies to better address the challenges that today's workers are facing.

Here are a few of the ways in which employers can create a more supportive working environment that promotes mental wellness:

- Ensure that managers and HR professionals are educated on understanding mental health challenges, including how to recognise the signs of anxiety, depression and burnout in the workforce

- Appoint designated mental health champions and mental health first aiders in the office to provide a supportive point of contact for those who are struggling
- Provide a defined and compassionate pathway for people experiencing mental health crises to reduce their workloads or take time off work, including a process for allowing them to return to work in a supportive way
- Be flexible with working hours and remote working opportunities, allowing staff members to achieve a better work-life balance
- Encourage staff to take time for themselves, whether this means providing a well-equipped designated break area for on-site workers, or making sure that staff members are not routinely working longer than their contracted hours
- Make greater efforts to recognise your staff's achievements, to foster a better team spirit and show them that their contributions are meaningful and valued
- Reflect your mental health policies and approach to inclusion in your recruitment and induction processes, to ensure that new workers understand how the business will support them
- Have open conversations with your staff members to find out what they feel they need from you in terms of mental health support, and develop your policies around this feedback

Additionally, there are various benefits and incentives that companies can provide to deliver a happier and harmonious work environment, such as:

- Organising or providing wellness-centric perks through the company, such as gym memberships, physiotherapy services and yoga classes
- Provide healthy food and drink options in the workplace to encourage a healthier lifestyle
- Run sessions and courses in mental health, mindfulness and related topics, to help educate the entire workforce and encourage them to communicate more openly about their mental wellbeing
- Scheduling regular social events, activities, team getaways and coffee mornings to foster team bonding and give staff an opportunity to socialise

These kinds of interventions that can make a big difference to your staff. Above all, it is vital to recognise that this is an area that requires improvements, and commit to reviewing or revamping your mental health policies to ensure they are fit for purpose in 2023.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of employers to support staff with action, rather than just with tick-box exercises. By leading by example to create a genuinely inclusive culture and training all their staff in mental health awareness, businesses across all sectors can help their workers to be accountable for their health, gain confidence to open up and show vulnerability, and ultimately feel better in themselves, while giving others the confidence to do the same.

Is the High Street doomed?

61% of consumers fear the cost-of-living crisis is the final nail in the coffin for the high street.

UK high streets have been under increasing pressure to survive, due to the impact of changing shopping habits and the global pandemic. But just as the outlook seemed to be slightly improving, the current cost of living crisis, fuelled by international events and soaring inflation, has provided another setback for the high street.

New analysis from the BBC has revealed that after two years of Covid related lockdowns, there were 9,300 fewer retail outlets in March 2022 than March 2020 due to closures of banks, clothes shops, and department stores.

Research by KIS Finance has found that 61% of people are concerned that the high street in its current form is under threat and that the continuing volume of store closures will lead to a permanent change to the retail landscape.

26% of total retail sales in the UK are now online (ONS data Oct 2022). Back in 2006 only 2.8% of retail sales were online, but this took off sharply during the pandemic and by January 2021 it had peaked at 37.8%. As life returned to normal the level of on-line shopping decreased, but appears to have now stabilised at the current level.

Online expenditure has been growing at a rapid pace, peaking in November 2020 at £3,349.2 million, when the pandemic again had a massive impact on all of our shopping habits. Although the amount of expenditure has fallen back from this peak, the level of internet retail sales in the UK is currently £2,227.6 million and has remained fairly consistently around this level for the last year.

When asked why the popularity of on-line shopping had grown to this extent, 64% of respondents to KIS Finance's survey stated that it was the convenience of online shopping that was the key factor for them, with the 24/7 availability primarily attracting them to this option.

Despite the rise of online shopping, we still love the high street

The survey by KIS Finance found that 82% of people confirmed that if they were given the choice of only shopping online or on the high street, they would choose to shop in store. Clearly consumers are not ready to lose the in-person shopping experience just yet.

However, age seems to be a factor here, with 18% of respondents between the age of 25 and 34 confirming that they do all their shopping online. Therefore, if the high street is going to survive in the future, there needs to be a focus on appealing to all age groups to ensure that future generations still value that in store experience.

The changing face of the high street

There have been a large number of high street casualties, primarily due to changing shopping habits and the pandemic, but the current cost of living crisis is a further hit for retailers. The physical retail sector has been in decline since the recession in 2008 and since 2016 more shops have been closing than opening each year.

According to PWC, in the first six months of 2022, 6147 shops belonging to multiples and chains with 5 or more outlets left the UK high street. This equates to 34 closures a day, although this is a reduction on the 61 closures per day in first half of 2020. The rate of decline is not accelerating in the way that it was during the pandemic and there had

been some positive signs starting to emerge in the market, but the cost-of-living crisis and impending recession now pose a further threat. In fact, Deloittes has forecast a further 30,000 net store closures are likely by end of this year.

What can be done to reverse the trend?

Whilst the march towards an ever-increasing on-line retail sector looks set to continue, this doesn't necessarily mean the end of the high street. Retailers are finding ways to blend their on-line offerings with their stores to provide customers with the best in choice and experience.

But what we need to see is the Government undertaking a radical review of both the tax and business rates systems to ensure that all companies, including giants like Amazon, are competing on a level playing field.

The benefits of an on-line sales tax

One potential approach to rebalance the market could be the introduction of an 'e-commerce sales tax', levied on all on-line sales. This could be balanced against a reduction in business rates for high street stores. Whilst this might not appear to be in the consumers' interests, any related price increases could be offset against price reductions for goods brought in high street stores. Essentially consumers would be paying for the convenience of buying on-line, whilst the potential for lower prices in store might encourage an increase in traditional sales.

Radical redesign of business rates

As an alternative to a specific on-line tax, the current business rates system could be redesigned to make it applicable to both store and on-line businesses. Whilst current business rates are essentially a property tax, if they were redesigned as a tax based on volumes of sales, this could be applied on an even basis across the sector. This would level the playing field and mean that on-line giants like Amazon would have to pay taxes on the same basis as their competitors.

Are local businesses the way of the future?

As the cost of essentials soar, consumers are cutting back on non-essential shopping, which is continuing to hit the already challenging retail environment. However, with large player such as Debenhams gone, which have been the foundation of many high streets over the last few decades, the opportunity for small independent retailers has really started to emerge.

According to the British Retail Consortium, footfall remains 10 -15% below pre-pandemic levels, but independent retailers appear to have recovered more quickly from the pandemic than retail chains.

This shift towards supporting local and independent shops started to gain traction during the pandemic and local retailers are continuing to call out for shoppers to support them during the current challenging times. Local campaigns are popping up across the country, such as the "shop small" campaign in Exeter, where independent retailers are turning to the local community to support them

by choosing small local businesses over large national chains.

However, in the current climate, the question is whether small retailers will have the resources to withstand the increasing costs that all are now facing, with inflation at a 40 year high and the cost of supplies, transport and electricity soaring. To help them reach a widder customer base some small retailers introduced home delivery and online options for the first time during the pandemic and many have now kept these in a bid to compete with larger retailers.

A sense of community appears to be a strong factor influencing many consumers, particularly during difficult times. What initially started during the pandemic has now continued as the cost-of-living crisis deepens, but local retailers need to find ways to retain this level of good will.

Local retailers adapting to survive

Small shops and businesses can maximise their chances of maintaining their new customer base by focusing on what large retailers can't offer; a personal, human touch. Whilst large companies' data bases may remember your birthday or recommend products you may be interested in based on your last order, this is impersonal and automated. Only small, local businesses can connect with their customers in a real way and build up genuine and beneficial relationships.

A shift from retail space to residential units

Many town centres are seeing an increasing number of applications to convert commercial retail spaces to residential use. Whilst this will change the look of the high street, it has the potential to bring life back to central locations and make them a core part of the local community.

At KIS Finance we are seeing an increase in applications for development finance and bridging loans to purchase and convert old retail premises into new modern apartments.

There was a 37% increase in applications to convert UK high street shops into living accommodation in 2020/21. However, nearly half of developer's plans were rejected by councils, showing that this option for empty retails space isn't always a straightforward one.

Retail expert James Child, retail analyst at Estate Gazette, says: "The challenge in the future will be ensuring that locals have real reasons to actually visit these locations, and create more than a row of shops, but proper destinations. There needs to be a reduction in the amount of retail space, replaced with other mixed-use schemes and residential elements to encourage locals to engage in their local areas. The high street of tomorrow will be easily accessible, safe, clean, and able to be enjoyed by all.

Town centres and high streets must be at the forefront of engagement in their communities, listening to what people want as opposed to giving them what they think they want," James says. "Introduce more housing into central locations, make parking free to encourage further footfall, but the biggest take away surely has to be – make your high street interesting again."