

PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

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Fifth of SMEs and freelancers see increase in late payments

Late payments are a powerful economic disruptor impacting businesses of all sizes. Studies have shown small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and freelancers are particularly at risk, with the impact of late payments leading to extreme financial instability, debt and even closing down.

Rob Rees, Divisional Director of Market Direct, specialist insurers of freelancers and small businesses, shares the effect late payments can have on SMEs and sole traders, while providing expert advice on how they can protect their finances. In today's climate, marred by surging inflation, a cost-of-living crisis and energy price hikes, late payments are a growing threat to small-scale entrepreneurs and sole traders. Our survey of 560 freelancers and SME owners revealed that 22% experienced an increase in late or non-payments last year.

The data also showed that nearly half of the respondents had payments owed to them that were over 15 days overdue, while 13% stated they didn't get paid at all and had to write off the money owed.

Late payments can create a perfect storm of financial issues for small business owners, including difficulty paying their own staff and suppliers, managing cashflow and stifling reinvestment in their business.

Getting paid on time can be the difference between a business thriving and a business struggling, so it is vital that freelancers and SMEs do all they can to help future-proof their finances from unexpected issues, such as late payments. Luckily, there are some essential steps that can help business owners protect their finances and safeguard the longevity of their businesses.

Seven tips to help you protect your finances from late payments as a freelancer or SME.

1 Research new clients and their credit history

There's no 'one-size fits all' solution when

it comes to clients that are bad payers, however, there are things small business owners can do to limit their risk.

Before entering any business relationship, take the time to vet the potential client. Credit reports and credit scoring services can offer insights into their financial stability and payment track record. Both Experian and Equifax are examples of companies that can offer this service.

This upfront due diligence can help you identify red flags, make informed decisions about whether to engage with a particular client and save you from the frustration and financial strain of dealing with late-paying clients down the road.

Other checks could include:

- Checking the prospect's website for legitimacy and feel
- Asking for references on your customer from suppliers and banks
- Carrying out a search of the official Register of County Court Judgements

2 Consider asking for a deposit or staged payments

Consider requesting a deposit, or implementing staged payments, to secure your financial interests on a project. By asking for an initial deposit upfront or breaking down payments into stages based on project milestones, you not only reduce the risk of late or non-payment but also establish a commitment from your clients.

This approach can provide you with a steady

cash flow throughout the project's duration, ensuring that your financial stability remains intact and allowing you to allocate resources efficiently.

Moreover, it fosters transparency and trust between you and your clients by aligning their payment obligations with the delivery of agreed-upon results, creating a win-win situation for both parties.

3 Ensure contracts are clear from the outset

Before commencing any work, it's worth ensuring there is a clear contract in place between your business and the client. Without a contract, chasing a non-payer is much more challenging from a legal standpoint.

Be sure to state your payment milestones and invoicing terms, including due dates, late payment interest or fees (on business-to-business debt if applicable), and accepted payment methods, as this helps set expectations upfront.

4 Have a system in place for chasing late payments

It pays to have a thorough system in place for chasing payments. On the day a payment becomes overdue, you should contact the client directly over the phone.

Try to keep the conversation friendly and professional, as there may be a reasonable explanation as to why the invoice hasn't been paid. Simply state that there is an outstanding balance and ask if there is a reason why the amount has not been paid. Try to agree a date when the payment will be made, but if your client is unable to give a date straight away, say that you'll call the next day once they have

had a chance to review. It can be a good idea to also send a follow-up email to confirm that the phone conversation took place and create a dated paper trail.

If you have still not received any payment after chasing the client, send them email reminders and follow up with a telephone call. Many accountancy software packages can automate email reminders for you, reducing the admin burden. Be firm, cautious of excuses, and press your client for a date of payment.

If payment isn't forthcoming, be prepared to act decisively and explain the consequences of non-payment to your client. For example, you could contact your customer in writing and inform them that you will be exercising your statutory right to claim interest (which is set at 8% over the Bank of England base rate), as well as compensation to cover the debt recovery costs.

5 Speak to your insurer to see if they can help

Always check your insurance policy to see if it includes legal help. At Markel Direct, we provide our business insurance policyholders with access to a 24 hour legal advice helpline, as well as access to Business Hub, which contains legal document templates to help with late payment problems. Having access to valuable advice from experienced legal professionals can help you navigate challenging situations and give you the best chance of getting paid quickly.

6 Reach out to a professional mediator or Small Business Commissioner

In our study, one of the most surprising findings was that only 4% of respondents said they consulted the Small Business

Commissioner, Citizens Advice or other organisations about their late or non-payments, and 56% didn't even know they could consult these organisations on this issue. On some occasions, the customer refuses to pay an invoice as there is a disagreement over whether the service or products provided were as agreed, or a customer can't pay the full amount at once.

If those are the reasons behind late payments, you can get a professional mediator to help. This option can be cheaper and offer more flexibility than taking a client to court.

If mediation isn't an option or doesn't work, you might decide to make a complaint to the Small Business Commissioner, who may be able to investigate the case.

7 Consider taking legal action

When all else fails, and late payments persist, instead of just writing off the owed money, it might be time to consider taking legal action. While it's not an option to be taken lightly, it can be a necessary step to protect your financial interests. Your insurance provider may be able to help if you have arranged legal expenses insurance, or alternatively, consult with a solicitor who specialises in debt recovery.

Whilst pursuing legal action should be a last resort, and efforts to resolve the issue amicably should precede it, it's important to



remember you are within your rights to take this step.

Whilst there is no sure-fire way of protecting your business from late payments, taking these precautions can help SMEs and freelancers ensure they are in the strongest position to protect their finances and mitigate risk.

Markel Direct moneydonut.co.uk

What is the UK inflation rate and why is it so high?



The rate at which prices rising remained unchanged at 6.7% in the year to September compared with August.

Slowing food inflation on items such as milk, cheese and eggs were offset by fuel prices rising sharply, hitting drivers at the pumps.

In a bid to slow inflation, the Bank of England has increased interest rates to 5.25%, but held rates at its last meeting.

What does inflation mean?

Inflation is the increase in the price of something over time. If a bottle of milk costs £1 but £1.05 12 months later, then annual milk inflation is 5%.

How is the UK's inflation rate measured?

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) tracks the prices of hundreds of everyday items in an imaginary "basket of goods".

The basket is regularly updated to reflect shopping trends, with recent changes adding frozen berries and removing alcopops. Each month's inflation figure shows how much these prices have risen since the same date last year.

You can calculate inflation in various ways, but the main "headline" measure is the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). The CPI rate was 6.7% in the year to September, unchanged from August. Food prices saw their first monthly fall in two years in September, but fuel prices rose sharply.

Tesco boss Ken Murphy has said he expected the pace of rising food prices to keep dropping as wholesale costs come down.

What is 'core inflation'?

"Core inflation" excludes the price of energy, food, alcohol and tobacco. This measure was 6.1% in September, marginally down from 6.2% in August. The Bank of England considers this number, as well as CPI, when deciding whether to change interest rates.

Why have prices risen so fast?

Soaring food and energy bills helped drive inflation up. Oil and gas were in greater demand after Covid. The war in Ukraine meant less was available from Russia, putting further pressure on prices. The conflict also reduced the amount of grain available, pushing up global food prices.

UK inflation at 6.7% in August 2023



This effect was compounded in the UK in February by a shortage of vegetables, which took food inflation to a 45-year high. Alcohol prices in restaurants and pubs also rose.

How does raising interest rates help to tackle inflation?

The Bank of England has a target to keep inflation at 2%, but the current rate remains well above that. The traditional response to rising inflation is to put up interest rates.

This makes borrowing more expensive, and means some people with mortgages see their monthly payments go up. Some saving rates also increase.

When people have less money to spend, they

buy fewer things, reducing the demand for goods and slowing price rises. Businesses also borrow less, making them less likely to create jobs; some may cut staff.

In August, the Bank increased interest rates for the 14th time in a row, taking the main rate to 5.25%. It had been widely expected to raise rates again in September but instead held them at 5.25%.

Are wages keeping up with inflation?

Official figures showed that - on average - regular pay excluding bonuses grew by 7.8% between June and August, compared with the same period a year earlier. This is higher than the rate of inflation was in the same period (7.1%), which means real wages grew for the first time in nearly two years. However, unions point out that many workers have received smaller pay increases, and there have been widespread strikes over pay.

The government has previously argued that big pay rises could push inflation higher because companies might increase prices as a result.

When will inflation go down?

Lower inflation doesn't mean prices fall. It just means they rise less quickly. The Bank of England has predicted inflation will drop to 5% by the end of 2023, rather than the 4% it had been anticipating.

Bank governor Andrew Bailey said it was "crucial that we see the job through" and get price rises back to the 2% target, because people "should trust that their hard-earned money maintains its value". But he admitted that inflation had been "more sticky than previously expected".

In October, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted the UK would have the highest inflation rates of any G7 economy in both 2023 and 2024. As a result, it thinks UK interest rates will remain relatively high until 2028.

In January, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said halving inflation by the end of 2023 was one of the government's five key pledges.

What's happening to inflation and interest rates in Europe and the US?

Other countries have also been experiencing a cost-of-living squeeze. Many of the reasons are the same - increased energy costs, shortages of goods and materials, and the fallout from Covid.

The annual inflation rate for countries which use the euro was estimated to be 4.3% in the 12 months to September, down from 5.2% in August. The European Central Bank had been increasing interest rates to try to bring eurozone inflation under control. On 14 September, it raised its key interest rate - the benchmark deposit rate - to 4%, a record high, but indicated it might be the last hike for now.

In the US, inflation was 3.7% in the year to September, the same rate as in August. At its September meeting, the US central bank kept its key interest rate unchanged between 5.25% and 5.5% as it considers whether it has done enough to stabilise prices.

August had seen the 11th increase since early 2022, with rates at their highest for almost two decades. It warned further raises would follow "if appropriate".

Wage spiral predicted to continue in 2024

Unresolved skills shortages, growth-ambitious business leaders and a cost-of-living crisis have all exacerbated the high quit rates of 2023. The result – the highest annual growth in regular pay the UK has experienced in the past two decades.

According to new research by recruitment firm Robert Half, almost a third (32%) of employers are finding themselves in the middle of a wage spiral, having to inflate salaries to maintain a competitive edge in the war for talent. With 69% of businesses confident in their 2024 growth prospects, the need to recruit skilled employees to ensure business continuity and growth still outweighs concerns about economic uncertainty.

The firm's 2024 Salary Guide – which analyses and reports on market salaries, hiring trends, and skills requirements across the UK – also revealed that a further 26% of companies are offering additional one-off bonuses to keep hold of their staff.

With inflation still an issue for the UK, almost half (41%) of employers indicated that they will offer a flat-rate salary increase for all employees in the next 12 months, while 27% are planning pay increases in line with inflation.

Annual average pay rises for private sector employees was 8%, yet a closer look at some of the most in-demand skilled roles reveals a more concerning wage spiral snapshot for the inflation embattled economy. Although across the board salary increases are in line with the ONS results, the 2024 Salary Guide forecast shows the average annual pay growth in accounting operations is up by 9.6% year-on-year, where, depending on experience, roles such as Financial Accountant, Purchase

Ledger Manager and Billings Clerk would command 26.4%, 26% and 36.2% higher salaries respectively. A similar picture is seen in financial services, where a Financial Controller can expect 16.2% more; within tech, software development professionals are able to secure pay increases up to 24%; and within the legal professions, the average annual wage increase is 12.4%.

Matt Weston, Senior Managing Director UK & Ireland, at Robert Half, commented: "Many employers may be shocked next year at the salaries that some of their most in demand roles will command. Without careful planning this will weigh heavily on company profitability at a time when businesses are struggling with costs.

"Yet, pay is not the 'be-all and end-all'. A robust corporate culture and a tailored retention programme can be a cost friendly strategy. Our research shows, for example, that almost half (47%) of the workforce would reject a new job if the company didn't offer flexible working, yet news reports continue to highlight brands that are enforcing office returns. And in many instances employees leaving a business do so due to deep-rooted talent attrition causes such as heavy workloads and a lack of development opportunities. Business leaders must address all aspects of the employee experience and must do so fast, since an increase in pay is the inevitable by-product of 'jumping ship'.

Time Management hacks to skyrocket productivity



Managing your time effectively is something that can be developed and honed to the point where you'll be pumping out the work in no time. Here are some tips to get you started.

Create a To-Do List

If you have an overwhelming number of tasks, a to-do list is a great way to organize your thoughts. Crossing off the completed tasks one by one is immensely satisfying and there are some excellent online versions if that's more your style.

Re-evaluate & Prioritize

A to-do list will only work if you put tasks in order of priority of highest priority to lowest priority. It's tempting to want to do the easiest tasks first but if this means

not finishing something crucial, this can actually raise anxiety levels and reduce motivation.

Stop Procrastinating

Quit putting off that task you've been meaning to do for the past umpteen days and do it now! In the words of Brian Tracy, "Eat that frog!". No, he doesn't actually want you to eat an icky amphibian for breakfast, but you should tackle the most despised task (your frog) first to keep the positive momentum going for the rest of the day.

Plan Out Your Time

That old saying, “Fail to plan, plan to fail”? It’s so true when it comes to effective time management. It may seem counterintuitive to spend precious time planning out how to spend your time but it really does work.

Avoid Multitasking

You may think that attempting several things at once is a sure-fire way to blast through your task list. In fact, multitasking can pull you in different directions and stop you from maintaining focus. It’s quite likely you’ll end up starting lots of tasks but finishing very few if any.

Find Your Groove

We all have that time of day when we’re performing at our best. For you, this may be after your morning coffee, late afternoon, or even at 2 am. Whenever it is, get as much done as you can during your peak productivity times and stress less when you’re not feeling in the zone.

Do Away With Distractions

I know it’s hard, but switching off your cell phone, not responding to emails and avoiding social media for a block of time — even half an hour — will do wonders for your productivity. You’d be amazed how much can get done without checking out the latest cat meme you just HAVE to see.

Have a Dedicated Workspace

Whether you have a separate office or a study nook, a space that you can use solely for work can help get you in the right mindset. Make sure that wherever you choose is free from clutter and provides a positive working environment.



Stand Up

We spend more time than ever sitting down. At our desk, watching TV, driving the car. The solution? Standing. Using a stand-up desk or standing during meetings can eliminate time-wasting and force you to get down to business. If it’s too difficult to stand for a prolonged period, try alternating sitting with standing.

Get Some Rest

Adequate downtime is key to managing a heavy schedule. Not enough sleep can have a negative impact on your mood and ability to make proper decisions — bad news if the workload keeps growing. Many people also swear by regular meditation to clear the mind and recharge the batteries.

Trust in Others

Harness the knowledge and abilities of people around you and you’ll raise team morale, improve accountability and start seeing results.

So, if you’re ready to take your productivity up a notch or two, you need to learn to work smarter and make use of resources available to you. What are you waiting for? Get going.

How to explain your weaknesses in a job interview



It can be hard to answer the question, ‘What are your weaknesses?’—especially when you expected to be discussing the capabilities, skills and talents that make you the best candidate for the job. Framing your weaknesses positively can be challenging, but when you combine self-awareness with an action plan, you can quickly stand apart from other job candidates.

Why do employers ask ‘What are your weaknesses?’

Employers ask candidates about their weaknesses to assess their self-awareness, honesty and ability to improve. They also likely want to see what you have already done to improve upon your weaknesses and what you plan to do to keep getting better. Here are a few examples of the best weaknesses to mention in an interview.

1 I focus too much on the details

Being ‘detail-oriented’ is typically a positive skill, but if you tend to spend too much time on the specifics of a project, it could also be considered a weakness. By mentioning that you focus too much on details, you’re showing to the hiring manager that you’re capable of helping the company avoid even minor mistakes.

EXAMPLE: *‘One of my greatest weaknesses is that I sometimes focus too much on the details of a project. I have been striving to improve in this area by better monitoring how long I spend on a task and allowing myself to re-focus on the project at large. That way, I can still ensure high quality while maintaining my productivity and helping my team to meet deadlines.’*

2 I have a hard time letting go of a project

Some people are natural perfectionists,

making lots of last-minute changes to make sure everything is perfect. The problem with this weakness is that it can impact deadlines. If this is your weakness, share how you’re trying to get better at letting projects go by giving yourself a deadline for all revisions.

EXAMPLE: *‘My greatest weakness is that I sometimes have a hard time letting go of a project. I’m the biggest critic of my work, and I can always find something that needs to be improved or changed. To help myself improve in this area, I give myself deadlines for revisions and try to avoid making too many last-minute changes.’*

3 I have trouble saying no

From an employer’s perspective, someone who is always willing to help is an asset. However, this asset can become a weakness when you end up submitting your work late because you’ve spent so much time helping others. Share how you’re working to better self-manage by organising your tasks and setting boundaries in how much time you can spare to help others.

EXAMPLE: *‘My greatest weakness is that I sometimes have trouble saying no to requests and end up taking on more than I can handle. I now use a project management app so I can see how much work I have at any moment and understand when I have time to help others.’*

4 I feel stressed when projects run beyond the deadline

Whilst expressing your stress or frustration at work is a weakness, employers also value employees who strive to meet deadlines and understand how important it is to submit work on time. In your response, focus on the fact that you believe meeting deadlines is vital for everyone to be as productive as possible.

EXAMPLE: *‘One of my greatest weaknesses is that I feel very stressed when projects I work on go past the deadline. I have always been punctual, and I feel strongly about submitting things on time. To help reduce the stress, I’ve started a course on mindfulness meditation to help recognise my feelings and let them pass without attaching to them too much.’*

5 I could use more experience in...

Every person has something they could improve at or gain more experience in. Sharing that you want to gain more experience at a relevant skill or quality shows the hiring manager that you’re self-aware and like to challenge yourself. Make sure, however, that you do not answer with a weakness that is important to the role.

EXAMPLE: *‘Some of my greatest weaknesses include my inability to share responsibilities and staying patient during group projects. I have discussed these weaknesses with my manager as areas I would like to improve. We have set up a timeline and goals for me to attain. I have participated in several team-building workshops. I am learning to let go and trust other people.’*

6 I sometimes have trouble asking for help

Whilst you may want to solve problems at work on your own, it can be your weakness. Being independent is a positive quality for many jobs, but it’s best to know when to ask for help to make sure tasks are done well and on-time. If you’re using this as your weakness, explain that you understand why asking for help is a good idea and how you’re trying to get better at it.

EXAMPLE: *‘Because I am independent and enjoy figuring out solutions myself, I’ve struggled sometimes with asking for help when I need it. I understand that at any organisation, there are experts around me that have specific knowledge and skills I can learn from. Whilst I am still working on it, I have been able to produce better work in a more time-efficient way as a result of getting help from those around me.’*

7 It has been difficult for me to work with certain personalities

Even the most flexible people can have trouble working with others that have certain characteristics or personality traits. Having good teamwork skills also means having a strong awareness of how you work with others and ways you can adjust your approach to better serve the organisation. If this is your weakness, explain the personality types you have had trouble working with and give a good reason why.

EXAMPLE: *‘Whilst I understand that a range of personality types strengthen a business, I tend to keep my ideas to myself around louder, more forthright colleagues. To overcome this weakness, I now make*

an effort to spend more time with these colleagues who are always able to speak up freely. By learning more about them, their communication style and their motivations, I am better able to collaborate with these personality types so that we both equally contribute our strengths and skills.'

1 8 I sometimes struggle to keep a healthy work/life balance

Finding work/life balance is important to maintain motivation in your job. Spending a lot of time and energy on your work shows your strong work ethic, but it is also necessary to find time for your family, friends and hobbies. If this is the weakness you want to talk about, explain the ways you have made it a point to find a balance between life and work and how you have seen your work improve as a result.

EXAMPLE: *'Because I truly love my work and I am very ambitious, I sometimes find it difficult to set boundaries between my work and personal life. I have seen a negative impact on my motivation and focus when I ignore my personal needs. To overcome this weakness, I now try to emphasise creating time in my schedule to spend with my family. Small changes, such as putting my phone on silent, have made a huge difference. Having more balance in my life between work and leisure makes me more productive at work.'*

9 In the past, I have been uncomfortable with ambiguity

Many jobs require employees who are thoughtful, experienced and responsible with ambiguity in the workplace. Whilst it's certainly a beneficial skill to carefully follow detailed instructions, it's also important to

be able to determine what it takes to realise the desired outcome. If this is the weakness you're mentioning in an interview, discuss the success you have found following instructions and finding comfort with ambiguity. Then, explain the steps you're taking to complete ambiguous tasks.

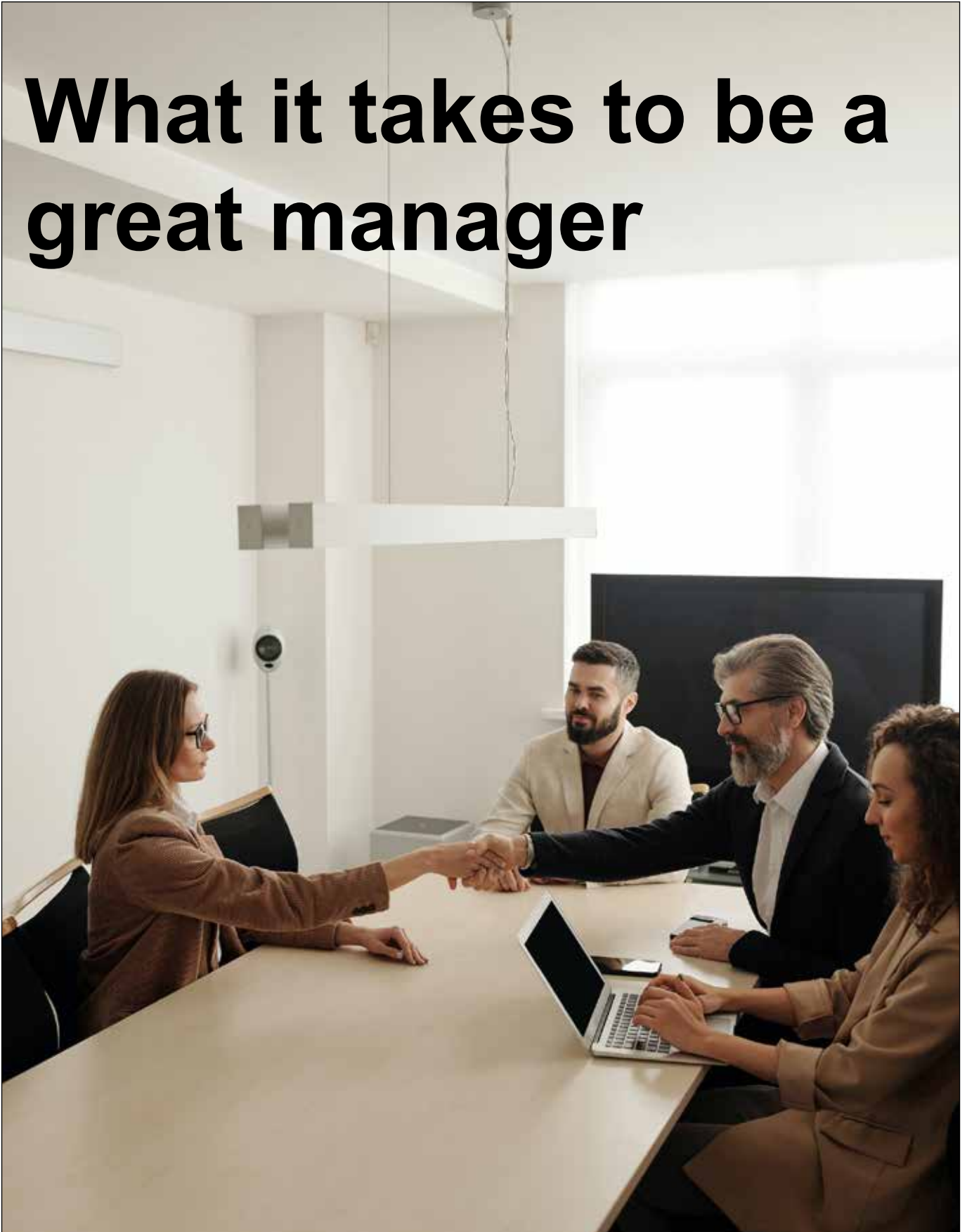
EXAMPLE: *'Because I prefer clearer directions, I tend to be sceptical when approaching a confusing assignment or goal. That is why I have created a personal framework for times when I feel confused or overwhelmed by an ambiguous task, including performing structured research and asking experts for advice. Doing so has helped me become successful when working on ambiguous tasks or when working towards less defined or specific goals.'*

10 I sometimes lack confidence

Lack of confidence is a common weakness that can cause inefficiencies in your work. Being humble when working with others can be helpful, but it's also important to be confident to do your job at an optimal level. If this is the weakness you're presenting in your interview, discuss the steps you have taken to improve your confidence and how your actions have resulted in success.

EXAMPLE: *'My greatest weakness is that I sometimes lack confidence, which is why I have difficulty speaking up in groups. Even if I have great ideas, I have difficulty sharing them with others. For this reason, I decided that it was time to take speaking and acting classes. These classes helped me learn to separate my shy self from my professional self.'*

What it takes to be a great manager



It's not hard to describe a bad manager. We've all dealt with bosses that micromanage, criticize, and make it harder to get the job done. But what qualities make someone a good manager?

Whether it's your first time with a direct report or you've spent years leading a team, there are a few traits you can develop to set your employees up for success. After all, good managers aren't born; anyone can grow into it with the right intentions and a little practice.

"Ultimately, we're measured and judged by the business, but the business doesn't succeed without great staff and the staff doesn't succeed without great supervision," says Marc Kalan, assistant professor of professional practice at Rutgers Business School. "It's not an intuitive skill set. You have to leverage skills and talents while recognizing deficiencies and assist your staff in overcoming them."

A good manager is:

1 Self-Aware

Being a good leader starts with knowing your own shortcomings, says Sara Canaday, a leadership development expert and author. "First and foremost, a leader has to manage themselves," she says. "If you don't understand your strengths and weaknesses, and how your temperament, beliefs, and experiences impact your decisions, you're missing the mark." That level of self-analysis can be tough, but knowing where you have room to grow can help you improve how you work with your employees and set a good example for your team.

If you're not sure where to start, request a 360-degree assessment if your company offers them. It's an opportunity to get feedback from your peers and subordinates, as well as your superiors, to get a full picture of how you're doing. Or ask a trusted colleague or former boss to weigh in. Rather than keeping it open-ended, ask pointed questions, Canaday says. If you think you're good in a crisis, ask if the person would agree or if there's anything you do that might not line up with the description. This will help you to get more specific and constructive feedback.

2 Empowering

As a manager, it might be tempting (and sometimes easier) to just do the work yourself, but that's a temporary fix. Great bosses don't control; they coach. This means providing feedback on a regular basis, developing your employees' problem-solving skills, and setting broad goals while giving your team room to figure out how they'll achieve them. "Managers don't need to have all the answers," Kalan says. "They need to set up appropriate challenges for those they supervise so they can try new things and learn."

3 Communicative

Communicating is more than just sharing information with your employees. It can come in many forms, including your actions. Modern

workers are looking for a manager who is authentic, and that means making an effort to engage your team. “Leaders need to share information, but also open a line of sight to their own thinking and be more transparent,” she says. And of course, with more flexible forms of work like telecommuting growing, effective and frequent communication is even more important to keep your team happy and connected.

4 Empathetic

Communication can only be effective if it’s well-received. “As a leader, you’ve got to have good interpersonal skills because that impacts how others are going to perceive you,” Canaday says. “You can have the best-laid plans, but if people don’t respond to you and they don’t trust you, they’re not going to support your vision.”

Put your team at ease by paying attention to how others react, allowing your team to do the talking in meetings, and giving feedback that is encouraging instead of critical. For example, when assessing your direct report’s performance, start from their goals and ask them if they think anything is holding them back. Then, ask if they’re open to hearing your perspective. “People say, ‘Yes I’m open,’ and it disarms them because you’re coming from a place of supporting their goals, but it opens you up to say what they’re doing is counterproductive, that is diluting their effectiveness,” Canaday says.

5 Nurturing

Teams aren’t just employees that all have the same function or output; they can also be a cohesive unit, a supportive group, and even a work family. Good bosses are the ones that

foster that feeling, says Johanna Rothman, an author and management consultant.

Set a common goal for your group that everyone can feel like they’re contributing toward, and help employees feel supported so they can be themselves and do their best work. “It’s really important to figure out, ‘How do we create the best environment?’” Rothman says, “so that people can do their jobs and deliver great products.”

6 Strategic

You have to balance day-to-day operations with the big picture. Taking time to reflect can set your team up for success. “We need to be able to take strategic pauses to separate the signal from the noise, make connections we might not have made in the moment, and prioritize how to move forward,” Canaday says. She suggests assessing how things are going at regular intervals and thinking through the most efficient way of doing things. For instance, a new manager might spend time getting to know their team and learning about what they do before optimizing operations.

7 Present

Sometimes, just being there can make all the difference, says John Baldoni, an executive coach and author. This includes being physically present for the team, but it can also mean making sure they know they can come to you for anything. “‘Be there’ means whatever needs doing, you do it,” he says. “Whatever the team needs, you get it for them. You’re the advocate—you act on their behalf, find them the resources, promote them, provide criticism, coach, and just be present.”

Five-day office returns unlikely without office space rethink

Employers need to speak to staff and rethink workspaces before pushing ahead with full-time office returns, according to workplace creation expert, Unispace.

Responding to reports from the latest KPMG CEO Outlook that suggest 64% of global leaders expect staff to be back in the workplace full time by 2026, Unispace has warned that employee engagement could be damaged if mandates are used to achieve these attendance levels.

In its **Returning for Good** report, the firm found that 58% of workers struggle to carry out their core job in the office due to distractions and excessive meetings. The data also revealed that over a quarter of businesses that had already mandated returns were struggling to recruit while 42% had experienced higher than usual staff attrition rates.

As Lawrence Mohiuddine, CEO EMEA at Unispace, explained, this suggests employees are struggling with office working and likely to move elsewhere if forced to return to a space they do not feel productive in:

“While encouraging a return to the office makes business sense for firms that have spaces going underutilised, there needs to be complete clarity around why people haven’t naturally begun heading into the workplace more and what difference workforces want

from the space itself. With our data showing that people don’t feel productive in the office, it’s understandable that many want to continue working in a hybrid manner.

“However, with firms also revealing difficulties attracting and retaining staff at a time when skills shortages are still rife, it is imperative that business leaders get to grips with the unique wants and needs of their workforces and use this information to drive meaningful changes. What people need in the workspace today is vastly different to a few years ago. Having been able to work in quiet spaces but also collaborate online when needed, employees are rethinking how and where they want to work. If employers force a five-day office return too quickly and without finding out what their people want from the office, staff attraction and retention will be negatively impacted.”





Colours that give you an unexpected Productivity Boost

If your workspace is awash with bright white or dull gray, it may be time for a change. Colours have the power to affect us physically, intellectually and emotionally, some making us angry, confident, excited. Find out here how you can use different colours and their combinations to kickstart your motivation and be more efficient.

Colours that inspire and motivate

According to colour Psychologist Angela Wright, there are four primary psychological colours, being red, blue, yellow and green. They each have an effect on the mind, the body, the soul, and a balance between the three, respectively. Every other colour and its associated effect are just a combination of two or more of these primary colours.

Red: Physical

Red is a stimulating colour that gets your heart pumping and raises your pulse. It is a powerful colour that can evoke a strong physical response, even activating the “fight or flight” instinct. This is great if you’re not easily phased being in high-stress situations. If you don’t, the colour red may be overwhelming and actually hinder your work efforts.

Use red for a productivity boost if you’re:

In a physically-demanding job: Workers that require a lot of physical exertion such as tradespeople, personal trainers, and tree surgeons, may respond well to red.

Blue: Intellectual

Blue is a soothing colour, helping calm the mind and aid concentration. It’s no wonder then that blue is a popular colour to use in office spaces. It enhances wakefulness and supports clear communication. Blue is a great choice if you want to get straight to the point.

Use blue for a productivity boost if you’re:

An office worker: Blue is brilliant for completing administrative tasks or projects that require maximum focus. Add a splash of orange if you need extra inspiration.

Yellow: Emotional

Yellow is energizing and radiates positivity. It plays to our emotions and lifts confidence levels so is excellent for getting you into the right mood for producing great work. As the strongest psychological colour, you might want to opt for yellow tones to stimulate your creativity.

Use yellow for a productivity boost if you’re:

An innovator or entrepreneur: If you’re stuck in an ideas rut, yellow can help get the creative juices flowing and make you more optimistic about the direction you’re taking.

Green: Balance

Green is harmonizing and, unlike red, does not strain the eyes. It strikes a nice balance between the other primary colours and creates a sense of calm and reassurance. This is particularly helpful if you feel overwhelmed by all the tasks you need to complete.

Use green for a productivity boost if you’re:

At your best in a calm working environment: If you like to start your day with yoga or a meditative practice, green is most likely the colour for you.

Don’t just consider the colour

In an interview with a productivity guru, Angela Wright stated that a colour’s ability to stimulate or soothe is based on its intensity or saturation. So, what does that really mean? You first have to select a colour that will either affect your body, mind or emotions. The second step is to find the correct brightness that will help improve your individual productivity levels. As you can see, colour choices and preferences are highly personal and varies from one person to the next. What works for you may not work for your co-workers, friends or family members.

It is possible to boost productivity using colour. But, you have to choose the right colour based on the type of work you do. You also need to consider the brightness of the colour. Nothing too bold or too dull.