

## Order your time like Starbucks' CEO

His workday starts at 6 a.m. And before most people set off on their daily commute, Jim Donald may have left a voice mail for 100 regional managers, written 25 thank-you notes to employees and signed 500 birthday cards.

That's one way the CEO and president of Starbucks squeezes every drop of productivity out of the day. *Here are more of his tactics:*

- **Shave 15 minutes off each meeting.** Donald schedules meetings for 60 minutes but wraps them up in 45. He uses the extra time—totaling eight hours a week—to “download ideas” and check messages.

- **Respond quickly.** He handles his own e-mail—up to 250 messages each day—answering about 75% of the messages. “I’m brief,” he says, “but that’s better than not responding.”

- **Track time spent.** Donald’s assistant creates a pie chart of his schedule every month that shows how close he is to his goal of spending 40% to 45% of his time traveling, 20% to 25% with staff, and 8% each for walking around and dropping into meetings and talking with business partners and other CEOs.

— Adapted from “A Double Shot of Productivity,” Patricia Sellers, *Fortune*, www.fortune.com.

## Analyze the room

Prepare for a meeting by studying not only the agenda but also the participants, including their work styles and what they want to accomplish.

“If I am going into a meeting, I now put quite a lot of thought into what I am going to do and what I want to achieve among 20 people with different agendas and viewpoints,” says Niall O’Ceallaigh, vice president of human resources at aeronautics company SR Technics.

Understanding what else is going on in the room will help you reach your goals.

— Adapted from “Harnessing Power With Your Mind,” Sandra O’Connell, *Sunday Times* (London), www.timesonline.co.uk.

## Approach your big game like pro coach

When the success of your business rests on one major project, approach it like you’re preparing for the Super Bowl. That’s how the general manager of a Best Buy store in Columbia, Md., prepares for the day-after-Thanksgiving sales, ensuring that every team member knows just how to execute the plan.

*Here are some pages from Kevin McGrath’s playbook:*

- **Diagram the flow.** Stickers on a floor plan in the back office show the positions of the 225 employees, right down to the six people assigned to outside crowd control. Inside the store, colored balloons and arrows on the floor direct customers to products and checkout lines.

- **Practice.** The weekend before Thanksgiving, employees at 811 Best Buy stores practice moves that range from handing out tickets

for hot-ticket items to managing the crowds.

- **Study the film.** In previous years, customers scuffed the floor by dragging boxes when shopping carts ran out, so last Thanksgiving McGrath assign three employees to corral carts in the parking lot.

- **Call in reinforcements.** In addition to 68 seasonal workers, McGrath hired two off-duty state police officers to handle crowd control and borrowed 150 shopping carts from neighboring stores.

- **Designate captains.** Before the doors open, employees not only hand out store maps and tickets for hot items but also tell customers how to navigate the store. With his winning game plan, McGrath’s store is one of the tops in sales in the area.

— Adapted from “Super Bowl of Retail Days,” Hanah Cho, *The Sun* (Baltimore), www.baltimoresun.com.

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# Time-Saving Gadgets

## Recharge in a flash

When your mobile phone, PDA or BlackBerry needs a fast charge and you're not near a wall socket, use one of these power packs:

- **Cellboost** ([www.cellboost.com](http://www.cellboost.com)) gives you 60 minutes of phone time for \$8.

- **The Instant Power Charger** ([www.instant-power.com](http://www.instant-power.com)) provides three full charges for about \$15.

- **The 24/7 fuel cell** from Medis Technologies ([www.medistechnologies.com](http://www.medistechnologies.com)) offers 30 hours of phone time for \$20.

— Adapted from “Juice It Up,” Mike Hogan, *Entrepreneur*, [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com).

## Create and show presentation online

You don't need a computer with PowerPoint to build and deliver presentations—just one with an Internet connection.

The free presentation software from Zoho Show ([www.zohoshow.com](http://www.zohoshow.com)) allows you to create and view presentations, although the presentations won't have advanced features, such as transitions, available in other programs. Colleagues on a conference call can follow your presentation over the Internet without additional software.

You can even import your existing PowerPoint and OpenOffice presentations into Zoho and store your creations online.

— Adapted from “Something for Nothing: Cool New Software, Free of Charge,” Michael Fitzgerald, *Inc.*, [www.inc.com](http://www.inc.com).

## Drive business with a digital window

Replacing your storefront window with a giant, interactive computer screen can give customers passing by a better view of your business. At Turn Key Real Estate in Great Neck, N.Y., for example, customers can control the computer in the window by waving their hands in front of it to call up information on homes that are for sale. The system also can collect information. *Example:* Potential buyers can provide their cell phone numbers so agents can call them immediately.

Turn Key President Philip Raices says the \$25,000 high-tech system “further differentiates me

from my competition.” And he knows that selling one home could cover the cost of the entire system.

PIM ([www.powerfulimpact.com](http://www.powerfulimpact.com)), the company that offers that system, also sells smaller “digital clerk” screens for inside stores. *How it works:* When a customer picks up a product, the screen starts playing a promotional video about it, providing specifications and information about which items are in stock. The system also can be programmed to cross-sell and up-sell items. That allows you to better serve customers—without adding staff.

— Adapted from “Creating the ‘Wow Factor,’” Sandra Beckwith, *Black Enterprise*, [www.blackenterprise.com](http://www.blackenterprise.com).

## Customize online maps to your needs

Online maps today offer much more than simple two-dimensional views and point-to-point directions. *Here are some of the options:*

- **Multiple points.** Both MapQuest ([mapquest.com](http://mapquest.com)) and a beta version of Yahoo Maps (<http://maps.yahoo.com/beta>.) allow you to build a trip with multiple stops.

- **Bird's-eye views.** Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) and Windows Live Search (<http://local.live.com>) allow you to see a traditional map view, a satellite image of

the area, or an overlay of the two.

- **Business overlay.** Google and Live Search allow you to search for businesses and see them marked on the map.

Live Search also allows you to annotate your map, placing virtual pushpins and highlighting your route. Then you can share it by e-mail or instant message.

— Adapted from “Online Maps Take the Guesswork Out of Travel,” Andy Riga, *The Vancouver* (British Columbia) *Sun*, [www.canada.com/vancouver/sun/index.html](http://www.canada.com/vancouver/sun/index.html).

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# Technology Shortcuts

## Look closer at Google search results

If you use Google for quick Internet searches, you may miss many extra features the site offers as shortcuts. Below are some of the things Google can do. *Note:* You can learn more at [www.googleguide.com](http://www.googleguide.com).

■ **Recognize numbers.** Type a three-digit number, and the first result will be an area code map corresponding to that number. Enter “fedex,” “ups” or “usps” and a number, and it will track your package. Google also can recognize numbers for flight status, vehicle information, patents, UPC codes and FCC equipment IDs.

■ **Define.** Add “define,” “what is” or “what are” before a word, phrase or acronym, and the top

result will be a glossary definition.

■ **Check flight status.** Enter an airport’s three-letter code followed by the word “airport,” and Google will take you to the FAA site listing weather conditions and flight delays for that location.

■ **Calculate.** With the Google search bar you can add, subtract, multiply and divide, as well as perform more advanced calculations. To convert units of measurement, link them with the word “in.” *Example:* “5 miles in kilometers.” Google also will convert currency figures among Australian dollars, British pounds, euros and U.S. dollars.

— Adapted from “Google Shortcut for Quick Searches,” J.D. Biersdorfer, *The New York Times*, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

## Tap Microsoft’s OCR

If you use Microsoft Office XP or 2003, you have the ability to turn scanned documents into text files. The toughest part of using the optical character recognition (OCR) program may be locating it the first time.

Go to Start, All Programs and Microsoft Office Tools to locate Microsoft Office Document Scanning. Place the document on your scanner, hit the Scan button, and in a few seconds you’ll have an image file you can search for key words. Another click will turn the file into text in a Word document.

As with all OCR programs, plain fonts translate much better than italic or fancy ones.

— Adapted from “Advance and Be Recognised” Tim Hott, *Personal Computer World*, [www.pcw.co.uk](http://www.pcw.co.uk).

## Integrate YouTube into marketing mix

If you haven’t watched a video online, you are in the minority. Seventy percent of Internet users have, and nearly a third have e-mailed or otherwise shared a video online.

Several businesses have jumped on the hype surrounding the YouTube video-sharing site, creating buzz about their products, building brand awareness and capturing indirect sales.

When Smirnoff posted a rap video parody featuring its new Raw Tea product, more than a million people saw the “Tea Party” spot within weeks. Heeling Sports regularly uploads video of its team members performing tricks wearing its Heelys, shoes with retractable wheels. The company generates traffic to the new spots by mentioning them on other sites.

It’s a low-cost marketing tool because the site is free and the tar-

get audience prefers clips that are creative but not as polished as standard advertisements. A third of the people who see an ad clip in an online video visit the company Web site, and 8% of those visitors buy something, according to a survey by the Online Publishers Association.

*The caveats:* You can’t control what others post on the site, such as people who videotape stunts wearing Heelys but not protective gear. And audiences balk at anything they see as fake. *Example:* A scandal erupted when viewers learned that a group created by a PR firm was financing a blog purportedly by a couple traveling across the United States in a recreational vehicle and parking in Wal-Mart lots.

— Adapted from “Contagious Commercials: How to Get In on the YouTube Craze, Inc.,” [www.inc.com](http://www.inc.com).

## Customize ‘Places’ in Word, Excel

Create shortcuts to your most-used files in the Places bar under the Open and Save dialog boxes in many Windows applications.

Open the dialog box and select the folder you want. In Office 2002 and 2003, go to Tools and select Add to My Places. In Office 2007 on Windows XP, select the folder and then right-click the Places bar, choose Add and type the folder’s name.

To organize icons on the Places bar, right-click them to move them up or down.

— Adapted from “Answer Line: Keep Your Secrets Safe,” Lincoln Spector, *PC World*, [www.pcworld.com](http://www.pcworld.com).

# Productivity Boosters

## Invest some time in taking a break

If you take a break only after you crash from working too hard, you aren't being effective. Instead, include breaks in the rhythm of your day, says Patricia Katz, author of *Press Pause ... Press On: Bringing Balance and Perspective to Work and Life* (Optimus, www.optimuspub.co.uk).

A break can range from putting some blank time on your calendar to taking a 10-minute walk or to simply taking a deep breath between phone calls.

"We're good at pressing for performance, and we're very poor at pausing for renewal," Katz says.

Even if you don't take a break, you won't accomplish everything. Surveys show most people have between 50 and 200 hours of uncompleted work. So take a break and focus on doing the important things well.

— Adapted from "A Pause for the Cause Is Good for You," Irene Seiberling, *Prince George (British Columbia) Citizen*, www.princegeorgecitizen.com.

## Eliminate voice mail

There's no need to miss calls today. Beyond carrying a mobile phone, inside the office your phone system can be programmed to ring one extension after another if a call goes unanswered, guaranteeing that someone will pick up.

You can arrange a universal or "follow me" phone number that will ring on a series of phones, such as your mobile phone, if you don't answer the office phone.

— Adapted from "Real Estate Goes Real Time," Jeff Lavery, *Worcester (Mass.) Business Journal*, www.wbjournal.com.

## Silence or muffle distracting noise

From the hum of a fax machine to the colleague in the next cubicle listening to messages over the speaker phone, office noises are not just annoying, they hinder productivity.

"Any noise that interrupts your thought process, any noise that is annoying contributes to the stress of trying to do your job," noted Carol Loveridge, executive director of Canada's MFL Occupational Health Centre Inc. in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Indeed, one study of workers in noisy offices found they made only about half as many attempts to solve a puzzle as employees in quieter offices, and they had higher levels of a stress hormone.

*Some ways to turn down the volume in your office:*

- **Design for privacy.** Designate rooms where people can retreat to work in a quiet atmosphere, locate workers who must talk on the

phone frequently away from those whose work requires more quiet concentration, and place workstations so phone talkers will face away from each other.

- **Isolate machines.** Move office equipment away from staff or surround the machines with sound-absorbing panels.

- **Mask noise.** Invest in a sound-masking system, or buy less expensive items to mask other sounds by creating "white noise," such as tabletop water fountains and electric fans.

And when your organization is moving to a new building, call on acoustical consultants as part of your design team.

— Adapted from "Neither Employers nor Employees Can Afford to Turn a Deaf Ear to the Negative Effects of Office Noise," Marjo Johne, *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), www.theglobeandmail.com.

## More sleep equals greater productivity

Eight hours of sleep isn't a luxury. Without it your memory will be impaired, you won't be as alert and you are more likely to suffer problems with your health. *Here are three ways to improve your shut-eye:*

- **Turn it off.** Don't eat, drink, watch television, read or surf the Web just before you turn out the light. "Have a routine like we have for 2-year-olds," says Safwan Badr, a pulmonary and sleep medicine specialist at Detroit's Harper Hospital.

- **Adjust to time zones.** When she boards a flight, the first thing Jean Mayer does is reset her watch to the local time of her desti-

nation. The Michigan-based executive director for Asia, Pacific and Africa for Ford Global Purchasing doesn't schedule any business meetings before 9 a.m. or 10 a.m., so she will be alert for them.

- **See your doctor.** Dominic Silvio, founder and president of Exhibit Works in Livonia, Mich., was always sleepy during the day because sleep apnea was waking him up to 40 times an hour. A mouthpiece now allows him to sleep properly and arise rested.

— Adapted from "Sleep Debts: Disorders, Stress, Drive to Get Ahead All Take a Toll on Executive Rest," Marti Benedetti, *Crain's Detroit Business*, www.crainsdetroit.com.

# Powerful Management

## Use more than pay to entice workers

When the job market is hot, finding and keeping good workers for entry-level positions requires more than boosting wages. *Here's how one Canadian employer does it:*

■ **Expand your search.** To find workers for her boutique, Kristina Egyed shops the supermarket. She can't offer the best supermarket workers more pay, but she can provide greater flexibility for their schoolwork and extracurricular activities. She also recruits retirees who want to work only a few days a week

■ **Make work a pleasure.** Offer your employees discounts on store merchandise, a clothing allowance or other enticements beyond the paycheck. Egyed organizes par-

ties at her LaLa Home Décor store in North Vancouver, British Columbia, to mark employees' birthdays or personal accomplishments.

■ **Show you want them to stay.** When a worker wanted to take two days off a week for motorcycle lessons, Egyed not only juggled the schedule but also paid for one of the days off. "If I had to replace her, it would have cost me much more than one day's pay, with training and advertising, never mind the upheaval at the store," Egyed said. "Having strong employees means giving, not just taking."

— Adapted from "Employers Get Creative in Ways to Keep Workers," Wendy McLellan, *Prince George (British Columbia) Citizen*, [www.princegeorgecitizen.com](http://www.princegeorgecitizen.com).

## Hire smart to prevent injuries

Working in the nutrition services department of Mercy Medical Center-North Iowa in Mason City is a physically demanding job. But not one of the workers hired in the past year has been injured while doing the heavy lifting each day requires.

The key, the hospital says, is a pre-employment assessment on a machine that measures muscle strength and endurance by having candidates press or pull on a bar with their arms, legs and trunk. The hospital has 44 types of jobs that are considered physically demanding, and it has rated the activity level for each.

Based on results from the ET 2000 machine from Cost Reduction Technologies ([www.costreductiontech.com](http://www.costreductiontech.com)), the hospital rejects about 15% of applicants.

To further ensure worker safety, each new hire receives training from an ergonomist on how to set up his or her workstation and how to perform demanding jobs with lowered risk of injury.

— Adapted from "Matching the Job to the Worker Cuts Injuries," *Hospital Employee Health*, [www.ahcpub.com](http://www.ahcpub.com).

## Talk to staff stars to keep them aboard

If fears of up to half of your best workers packing up and leaving aren't keeping you awake at night—maybe they should be. That's how many of your workers are filling out résumés and going to job interviews, according to a survey by the training and research firm Leadership IQ in Washington, D.C., which correlated its data with performance reviews.

As a leader, you may be hastening your stars' burnout by piling the toughest assignments on your most reliable workers while allowing slackers to coast. In addition to trimming the deadwood from your staff, you should be talking to your best workers to discover how to keep them aboard long before they turn in their two weeks' notice.

*During individual conversations, ask workers these questions:*

■ "What do you love about

your job?" "What motivates you?" Strive to align assignments with those interests.

■ "What are we doing to demotivate you?" or, asked another way, "What drives you crazy?" Then follow up on their answers by asking for suggestions to change those situations.

Don't be surprised if few of the answers are related to money. Even with a tight budget you can control many parts of the work experience and environment that will encourage loyalty among your best staff members.

And don't wait for poor performers to leave on their own. The Leadership IQ survey found that relatively few of them are actively seeking other jobs.

— Adapted from "Keeping the Top Talent," Janet Cho, *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), [www.cleveland.com](http://www.cleveland.com).

## Herd socializers

When staff members linger too long chatting in the cafeteria, lead them back to work without seeming like an ogre. Join the group for a few minutes of chatting, then stand up and say you need to take care of something in your office. Others will follow your lead.

— Adapted from "Smart Ways to Trash Office Gossips," Reylito Elbo, *BusinessWorld*, [www.bworldonline.com](http://www.bworldonline.com).

# Proven Effective Habits

## Train your staff to listen

Casual conversations between customers and your front-line staffers can yield big business—if your workers know how to listen for opportunities.

*Example:* When a customer calls a credit union to add a new name to his credit card account because his son is going to college, an astute teller will know that tidbit of information signals a major life change. The teller can work into the conversation offers for a new account or information regarding college loans.

That's not only good business but also great customer service.

— Adapted from “Most Valuable Data Is Free—If Staff Knows to Dig,” Colin Piper, *Banking Wire*, <http://infotrac.thomsonlearning.com>.

## Spot inefficiency with ‘Chicken Pox’

To break yourself of the bad habit of handling the same piece of paper over and over again, use the ‘Chicken Pox’ technique from Sandy LaBelle, author of *Get Your Life Back* ([www.sandylabelle.com](http://www.sandylabelle.com)):

Hold a red felt-tip pen when opening the mail. Each time you pick up a piece of paper, put a dot in the upper corner. When you start noticing several dots on a paper, you will know that you have waited too long to file, trash or act upon it.

— Adapted from “Tips for Taming Time,” Sandy LaBelle, *Techniques*, [www.acteonline.org](http://www.acteonline.org).

## Make connections now with 2010 grads

Don't wait for college job fairs to start picking new workers, because the cream of the crop is likely to be gone long before then. “Companies coming in to look at our seniors are finding 80% to 85% of them have already committed to an employer,” says Matthew Eicher, industry relations manager at Arizona State University in Tempe.

Smart employers are offering internships and summer jobs to candidates in their first and second years of college. Organizations begin making offers to May graduates when they begin their senior year, and employers also are interviewing in fall for summer internships.

The benefits of acting early are long term. Contracting firm PCL in Edmonton, Alberta, has a retention rate for intern alumni of 90%, three times the rate for other new employees. But you won't see any benefit if interns spend the summer just fetch-

ing coffee. To lure candidates, tell them not only about the hours and pay but also about any projects you plan to have them work on.

While interns are with you, make sure that they see how classroom theory relates to the real world, and help them hone skills they aren't likely to develop in school, such as how to write a professional business letter. Assign each intern a supervisor and mentor to guide the newcomer through the assignment.

A great internship pays off well beyond one potential employee. “If students have a good experience, they are the best advertising because they come back and tell classmates,” says Michael Powell, who directs the engineering career center at the University of Texas at Austin.

— Adapted from “Internships Help Students and Employers Gain the Inside Track,” Lia Steakley, *Engineering News-Record*, [www.enr.com](http://www.enr.com).

## Athletics translate into wins at work

If you want to score some points at the office, log more time shooting hoops or enjoying other athletic endeavors. Why? Athletes do better at work than couch potatoes.

Lessons learned playing sports that transfer to the work world include: teamwork, leadership, commitment, time management, focus, decision making under pressure and self-confidence. Even exercising alone helps with self-discipline, goal-setting and self-confidence.

Seen in that light, it's not surprising that two-thirds of women business executives and 75% of chief executives exercise regularly. Eighty-one percent of female execu-

tives played some type of team sport when they were growing up, according to Jennifer Crispen, a professor who teaches a course on women's sports at Sweet Briar College in Virginia.

In addition, a study by Leeds Metropolitan University found that morning exercise improves work performance later in the day. Keeping fit also will boost your self-confidence.

Another benefit of recruiting a staff softball team: building bonds across departments.

— Adapted from “Sports Help Keep You on the Ball,” Penelope Trunk, *Business Day* (South Africa), [www.businessday.co.za](http://www.businessday.co.za).

# Best organizing practices: Tested ideas that work

## Train call staff for standout service

In a fiercely competitive battle over products and prices, you can't afford to ignore customer service. Here's how one British telecommunications company turned around its reputation.

A few years ago, NTL Telewest was scrambling just to answer its phones. The organization recruited the wrong people, rushed them through training and then had to replace them soon afterward. It finally broke the cycle by adding 300 staff members and 37 trainers and by creating a tiered system for answering calls.

While most of the 4,500 staff members handle simple calls such as billing and service questions, a group of 500 have been trained to answer more complex calls. "We used to do A to Z and did a shocking job of everything," admitted Neil Berkett, the organization's chief operating officer.

A software program now directs "high-risk" customers, such as those calling to disconnect their service, to a special "advanced customer care" team of 200 who are trained, paid and monitored more than others. Those staffers, who know all about what the company's competition is offering, retain 80% of those customers.

The better service for customers has reduced the stress on staff, slicing turnover from 100% annually to less than 50%. NTL's data analysis also revealed that whenever it handles a problem well, a customer is more likely to stay with the company than is one who simply receives flawless service.

— Adapted from "Customers Are King as NTL Loses Its 'Hell' Tag," Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson, *Financial Times*, www.ft.com.

## Measure critical factors each day

Replacing old propellant in Minuteman boosters with new propellant designed to last until 2020 is a complex process that used to take two weeks per missile. The process involves 150 people, from truck drivers to technicians, working on four to six missiles at a time.

But the U.S. Air Force's 309th Missile Maintenance Group pared the time to six days and recently marked two years of on-time deliveries.

"One of the big things we did to be more efficient was establish a control room to direct the movement of missiles, line crews, pre-position parts and subcomponents," said Yoon-Mi Hamrick, director of the 582nd Missile Maintenance Squadron. "The status of all activities is updated daily."

With daily meetings and reviews of the "Five M's"—material, manpower, metrics, measurement and machinery—workers can anticipate and resolve problems quickly.

*Example:* They keep extra parts on hand in assembly kits so delayed deliveries don't stall the process.

— Adapted from "Lean Principles Contribute to Success of Propulsion Replacement Program," Bill Orndorff, *US Fed News*, www.htsyndication.com.

## Build better leaders in less than a week

To build collaboration and develop leaders among its 52,500 employees in 40 countries, VF Corp.

regularly brings together more than a dozen at a time for a four-day management boot camp called the Leadership Institute.

The program pairs lectures on communication with other activities, including a computer simulation called "Launching a High-Risk Business" and an *Apprentice*-style exercise in which teams compete on a case study to deliver to the top executives.

*Example:* Four teams last fall were charged with pitching a new line of golf apparel, with just a couple of days to conduct research and prepare their 45-minute presentations.

Within two years of graduating from the program, a quarter of the attendees receive promotions, and the apparel manufacturer has been able to retain more than 95% of its top performers.

— Adapted from "In the Trenches at VF Boot Camp," Nanette Byrnes, *BusinessWeek*, www.businessweek.com.

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# Quick Tips & Time-Savers

from the editors of *The Organized Executive*

**1 Organize up, inside.** Look for places other than your desktop to store frequently used items. *Examples:* Mount your phone on the wall. Tape a frequently used reference paper, such as accounting codes, to the inside of a cabinet door or on your keyboard tray.

**2 Learn the phonetic alphabet.** Knowing how to translate letters into words like the military does will avoid time-sapping confusion when

spelling a name or other word for someone else. When you say Bravo or Delta, there's no doubt about whether you meant "B" or "D."

**3 Spare the stuffing.** When a file folder is overflowing, pare or subdivide its contents. File drawers should never be full; at least a third of the space should be free. That allows you to pull items out and replace them easily and to add new documents when necessary.

**4 Encourage an ending.** Schedule meetings shortly before lunch or 5 p.m. That gives participants an incentive to wrap up the session quickly.

**5 Stop sticking everything.** Self-adhesive notes are great tools for quick temporary information. But you shouldn't use them as a substitute for an organization system. A journal or spiral-bound notebook keeps a log of your activities without clutter.

**6 Log files on folders.** Keep a log on the outside of the folder holding paper documents. Note the last time the file was accessed and list the items inside.

## What to Say When ...

### Telling employees they won't receive raises

Breaking the news to your staff members that a budget freeze means no raises this year will never be pleasant, but you can earn their respect and understanding if you do it right. *The bottom line:* Be open and show your care.

The more you explain the situation, the more easily employees will be able to accept it. And if you tie the financial situation to performance—perhaps setting goals for each worker—they will see hope for the future and understand how they can help.

Look for other ways to offer workers something they want, such as flextime or a 401(k) plan to which they can contribute alone until your business can afford to match contributions.

Don't hide your concerns about them quitting. Tell them: "We know you can go someplace else and make more money. But we want

you to think twice about it," says Leigh Branham, author of *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave* (AMACOM, www.amanet.org).

It's also important to show employees that the company is holding the line on spending across the board. So cancel any fancy parties and hold off on new company cars.

— Adapted from "Telling Staffers There's No Raise Ahead Is a Hard Task," Joyce Rosenberg, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, www.post-gazette.com.

### Adding humor to your presentation

A bit of humor in a business presentation can put your audience at ease or drive home an important point. But you shouldn't try so hard to be funny that you lose the focus of your message or risk alienating your audience.

The corporate education and entertainment division of Toronto's Second City comedy troupe (www.secondcitycommunications.com) offers this advice:

■ **Work with what you know.**

Because you are the boss, making yourself the target of a joke is the safest route. A gentle joke—without being vicious—could also play off something well known about another staff member, such as the person who always writes long reports or the quiet staff member who went wild with the karaoke during the previous evening's entertainment.

If there's an elephant in the room, an issue that's worrying the group, attack it head-on, acknowledging it with a joke to put everyone at ease.

■ **Keep it simple.** A running joke can stitch together your speech. But focus on your business mission, not on rehearsing your next stand-up routine.

And if a joke doesn't work, move on, says Chris Earle, a Second City director. "Don't try to recover with another joke. You'll dig an even deeper hole."

— "The Art of the Joke," Rachel Pulfer, *Canadian Business*, www.canadianbusiness.com.