

# Managing Interruptions

Excerpted and adapted from *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition  
May 2004

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## SUMMARY

Implementation of a few time-management tips can help you control client contact and avoid frequent interruptions.

## TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

To manage time successfully, you must firmly believe that every demand on your time is a request to give up the most valuable thing you possess. Unscheduled interruptions can be a major source of frustration and lost time.

The key to avoiding such interruptions is to control the contact. If clients call frequently, ask whether they would schedule a regular time when you can call them. If clients know a call is forthcoming, they may be more reluctant to phone unless it is urgent. (The same approach can be used with a supervisor who constantly calls the project manager into the office for routine discussions or with a new staff member who asks for your approval of every detail.)

Another common problem is caused by people stopping in the office as they walk by. The simplest way to avoid this problem, of course, is to close the door (if one exists). However, this can result in losing touch with the rest of the office. A subtler approach is to arrange the furniture in your office so that you can work facing the door or away from it.

For many, a big time waster is the telephone. Furthermore, long-distance charges for most architecture firms are substantial. Here are some tips for managing the phone:

- **Make your own calls.** It usually takes no longer to place a call than to ask someone else to do it. With answering machines and voice mail, you can usually make your point or ask your question even if the other party is not available.
- **Return calls in groups.** You may want to review message slips, note agenda items, and start making calls once or twice a day. Good times for returning calls are late morning and late afternoon. People are more likely to be in their offices then, and the approaching

- lunchtime or end of the day can discourage protracted conversation.
- **Select your tone in answering the phone.** If you seek a long, friendly conversation, you might start by asking, "How are you these days?" On the other hand, you can respond to a vendor with whom you don't care to spend much time with, "This is Elizabeth. What can I do for you?" This sets a polite but terse tone that can discourage small talk.
- **Know how to end a conversation.** If stuck on a long-winded call, you can recapture the conversation by asking, "Well, that's all I have. Do you have anything else?"

## RESOURCES

### For More Information on This Topic

See also "Project Operations," by Frank A. Stasiowski, FAIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 14, page 434.

See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at [bookstore@aia.org](mailto:bookstore@aia.org).



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### Key Terms

- Practice
- Business planning
- Quality control programs
- Project management guidelines