



How to Increase Productivity Without

BURNING OUT

The seemingly admirable goal of increasing productivity often comes at a price for frontline employees: an increased risk of burnout.

The problem is that increased productivity often translates into nothing more than squeezing more work into every hour, and often squeezing more hours into every day. Whether or not that's admirable, it certainly is not sustainable.

At a recent GovLoop virtual event, Reimagine Your Workday: Exploring Productivity, Workflow and Training Opportunities, government leaders shared more enlightened ideas for how individuals and teams can accomplish more without putting their health at risk. We followed up with industry leaders, who discussed how IT can help employees have more satisfying and less draining days.



Get Social Before Getting Down to Business

Chit-chat can save money.

That's something senior leaders at the General Services Administration have come to realize as they've adapted to working together virtually.

GSA hosts monthly virtual meetings for their cadre of Senior Executive Service members, more than a hundred officials scattered around the country. The goal is to provide a forum in which agency leaders can share best practices and discuss ideas for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of operations and services.

Recently, they've added a twist: They begin the meeting by inviting everyone into small breakout rooms where they can just chat before business begins. Those personal connections lead to better collaboration once the official business gets underway, which in turn leads to more opportunities to share cost-saving ideas, said Katy Kale, Deputy Administrator at GSA.

"We've found that because they know each other better, [they] are more open to sharing examples of best practices, to being vulnerable enough to ask questions of their peers," she said.



Katy Kale
Deputy Administrator
at GSA



Trust and Inspire

Big changes can be daunting, no matter how dazzling the end result.

So, Keson Khieu, Business Intelligence Chief in California's Department of Health Care Services, has created a people-centered model for managing staff through transformations. He calls it "trust and inspire."

Rather than the top-down approach so common in government, Khieu's model is based on mutual respect and appreciation. He doesn't order his direct reports to do their work, like many bosses do. He trusts his employees, and they psychologically want to be worthy of that sentiment.

Keson Khieu

Business Intelligence Chief
in California's Department
of Health Care Services



"To enable other people to adapt to changes and transformation, a leader needs to enable trust, to accept people for who they are and give them a say," Khieu said.

Kind words and acknowledgements help staff embrace what it means to work together, and five- or 10-minute daily check-ins devoted to non-work chitchat – the virtual equivalent of hanging out by the watercooler – inspire commitment to both the job and colleagues.

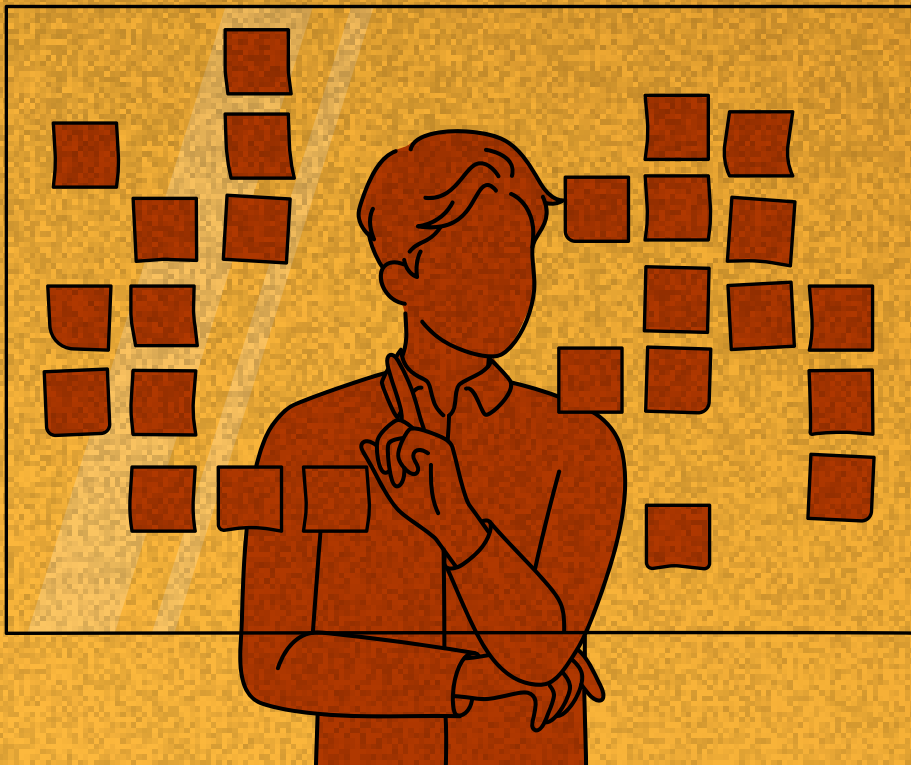
Communicate Priorities

We've heard it many times: Communication is key. And in an agency, some of the most critical communications are between leadership and staff, said Eric L. Dilworth, Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer.

"You really don't want an organization [run by] 'whatever the boss says goes,'" because the leader's priorities could be misdirected, Dilworth said. As a manager, you must understand what type of input your leader responds to — and how they prefer to receive it (e.g., formal email or in-person meeting) — so you can help influence the path your boss takes.

If you ignore that opportunity, you'll frustrate yourself, and the messaging you deliver to your team might be inappropriately negative, he said.

What your people need are clear priorities and measures of success, so you can report on the progress they're making. **"I think as a leader ... anything you can do out front to show people that 'I'm all in on this and I'm going to be with you step-by-step'"** is critical to the team's overall effectiveness, Dilworth said.



Eric L. Dilworth

Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer

Identify Your Process Pain Points

Too often, people waste a lot of time by working with — or trying to work around — workflows or processes that aren't quite right.

When looking to increase productivity, you first need to assess how you are getting the work done, said Dexter Brooks, Associate Director of the Office of Federal Operations at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Are those workflows and processes efficient? Are there specific points at which they break down due to gaps in technology, training or service delivery?

For example, Brooks' team, which produces a lot of written reports, once took a hard look at its production process from beginning to end — from research and planning to writing, reviewing and publishing. They realized that reports often got stuck during the review process, because too many were people involved. They fixed that problem by appointing a lead editor to drive the process.

"And now, even though we lost a [position] in production, the new resource actually allows the existing staff to move product much quicker and to meet our goal of producing X number of reports per year," Brooks said.



Dexter Brooks
Associate Director of the
Office of Federal Operations
at the U.S. Equal Employment
Opportunity Commission

Recognize Your Limits

At what point does a long stretch of intense work begin to deliver diminishing or even bad returns?

That's a question that confronts cyber professionals when responding to a serious incident, said Michael Watson, Chief Information Security Officer for the commonwealth of Virginia.

Working intensely in short bursts is one thing. But when facing long hours or even multiple days of hard work, **"you really have to pay close attention to that productivity curve,"** Watson said, **"because at some point, it starts to go down pretty significantly."**

Take your limits seriously. For example, if you know your productivity and judgment drop off after six hours, then organize your day in six-hour shifts, with meaningful breaks in between.

While it might be tempting to push through, scheduling breaks "does a much better job of making sure you remain productive," Watson said.

And be clear about those limits with your supervisor or executive so they have realistic expectations, he said.



Michael Watson
Chief Information
Security Officer for the
Commonwealth of Virginia



Raise a Smaller Flag

There's something satisfying about knocking out a big project. The problem is finding the bandwidth to get it done. How can you and your team tackle oversized projects without getting overwhelmed?

In Florida, Chief Information Officer James Grant has a method. It's called "smaller flags." It comes from when the state capitol was missing a flag. It had two large flags — the U.S. flag and a POW/MIA flag, but no state flag.

The governor called for the installation of the state flag, but a few days later the news came: It would cost about \$3 million, and take at least 18 months to install. That's because the weight of the poles would require a restructuring of the dome to support them.

There had to be a better way.

"And the story goes that a 20-something guy that's there to carry the bags, says, 'Sir, it seems to me if we use smaller flags, that we could have it done tomorrow,'" recalled Grant.

Mission accomplished.

You can bring that same "smaller flags" sensibility to your work, rethinking what needs to get done and how it gets done, Grant said.

"It requires understanding what the definition of success is," Grant said. **"It requires giving your team permission to be innovative and creative, and understanding that the outcome matters more than how you got there."**



James Grant
Chief Information Officer



Get Your Data In Order

Imagine your boss asks you to put together a 1,000-piece puzzle. You're great at puzzles, so you think, "Hey, no problem." But there's a catch: Those thousand pieces are scattered across the office building, so you've got to find them first.

That's what life is like for many data specialists — or anyone looking to use data to make better decisions. There's no lack of data, but they end up jumping from system to system to find it.



Chris Townsend
Vice President
for Public Sector,
Elastic

"The way that we have many of our systems today, making that data available to our government analysts can be very cumbersome," said Chris Townsend, Vice President for Public Sector, Elastic, which provides enterprise search, observability and security solutions.

Some organizations try to overcome that problem by dumping all the data into a central repository, but that's a cumbersome approach as well, especially with large volumes of data.

A better option, Townsend said, is to index the data, so that a search engine can find it wherever it is. "We're deployed in some of the largest government agencies at scale, because this is a very flexible, efficient way to index and ingest the data," he said.

Rethink Menial Data Work

Just because a task is important doesn't mean it's a good use of your time.

This is especially true when it comes to the work of extracting data from various sources, loading it into a data lake or warehouse, scrubbing it and so on. This is all important work, but when done manually, it's tedious and time-consuming, with plenty of opportunity for errors.

"If it takes me all week to put together a report, is that really a valuable use of my time?" asked Andy Maclsaac, Director of Solutions Marketing for Public Sector at Alteryx, an analytics automation platform.

The thing about many of those tedious tasks is that they are perfect candidates for automation, being repetitive and rules-driven. An automation platform can carry out such tasks more quickly and accurately, teeing up analysts to do what they do best.

"It's really about enabling analysts to unleash their creativity, their problem-solving and to really apply themselves to deeper, more valuable work," Maclsaac said.



Andy Maclsaac
Director of Solutions
Marketing for Public Sector
at Alteryx



Reduce Operational Complexity

Old technology is like an old car: The longer you own it, the more time and money you spend on upkeep and the less value you get out of it.

Many agencies, for example, manage multiple storage systems, each for a different type of storage format — e.g., block, virtual machine, file or object. Each format has benefits, but it can be a bear to manage all those individual systems and the interfaces involved.

That's why Pure Storage offers an integrated data platform with an operating system called Purity that manages that complexity, said Matthew Alexander, Field Solutions Architect at Pure Storage, which provides flash-based storage solutions.

But agencies also need a storage solution that evolves as requirements evolve, Alexander said.

That's the idea behind Pure Storage's Evergreen program. Through this program, an agency can purchase a storage platform today, and Pure Storage will keep the hardware up to date over time and add new software features as they become available.

In short, by simplifying the IT environment and keeping technology up to date, an agency can focus on **"getting value from the data rather than managing the hardware on top of which it runs,"** Alexander said.



Matthew Alexander
Field Solutions Architect
at Pure Storage

Don't Do Zero Trust by Piecemeal

You've heard it countless times: Zero trust is not a solution but a framework or approach to security. But eventually, you need to deploy products — and that's where things can get tricky.

A zero-trust architecture will entail a wide variety of products, from traditional firewalls and endpoint controllers to more advanced technology, such as a sandbox, which can be used to isolate and inspect suspicious traffic or files. If you're buying these point solutions piecemeal, you're buying a lot of trouble.

"A lot of point products integrate differently," said Felipe Fernandez, Director of Systems Engineering at Fortinet Federal, which provides a cybersecurity mesh platform. **"That is a challenge for security professionals when they try to combine all those to create an advanced zero-trust capability."**

The Fortinet Security Fabric was designed to make it easy to integrate products and deploy security orchestration, automation and response capabilities in support of zero trust.

With an integrated approach, an organization can implement a zero-trust architecture "far faster and far better than they would have done with various point products, even with the help of an integrator," Fernandez said.



Felipe Fernandez
Director of Systems Engineering at Fortinet Federal

To learn more ideas for avoiding burnout, watch the [full event here](#).

Thank you to our sponsors:

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