

The ABCs of Work: Quiet

Career Development



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic explores the benefits of finding **Quiet** in your workday.

Last time we discussed the many reasons to Pray for good outcomes at work. Today we examine

how finding moments of Quiet helps you achieve good outcomes more often.

If only I could get everyone else to be quiet

Most lawyers like to read and analyze what they're reading. We like to think. We're happiest surrounded by heavy tomes that we wallow in without deadline or external stress. Alas, someone is usually clamoring for a quick answer. They don't want the legal theory, a long explanation, or really anything more than a simple Yes/No – can we do it?

It's not just business colleagues demanding answers. It's the business world itself. Countless calls on our attention. From emails and voicemails, memos and alerts, complaints and investigations. Every day is a cacophony of stimuli. Where to look first? What to rush through now so I can rush through something else.

We can acknowledge that our work worlds are complex without succumbing to being tossed helplessly from task to task. Just because someone wants an answer right now doesn't mean you must provide it on their timeline.

The best in-house counsel learn to jealously guard their time and parcel it out according to pre-determined priorities. They establish priorities based on overarching strategic considerations. You work on the most important thing regardless of how red an urgent thing is flashing.



Top in-house counsel prioritize their time to allocate working on higher priorities. eamesBot / *Shutterstock.com*

Because work life is noisy and complex, your options for introducing quiet are necessarily limited. I suggest keeping your expectations modest, but then sticking to your prioritization. For example, set aside two one-hour periods each day for quiet work. Block this time in your calendar and let no one intrude.

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Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

Some tasks that particularly benefit from quiet

What should you focus on when you are in one of your quiet moments?

- **Updating your strategic priorities**. Nowhere will you benefit more than in keeping your strategy clear. It guides everything you and your team do. You must thus ensure your strategy evolves as business needs and the environment change.
- **High stakes projects**. Save your best work for the projects that have the biggest impact. It may be tempting to knock off administrative tasks or small items on your to do list, because you can get a lot done in a short time. Contrast big projects, which usually require dedicated effort for longer periods to pay off.



It is best to when you are angry in the workplace to calm down and not act out of emotion. iIllusart / *Shutterstock.com*

- **When you're emotional**. Many regrets are midwifed by strong emotions. When you find your blood pressure rising, find a way to take a break. You can write an angry mail, but never send it angry. Wait until you've reconsidered it in a quiet moment.

When you'd rather make some noise

When you see inappropriate behavior, for example when someone is acting against your company's values, being quiet is not an option. Similarly, be alert if you feel like you're being asked to act against your personal values. Never ignore or quiet that nagging internal voice warning you something's wrong.

Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as finding quiet in your day. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and all the more so because we've kept things simple. Here to finish are some honorable mentions to serve as food for thought.

Queer — Here I refer to the other meaning, i.e., to "queer a deal" or derail what looked like a sure thing. You will probably recall times when negotiations went long and you were near the end. Suddenly your business colleagues start pressuring you not to cause trouble by raising open points. While you must never inadvertently queer the deal, nor should you cave on important points. The final negotiations are where you deliver your greatest value, which never comes from meekly yielding open points.

Question — Asking questions is probably the in-house lawyer's lowest cost activity with the greatest payback. Questions show you're interested. The answers sometimes uncover hidden assumptions. You learn new things. You are a more effective lawyer in proportion to the questions you ask.

Be well.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.