**TRAP 1: MANAGEMENT BY CRISIS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| My boss can’t tell a crisis from a minor blip. He loves an uproar! | As a team, study your projects/processes to rank risks by consequence. Prove you deliver on Red Zone risks (Part 1, Chapter 5). Help boss defocus lower-level risks. |
| A crisis blindsided us. Now we feel vulnerable | Chart both *likelihood* and *impact* of threats. Build trust with lateral groups for mutual early warning system. |
| Firefighting is our life! | Focus on *preventing* new fires. Use only necessary force to quell old ones. Prevention outguns repair every time. |
| Faulty time estimates causes crises and overloads all year. | Murphy’s Second Law says that things will take longer than you imagine. Examine previous lead-times. Add 20 percent cushions for a realistic standard lead time menu. |
| Poor reporting processes keep us blind to issues. | On a template, set interval targets to be met. Check off items completed and keep your own records, locally. |
| Team overreacts to VIP requests: All seem #1! | With demands from above - establish *what* is needed, *why* and *when*. Illustrate *choices* and *risks*. Negotiate, using the Two-Column To-Do Chart (Part 1, Chapter 2). |
| I feel panicky when bullied by the boss. | Count to ten seconds. Unless the place is under mortar attack, buy a moment to think. Go graphic: chart options together. |
| Oops! We punished the messenger: now we’re cut off by lateral peers. | First, apologize. When others deliver bad news, teach yourself to say “Thanks for this heads-up,” and mean it, even when the news disturbs you. |
| When the crisis ends, I resist “lessons learned.” I just want to forget! | Create a “task diary” so you can set clear expectations for next time. Wring some value from any disaster. |
| I got involved in a crisis way too big for me. | Think “referral” next time humility is for called for. Get an expert second opinion. Then help, where you can. |
| Yours? |  |

**TRAP 2: INADEQUATE PLANNING**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better approaches** |
| Who has time to plan? People are pounding at my door all day. | One hour of planning saves three to four hours of execution. Plan – before the pounding starts. Post priorities so “walk-ins” can see their “competition”. |
| Some planning systems are too complex to set up and maintain. | Once set up, an integrated calendar/project list saves time, repeatedly – and keeps co-workers informed. Or – sketch a simple chart showing your top 20 percent tasks (ranked by risk and value). Add a pie chart to show time allotments. |
| Few days are typical here. Emergencies occur to wreck our plans. | While emergencies may disrupt part of the day, you can minimize damage when a glance at your written plan returns your attention to priorities. |
| I keep my priorities in mind; no need to write them down. | No memory is infallible. No to-do list is complete until priorities are ranked, and deadlines set in writing. Besides, you can’t expect bosses and team-mates to read your mind. |
| Can’t choose between long-range and immediate tasks. | Break long-range tasks into segments. Place all segments on a timeline – some early, others later. Now, all tasks for today (whole or segments) become “short range”. |
| Everything is urgent. | Use triage. Validity and risk outvote urgency. |
| I try to do “first things first” but traffic is heaviest in the morning. | Earliest slots may not be “best”. Put toughest tasks into slots when you have best “energy, access and privacy”. Then batch similar tasks: several *calls, math* for two or more projects, then several *writing* tasks. Ride the learning curve. |
| Team disagrees about priorities: what deserves our best attention? | Set up a risk/value criteria exercise: Rank items such as safety, cost, compliance, profitability, staffing, and accuracy. Then, weight tasks against them. Highest scores win. |
| Three bosses compete for my prime time. I feel trapped. | Focus on *tasks*, not owners, when negotiating. Insist that risk/value (validity) must trump urgency in most cases. Don’t opt out. Express your view on relative validity of tasks; then, offer best options and build a set of standards. |
| When key client fails to plan, we must jump on it. | Get senior management to hold repeat offenders accountable. Build in penalties to compensate for chaos. What you tolerate will continue and worsen. |

**TRAP 3: INABILITY TO SAY NO**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| My desire for approval makes me cave in and say yes too often | If your clients and managers are reasonable, you can say yes 80 percent of the time. The trap lies in saying yes to that 20 percent of requests that may be unreasonable. |
| I fear offending with a “no”. | Smart bosses and customers are not offended when you point out a risk *they* may face. Instead, you gain respect. |
| I’m blinded by pride in my capabilities; then I pay if I come up short. | Your scarce skill set may increase demand, making your services more valuable. Resist spreading assets thin. Focus on Red Zone priorities. Delegate or relegate low risks. |
| I feel a sense of obligation to all who ask my help. | Discuss roots of this feeling with family or trusted friend. Control any “godlike” delusions. Your own team and boss may resent your being called away too often. |
| Can’t find words to beg off. | Count to five seconds. If saying no repels you, say: “I see a risk in this” or “Let me point out a risk you would face.” Then, sketch the risk on a notepad, to break eye contact. |
| What if I lack an excuse? | Most often, “no excuse” beats a poor excuse. Best exit is your own set of priorities. Keep your top 20 percent visible. |
| I’ve always said yes. How can I change that now? | Recall times when people poured on guilt, to get a yes. Once you did the work, did you feel thanked? Or used? Know when the time has come for courteous assertion. |
| I can say no to everyone but my boss. | Acknowledge the boss’s privileged position with you. Then, show your priorities and request a trade-off. Workers can’t stay mum, then blame their bosses for self-interest. |
| I said yes once too often to one of my peers; then my temper exploded, hurting us both. I apologized, but – what next? | Consider a conditional approach: “I can do X for you only if you can do Y for me. Our working relationship has become lopsided. Are you willing to even things out?” Rehearse this with a friend (not from your company) until you can do it comfortably. |
| I fear angering a boss or client if I opt out of a task on ethical grounds. In our global firm. | Hold to your values. But avoid opening with “you.” Instead, say: “I would not be comfortable doing that.” or “That would feel indiscreet for me. We must find another way.” |

**TRAP 4: COMMUNICATION**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| My boss dumps hasty instructions (e-mail or “live”) – and rushes off without clarifying. | Respectfully, point out any gaps in your understanding. Illustrate graphically, checklist style, so the boss can reply quickly, without needing to write to write any text. Provide an extremely convenient way to respond, then press for it. |
| We must write project plans so fast, I hit “Send” with a sense of dread. | Don’t hit that keyboard, yet. Spend seven minutes doing a SMART Chart (Part 1, Chapter 3). Get team accord on *specifics, measurables, achievables,* and *resources.* Your write-up will then affirm a plan you can call support. |
| People barge in, all upset about something minor, insisting on instant satisfaction and relief. | Unless you run an intensive care unit, you can buy time. Acknowledge that you understand the issue. Ask them to jot down what they need, focussing on what is still possible. Suggest that fast fixes often prove unsatisfying. |
| A valued employee comes in, threatening to quit. I feel like “promising her anything” to quiet her. | Don’t quiet her. Value her. Listen without interrupting. Ask questions only to confirm understanding. Observe body language, noting what is not said. When she falls silent, ask her to work with you on lasting fix, not a hasty one. |
| Stonewalling, resistant behaviour by subordinates brings out the beast in me. | Don’t press resisters: they’ve had more practice than you. Use friendly silence to reduce the voltage (mostly yours). Tell them the next ten minutes are all theirs. Then, listen. |
| It’s tough to be assertive with someone aggressive | Avoid linking the word “you” with anything construed as a judgment. Instead, say, “Here’s what *I* need.” Then say, “Tell me what *you* need.” Go from there. |
| When people whine about fairness, I get miffed. But I can’t say: “Life isn’t fair.” | Admit that any new policy will benefit some more than others. Address the luckier ones, asking how they could reduce pain for the others. People can be surprisingly kind. |
| Differing value systems and customs cause interpersonal foul-ups in our global firm. | Study the customs of your partners’ cultures. Read some books on global business etiquette. Others have taken the trouble to learn our ways. Take the time to reciprocate! |
| We’re all so busy, none of us has time for pep talks. | Post team victories “on the wall”. Focus people on the next big push. Work to win them rewards that matter to *them.* Graphic targets motivate: graphic mileposts sustain energy. |
| Best communication rule? | Focus on the future. It’s all we have left. |

**TRAP 5: POORLY RUN MEETINGS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| If there’s no news, why hold team meetings? Is the boss lonely or something? | News can be e-mailed, but team cohesion can’t be. At meetings, we get two-way idea exchange, to quiet anxieties, and to build trust by observing consistent behaviour. |
| Our rule is: No Agenda – no meeting! | Agreed – for scheduled meetings. For emergency meetings, creating an instant agenda becomes item one. Agendas help all participants to prepare, stay on track, and write minutes. |
| Too many of our meetings are called prematurely: no one is ready to vote. | If a meeting helps teams to argue complexities, thin out the options and explore emotions *before* voting, it’s a good meeting. Try agreeing: “No vote today.” People can then listen calmly. |
| Wrong people invited. | Meeting organizer should set date suitable to key players. Others can attend or send an authorized voter. |
| Late start – late finish! We’re held hostage! | Facilitators: don’t wait for latecomers – it rewards the wrong behaviour. End on time or expect people to “bail”. |
| While some take part, others play games on their smart phones. | Some companies confiscate electronic devices at the door. Why? Secret sneering by IM texters can damage teamwork, especially with overseas attendees who cannot see, but can sense skulduggery in the teleconference. |
| Interrupters are allowed to pull players from room. | Set policy so messages are held until after the meeting, unless there’s a major emergency. |
| The “minutes” issued long after the meeting do not reflect what happened there. | Produce “living minutes,” laptop to screen, or post them on flip charts, using a simple list format. Everyone can assent at once. No surprises later. |
| Some people criticize, or dominate, or hijack others’ ideas. | Teams who meet often should post etiquette rules. Facilitators can take the ball away from dominators. If you don’t want your idea hijacked, stand up, post it to a chart as you talk. Then, invite others to join in. |

**TRAP 6: THE WORLD GONE VIRTUAL**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| While doing legitimate internet searches, I get side tracked for hours | Run a time log and measure your time investment. Next, set narrower search criteria for better focus. Then, delegate certain searches to interns, less pressed for time than you. |
| I hate the learning curve required by each new release of software. | Yes – but you’ll love the time saved by integrating your calendar with tasks, projects, assignments, and deadlines. Once you set your preferences and practice a little, your new software can do everything but the laundry. Read the latest *dummies* books or take classes to catch on, fast. |
| Despite firewalls, I get a ton of unwanted data. | Control your own internet activity. Set preferences to block traffic by topic or sender. Ask IT what more you should do. |
| My boss complains if I visit personal and game sites during work hours, but often, I’m on break. | Better to log and control your use, than goad your security team into monitoring you. Log to see how often and how long you “stay to play” – then put yourself on a diet. Latest freeware now lets you clock all your time investments. |
| My laptop was snatched recently. My password protection failed, and I took a credit card hit. | Talk to your IT department about the best approach to creating passwords, changing them frequently, and otherwise protecting the company’s data and your own. |
| How much credence can I put into data researched on the internet? | The internet is free. No controls. No editors. No required differentiation between facts and opinions. Some sites strive for credibility. Check multiple sources including data from print publishers (who are still answerable in court). |
| I let my big brawling family e-mail me at work. their “duelling e-mails” were seen by IT and my senior boss. | What e-mail address did you give your family? An address belonging to your company – or your role there? Bad idea. Fit it now! Expect some noticeable damage to your career. |
| Should we treat the Internet as some sort of villain? | No. We have met the enemy, and they are us. |

**TRAP 7: E-MAIL MANIA**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| My boss says my tone on e-mail sounds harsh. | Ask a trusted friend to read your text aloud: you’ll hear any terseness. Don’t open sentences with the word “you” except for Thank you” or “You’re right.” |
| Can’t get teammates to stop forwarding junk mail. | Make your reasons clearer. Filter incoming mail by subject or sender. If all else fails. |
| I can’t resist opening e-mail, even when busy. | Turn off the signal. Set specific times of day to open e-mail. Then dare to lengthen the intervals. |
| Giant attachments crowd my inbox. | Agree with the team to post large documents to a shared site. Outline main points in your e-mail: include a link to the full document. |
| Old subject lines no longer apply. | Update subject lines to suit the current state of play. Or change only what follows the colon, e.g.: (original) ABC Visit: Budget; (*update)* ABC Visit: Postponement. |
| Long “threads” run back months, with or no conflicting conclusions. | The “owner” or project manager must consolidate the data at intervals, delete the old, and write a new summary. Invite fewer commentators, too. |
| People get criticized on e-mail; discord results. | Indiscretions always leak. If you supervise the sender, then coach, counsel, or discipline. If customers or vendors are the victims, expect repercussions. |
| My innocent e-mail was misinterpreted. | Set your spell check to flag “flamers or blamers.” Words like *wrong, neglect, mistake, ignore,* or *fail* tend to upset receivers. If angry, don’t use e-mail at all. |
| People use e-mail and IM, even in the same room with others. | E-mail is great for speed over distances. Otherwise, it does isolate us. Use face-to-face and phone chats for two-way talk/ Allow nuances and silences to aid understanding. |
| I find myself re-reading e-mails without acting on them. | Set up an efficient system such as:   * *Not my business?*   Refer, Reject, or Delete/   * *My business: easy?*   Read, Respond, Act, then File.   * *My business: complicated?*   Read, acknowledge receipt, announce time needed.  Then, research, decide, respond. |

**TRAP 8: THE UNTAMED TELEPHONE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| Hooked on smartphone technology, I buy fun new “apps” daily. It’s like eating popcorn I can’t stop! | People who couldn’t walk past a rotary dial phone booth in the old days can’t pass up a phone gizmo now. No need to track the time you’re spending; you’ll see it on your monthly bill! If ready, find a “cell phone addiction” support group. |
| I feel obliged to take calls from customers or bosses even when rushing to meet a vital deadline. | First, reserve time for vital work in your Red Zone, free of calls. Then bracket each Red Zone with contact cushions so people can reach you and you can respond. Give them any time except Red Zone time. |
| In a service industry, we must take all incoming calls no matter the value. | Use caller ID. Set up a system to refer mid-value calls to live help. Bump lowest-value calls to voice mail with a call-back promise or other help. Prioritize: then provide. |
| We’ve had a change in procedure that will drive a lot of internal phone traffic. | Don’t take calls one at a time on big changes. Set up “clinic times” when people can gather in groups to ask questions and get answers. Post illustrated instructions on a shared website. Support change through several media. |
| My biggest customers tend to phone at heaviest traffic times, getting queued up. | Treat such customers to a graph showing heavy traffic. Find a “privileged slot” when you can service them properly. Customers may still call at will – but at least some of their service will be top notch and reliable. |
| Requesters leave so little data on voice-mail, I have no idea what they need. | On your voice mail greeting, say: “Please leave your name and number, and a brief message about what you need so we can get back to you with an answer.” |
| If I fail to respond right away, some callers will leave repeated messages on voice-mail. | Again, your voice-mail greeting can head this off. You say: “Please leave a message about what you need. I can begin returning calls at \_\_ o’clock. If that would delay you, please call \_\_.” (set-up a referral service person.) |
| Some callers just drone on. | It’s ok to cue a close. Example: “Kim, before we hang up, I want to be sure we’ve agreed …” or “Before I head to my meeting, have we covered everything?”. |
| I sometimes fail to get the point, myself. | When you know someone is busy, say so. Try: “Hi Louise. This is Jeff. I know you’re busy, so here’s one quick question.” Then, say what you need. She’ll be grateful. |

**TRAP 9: INCOMPLETE INFORMATION AND THE PAPER CHASE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| Our team can’t decide what info we really need. | Your team could the following questions to determine what you do need. Then build a set of request templates to help your info-sources supply the right data. (these represent planning)   * What information will we need? At what stages of a project? * Where will the information originate? Which department? Person? * Who is empowered to gather it? How many players are involved? * What deadlines are critical? * What cushions must we build in to our request? (the other guy can’t be answerable for any lateness of ours.) * What could go wrong? * What steps could we take to buffer errors or delays? * What alternative sources could we tap? When? At what cost? |
| We’re still paper-heavy, with poor filing facilities. Can’t seem to store it, find it, or get it moving. | If buried, get help from a trained administrative assistant, at least to dig you out. As for moving paper onward – pencil your reactions into the margin, so you need not reread the original. Store incoming paper vertically – never stack it. |
| I’m constantly interrupted by people dropping off essential paperwork, but it’s confidential stuff. | Provide convenient vertical “drop boxes” – well labelled for easy slotting. Provide lock-boxes for confidential drop-offs. |
| Lateral groups deliver data we asked for – too little, too late. | Begin early. Say *why* something’s late. Ask *what* it would take *now* to expedite the request fully. Take it forward. |
| Straggler managers fail to ok action reports. | If the majority have voted, seek boss’s ok to close your memo with: “Unless we hear from you by \_\_, we will assume you are willing to join the majority vote.” |
| My own boss is slow to ok action on reports he pressed me into writing. | Don’t make the boss wade through the whole text. Instead, e-mail a list of points needing approval, with links to the text. Make it easy but be firm about deadline. |
| My journal reading load is brutal. Can’t get through it. | Rotate duty among staffers; give credit for good summaries. Switch to electronic journals; scan with AutoSummarize. |
| I put off letter-writing until too tired to write. | Keep a file of best phrases from earlier letters. Adapt and reuse whenever you’re too tired to write well. |

**TRAP 10: CONFUSED RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| How does responsibility differ from authority? | Define responsibility as duty: authority as power to perform it. List your duties and powers, side by side, to clarify. |
| There’s no written description for my job. | Write your own, in list format. Open each entry with a verb, e.g.: *supervises, buys, appoints, selects.* Get this description approved. Update it before each performance appraisal. |
| My job overlaps others. | Of course, large workloads will often justify several players with the same skill sets and titles. Simply negotiate areas where work might be duplicated wastefully. |
| A team-mate muscles into my area, confusing others whose help we need. | Without apparent rancor, clarify with the boss to eliminate confusion and avoid conflicting instructions. Illustrate consequences already occurring, as objectively as you can. |
| I’ve been made responsible without the authority I need. | Before acceding, find out whose co-operation you’ll need. Help draft a notice for the boss to send out, authorizing you to expect the usual support. |
| Our job titles do not reflect what we actually do. | Titles convey authority, and assure at least minimal respect and co-operation. Check the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* for ideas on accurate titles. Talk to your boss and HR. |
| Our organisation chart is completely outdated. | Every organization with more than one layer of authority needs an org chart. Failing that, get approval to sketch out task ownership and hierarchy, at least, locally. |
| Our evaluation format is unrelated to job descriptions. | Well in advance of your next review, add a column or overlay that ties your actual performance factors to the evaluation format. Your boss may welcome the clarity. |
| My boss has me write my own annual review. | Negotiate. Whoever writes the review can also set raises and promotions. I bet your boss will come around. |

**TRAP 11: POOR DELEGATION AND TRAINING**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| I hesitate to delegate – mistakes could be costly. | Accept some risk as inherent to delegation. Overcome it with smart task selection. Then recruit and provide rigorous training and frequent follow-up. |
| It’s quicker to do it myself. | True once, but not repeatedly. Choose repetitive tasks so competence can build. Your cost / hour is too high for repeats. |
| I’m not ready to train; we have no tools in place. | That’s ok. You need to prepare training tools well ahead of trainee arrival. Write an index card for each task segment. Organize the cards for easy learning, a few at a time. |
| With previous attempts, I micromanaged the poor newbie – drove him crazy. | Teach at a “learner’s level” – not your veteran level. Set reachable targets; get feedback reports at agreed intervals to prevent yourself from “hovering”. |
| My trainee said she “got it”: then she fumbled badly. | First, you train and demonstrate. Then, the learner repeats and demonstrates. That playback is vital. With hold any critique until the trainee runs the full set of steps. Retrain if necessary. Let the learner show you again, until you are secure. |
| I enjoy some jobs too much to delegate them. | You got your credits when you stabilized that job. Now that it’s safe to delegate, it’s going to take newer, more challenging tasks to make you famous. |
| Even my my most seasoned people call me a control freak. | When supervising people with deep experience in a task, you must focus on results, not rigid rules and methods. Measure outcomes, not activities. Loosen your grip. |
| I can’t delegate; everyone is overloaded, and we’re in a hiring freeze. | Trade off with a fellow worker, each using best strengths to save time. Form temporary partnerships. Or get approval for outsourcing at lower rates per hour. |
| Confidential or proprietary work must stay with me. | Negotiate this. Can your management prove that some age or experience level signals readiness to handle confidential or proprietary work? Warn them against bias – or create a way to mask confidential data, yet delegate routine support work. |
| Lacking budget, we all put in excess overtime to the point of exhaustion. | If you’re a non-profit, seek volunteer help. Paper the district with flyers about your worthy mission. If you’re profit makers, use flex hours to attract students or skilled retirees. |

**TRAP 12: PROCRASTINATION AND LEAVING TASKS UNFINISHED**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| I don’t notice I’ve been dragging my feet until someone accuses me of it. | On late starts, humbly ask a coach to “call” you on it, every time. If you’re “failing to finish”, just check those “late” flags in Outlook or on your project timeline. |
| People say I enjoy the drama of leaving things to the last minute. | If it’s true, give up the “hero” role. Impending lateness, kept secret, will irritate bosses, and embitter peers assigned to last-minute rescues. They’ll take their revenge some day. |
| I’ve really bought into the notion that I work better under pressure. | No. You work faster, at the expense of quality and safety. |
| I do the stuff I enjoy first, leaving less time for the dreary or difficult stuff. | You needn’t “*do priorities first*,” you must “*slot* them first” so their on-time completion is assured. Best work gets best slot. Keep your fun stuff out of the Red Zone. |
| But, it all has to get done, doesn’t it? | No. The vital or urgent work has to get done: very high consequences flow from it. But minor tasks, postponed, may get forgiven or easily caught up. |
| Other people’s faulty deadlines cause our tardy starts, late finishes. | Use your own standard lead time estimates, or insist on seeing their estimates, up front. Then, waste no time renegotiating if the task proves harder than advertised. |
| The workload is so big, I grow weary and lethargic. | Look into objective standards for your job title. Measure your actual output against norms. If you can prove overload, then negotiate. If not, do you need a smaller job with more modest rewards? |
| I admit, I’m lousy at self-discipline. | Use electronic or written reminders, a list, wall chart – any vivid visual cue. Jolt yourself into action before your boss or customer finds someone better. |
| As a researcher, once I “crack the case” I lose interest. Hence, I don’t finish the details. | If you can prove your role as resident genius (and you’ll have to), your organization may provide you with a whole troop of qualified “finishers”. Gladly. |
| If I try to multi-task, my memory blurs on the tasks I left mid-stream. | Sure, finish brief tasks in one go. For large tasks competing over months, check “Mind Mapping” web-sites for formats that keep all tasks creatively and colourfully, in view. |

**TRAP 13: SOCIALIZING AND DROP-IN VISITORS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| As social animals, we need a change of pace from our drudgery … so why not drop in on colleagues? | Sure, we’ll drop in on friends, but we should look before we barge in. Avoid breaking another’s concentration just to relieve your boredom. Find less busy pals at the break room, cafeteria, or water cooler when you want to socialize. |
| I warn that I have only 5 minutes to spare. But they over stay. | Tell the visitor that your 5 minutes are all theirs. Don’t return the volley; it lengthens the conversation. At minute 4, start moving toward your previous obligation. |
| I dare not throw visitors out for fear of offending. | Be candid about your deadlines. Express regret and suggest a later time, and possibly a different place. |
| As a subject matter expert I must stay available to all. | Set up some open times, when those who need your help can rely on your full attention. Don’t cut contact time. Just cut randomness. |
| I micromanaged my new hires: now they’re “trained” to bother me for every little thing. | Maybe it’s time to teach “exception reporting.” Invite warnings about deviations from plan, but ask them to keep notes on your advice and consult those notes next time. Otherwise, set regular, not random check-in times. |
| Chatty friends – among them my boss – tend to tarry too long. | Stand up when it’s time to wrap up. Foreshadow the end of the chat: “Is there anything else we need to cover? I’ve got a tight deadline. It’s for you, Boss.” |
| My office sits in a traffic pattern. | If you can’t change the location, at least seat yourself obliquely to the passing throng. Don’t catch their eye. Find a remote hideaway when concentration is crucial. |
| People must interrupt me to deliver highly confidential reports into my hands. | Position a secure slot or lock-box near your office or just inside, so people can deliver packages without interrupting you. |
| Friends with too little to do settle in for long visits. | Jokingly threaten to put them to work. If the work is not “classified,” do as you threatened, with a smile. |
| I see socializing as a trust-builder; an investment in the future. | Good. Everything in moderation. After a lengthy visit, make a note of the time spent; be honest about the point of diminishing returns. Go for brevity with no less warmth. |

**TRAP 14: ATTEMTPING TOO MUCH**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues** | **Better Approaches** |
| My family complains I work too much. Despite my high energy, I do feel burned out lately. | If work feels endlessly dreary, if you awaken tired after a night’s sleep, you may be in early burn-out. See your physician for a stress check-up. Take that vacation time you’ve racked up. Write a plan for balancing work and life. |
| I’m an entrepreneur, and energetic workaholic. But my personal life has evaporated. | If you love what you’re doing, and hardly notice long hours (business owners easily do 80 to 90 hours a week), then good! Focus on results, simplify work. Decide how long you can do this. Is your bio-clock ticking? Is your health strong? In any case, when tired, stop for the day. Fatigue breeds mistakes. |
| But it *all* has to get done. | By you? Alone? Today? Chart high risk/high value work. Get that done. Check upper mid-value work. Get that done next. Calculate benefit of lower-value work. Postpone it. |
| I’m a perfectionist in all things. | Be a perfectionist in many things, but not all. For example, rough data is enough for a “go/no go” decision. Fine-tuned figures are required only if you decide it’s a go! |
| Work pals say I overdo it, but I take pride in hard work. | You’ll do better taking pride in outstanding results. Hard work is not a virtue in itself. |
| They’ve folded 2 jobs into 1. I took it on, and it’s a killing load. | Find data (objective quality and quantity standards) for your blended job title / description. Search industry reports; talk with your opposite number in related firms. Find out if are carrying two jobs for one pay-check. Do a time log, and negotiate for money, time, help, or task reduction. |
| As a boss, I worry that the whole team is over-worked | Help them build realistic time estimates for their work. Focus people on productivity (high pay back for energy invested). Then, get them the part-time or temp that they need to dig out of a temporary or seasonal overload. |
| As a boss, I’m blessed with a dedicated team; they’ll sometimes work until exhausted, though. | If they’re cleaning up a real emergency, stay alongside. Know when to feed them, when to tell them they’ve broken the back of the problem, when to send them home. Say: “New day tomorrow!” Then, make your thanks public. |