

# . . . cope with a burgeoning workload

**Mark Hunter** gives a ten-point plan to avoid overreacting when work seems too much

## Keep a record

1 Workload has a habit of creeping up on you. Before you know it, your nine-to-five day has become eight-to-seven and you are struggling to cope. Vanessa Robinson, head of HR practice development at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, advises anyone who feels that their workload is getting out of control to keep a written record of the increase. "Don't let increased workload become the norm," she said. "A record will give you a good starting point if you need to have a conversation about it with your boss."

## Go home

2 It is easy to get sucked into presenteeism, where everybody stays later and later to prove they are pulling their weight. Ms Robinson said that this can be unnecessary: "In theory, in times of recession the business is reducing. So it may be that there is less to do than you think."

## Understand yourself

3 Ryan Ahearn, head of learning and development at the Institute of Directors, emphasises that senior managers require self-awareness to deal with increased workload efficiently. "You need to know your strengths and weaknesses. Do you work better early in the morning or later in the day? What can you do better yourself and what should you delegate to others?"

## Stay visible

4 If your workload is increasing, the same will be true for your staff. Now is not the time to bury your head in your overflowing inbox. "Your staff are going to need support and they will be looking for leadership," Mr Ahearn said. "It is important for your business that you are there to provide that."

## Don't procrastinate

5 Richard Maybury's company [priorityattitudes.com](http://priorityattitudes.com) advises businesses on how to improve



When your workload gets too great, you must address the problem

productivity. He believes that procrastination has "almost become our default position . . . We forward e-mails from our BlackBerry or use snooze in Outlook and we think we have dealt with it. As a result, we end up focusing on issues that shout the loudest. We need to use technology better. This means going back to fundamental principles: Read something once, then make a decision. Deal with it or delete it or delegate it or add it to your calendar to be dealt with at a later date. We need to live more in our calendars than our inboxes."

## Avoid deadline drama

6 Work is never more overwhelming than when an important deadline is looming.

Jo Whitbourn, marketing manager at the Chartered Management Institute, recommends avoiding the failure of missed deadlines by staggering work: "The trick is to avoid one deadline. Instead, set a number of smaller targets, as these will help you to reach your goal with greater comfort."

## Remove clutter

7 "Overload comes from feeling out of control because you have a number of demands competing for your attention," Ms Whitbourn said. "One way to tackle this is by keeping an ordered, tidy desk. Having fewer things to distract you means that you are more likely to manage the key tasks in hand."

## Stay focused

8 If your time and energy are becoming increasingly precious, don't waste them on things that are not essential to your business. "It's easy to focus on tasks that are quick wins," Ms Whitbourn said, "but ask yourself if the task is contributing to your overall objectives. Anything else is just a distraction."

## Don't panic

9 Overreacting to adverse events is a sure way to start the overload snowball rolling. According to Eugene Farrell, business manager at AXA ICAS, a corporate wellbeing specialist, one of the biggest recent contributors to workload has been the reaction to the threat of swine flu. "UK plc seemed to launch into full crisis-management mode before it was really necessary," he said. "Many organisations then found that their contingency plans weren't up to scratch, so they are now having to draw up new ones."

## Step off the treadmill

10 When work builds up, the temptation is to get your head down and simply get on with it. However, it pays to take a breather now and then. "It's always a good idea to take stock of how you are handling things in a logical, cognitive way," Mr Farrell said. "Look for warning signs, such as increasing impatience, irritability, getting angry, oversensitivity, making emotional rather than rational decisions. Good organisations are sensitive to emotional intelligence."

## The impact of longer hours



Source: Chartered Management Institute survey of 1,511 managers