

“Traffic Rules to Live By”

By Dawn Travelstead

Know your “power.” As the Traffic Manager, you have the power to move deadlines – so long as they don’t hinder the overall workflow of the agency. There’s no need to seek approval from the Account Executive (AE), for example, IF you know there’s padding in a job’s timeline. Move the deadline and let everyone involved know you did so.

Find Tasks that can be completed simultaneously. Don’t get caught in a linear rut -- Task One...Task Two... Task Three. Look at the overall project and find Tasks that can be completed simultaneously. Can the AE start the estimate while the Copywriter begins putting pen to pad? Can the Art Director think about photos while the Print Buyer researches display options? The more Tasks that can be executed simultaneously, the shorter the job’s lifecycle.

Find out what employees need in order to complete Tasks. Don’t approach the Copywriter, for example, and say, “Are you going to have the copy done on Friday?” Rather, ask him, “Do you have everything you need in order to have the copy done on Friday?” If you wait until Friday, expecting to receive copy, and find it’s not done because he needed a phone number but didn’t take the time to ask, you’re as much at fault as he is for missing the deadline. As the Traffic Manager, it’s your job to make sure employees have what they need, not to simply hold them accountable when they aren’t finished on time.

Understand employees don’t “want” to miss deadlines. No one wakes up in the morning and thinks to herself, “I’m going to miss three deadlines today and feel good about it.” Missed deadlines happen for a reason. It’s your job, as the Traffic Manager, to ensure they don’t. Monitor each employee’s workload carefully and move deadlines – ideally, closer in not further out.

Be proactive, not reactive. When you become reactive to missed deadlines, rather than proactive in avoiding them, you become part of the problem... not the solution. As the Traffic Manager, it’s your job to ensure things move smoothly. If you spend the majority of your time chasing work rather than plotting its course, you’re not doing your job.

Don’t play “gotcha.” It makes employees feel bad and, ultimately, can lead to their becoming even less productive -- if not out of discouragement then merely to spite you. You’ll get a lot more work done by being a partner and sharing the responsibility with employees than you will by being a hall monitor. No one likes a snitch!

Let employees know you see them as individuals, not machines. Happy employees are productive. Take a moment to ask Bob how his new dog is doing; ask Susan how the wedding plans are coming along. It’s important to establish connections with employees rather than constantly asking them if they’ve gotten their work done. If they know you respect them as individuals, they’ll be much more inclined to work with you.

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