

Open-door policy? No!

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak
COLUMNIST (www.AdviceChief.com)

We often hear how bosses should have an open-door policy--where they always leave their office door open to allow peers and subordinates to come talk them anytime about almost anything without having to make an appointment. As cool as that is, it's not really productive for the boss.

When it comes to an office door policy, don't make any declarations about it. If you feel obligated to address it, then be sure to give it some flexibility--times when your door is open and times it is closed. Having an open-door policy does facilitate timely communication with your people but a closed-door policy is needed when you have to concentrate on important tasks, phone calls, emails, or if you just need quiet time to think. And certainly close your door if you're having a private meeting with someone. No one likes the idea of someone possibly eavesdropping outside your door.

If people still interrupt you when your door is closed, then keep it simple. Tell everyone if your door is closed, you're not available to talk and that they can leave a message on a board or notepad, or they can send you a text or email (unless there's a legitimate emergency

or a very important situation). And if your door is open, well, they can knock and pop their head in.

When you leave your office, be sure to indicate in some manner that you're "out of office," especially if you've closed your door, so people don't waste valuable time waiting for you when you're not there.

If people are antsy and always checking to see if your door is open or closed, then maybe an alternating open-and closed-door schedule will work. Something like this:

Morning

7:30 - 9:00: Closed Door

9:00 - 11:00: Open Door

11:00 - 12:00: Closed Door

Lunch

12:00 - 1:00

Afternoon

1:00 - 2:00: Closed Door

2:00 - 4:00: Open Door

4:00 - 5:00: Closed Door

This type of schedule would allow people to correctly anticipate your availability. If something comes up that derails this schedule, announce it by email or leave a note on your door or with your secretary. Perhaps a different type of schedule will work for you but consider one and test it.

Many of the managers I knew who

proudly declared they had an open-door policy became prisoners to other people's demands, needs, and events. For some it worked out okay, but for others they struggled to control the pace of their days. For the latter, I noticed their schedules were seldom reliable and they were usually late to events and meetings--even the meetings they called!

If you truly want to keep your office door open all the time based on your mission requirements, then I suggest you do the following to prevent people from popping their head in for small chat or from disturbing you in other ways: arrange your office furniture so that the position of your desk chair prevents you from making eye contact with anyone walking by or standing in front of your office. People are less likely to wave or speak to you when your back or side is facing the doorway instead of your face.

Whichever door strategy you choose, be sure to not keep your door closed most of the time. There is nothing more frustrating than a boss rarely available to discuss issues, approve important decisions, or give proper guidance and mentoring when necessary. So be available but be in control!

~ The End ~