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COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I’m the boss and I have an open-door policy but it’s killing me! I never get any work done because as soon as someone walks out of my office another person walks in. This causes me to have to always stay late into the night checking emails and preparing for meetings among other things. I know I can’t have a closed-door policy so what approach should I take to get better control of this?

OPEN DOOR BOSS



DEAR OPEN DOOR BOSS: It’s time to close your door because yes, you can have a closed-door policy some of the time. Having an open-door policy facilitates timely communication with your people but there are times when you need to kick the door shut so you can get some work done, have a private meeting, or not be disturbed.

First of all, there is no universal rule on what kind of open-door policy works best for every boss. Each policy must be adapted for maximum efficiency based on the mission at hand.

When it comes to an open-door policy, I recommend you keep it simple. If your door is open, you’re available. If your door is closed, you’re not available and people should either write a message on a board or notepad, or maybe send you a text or email. And people should not be knocking on your closed door

Doors wide shut

unless there’s a legitimate emergency or a very important situation.

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.

A tactic concerning an open- and closed-door policy that worked great for me was adhering to a scheduled routine. For example, I once used the following schedule and it was very efficient for everyone involved:

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

If something came up that derailed this, I would announce it via a wide-spread email or leave a note on my door. And my weekly staff meeting was Monday mornings during the 9:00 - 11:00 time slot. This schedule allowed people to correctly anticipate when I’d be available to discuss issues with them without them having to always get on my calendar. Perhaps a different type of schedule will work for you but consider one and test it.

Other managers I knew never addressed any kind of open- or closed-

door policy and went about their days in accordance with the flow of people’s needs and events. For some this was appropriate and worked well and for others it produced inconsistent results as they struggled to control the pace of their days. For the latter, I noticed their schedules were never very reliable and they were usually late to events and meetings--even the meetings they called!

When you are present in your office with your door open, I recommend 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 are facing the doorway instead of your face.

Whatever you choose to do, be sure to NOT have a continuous closed-door policy. There is nothing more frustrating than a boss never available to discuss issues, approve important decisions, or give proper guidance and mentoring when necessary. So be available but be in control. After all, you’re the boss.



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.