

Good office managers change a company for the better, making it more productive and harmonious. At many companies, that's a big job. But developing some useful skills, from technology to business law, can make a difference.

Does your workplace feel like Dunder Mifflin on *The Office* or is it mostly productive and calm? If it's the latter, chances are you have a great office manager on the job. Being an office manager is no easy task. It requires the mind of an engineer, the soul of a social worker and the skills of a magician. Difficult? Yes. Impossible? No.

Every office is quirky, with its own ecosystem of personalities, work styles and culture. Here are three strategies to help an office manager succeed at making all the parts function as a cohesive whole.

Be Objective in Resolving Conflict

Feuding employees get in the way of achieving business goals. If work is disrupted and customers are not being served, the office manager must step in. To successfully resolve conflicts the manager must be fair and impartial, focused solely on getting the office back on track.

How do you resolve conflict successfully? Be scrupulous about hearing out the combatants. Listen to each party, then act for the good of the office. Keep your supervisors in the loop when making sensitive or potentially unpopular decisions and let someone else be the bearer of bad news if necessary.

And don't think every problem is yours to solve. Other professionals are better equipped to handle issues involving criminal, erratic or violent behavior.

Update Your Skills and Knowledge

Someone's on the road and having BlackBerry issues. The boss can't print the PowerPoint for the presentation in 15 minutes. E-mail is spewing spam. The other side of the technology that makes our offices (and lives) run is that it doesn't always work.

That's why everyone's go-to guy or gal must understand a company's systems, software and infrastructure. Take classes, consult with an expert or participate in a professional organization to stay current. While the office manager can't fix every glitch, it's important to be able to identify and troubleshoot problems.

To be Overworked is Human, to Delegate Divine

In today's multifaceted workplaces, delegating is a necessity, not an option. Some tasks that could be delegated include customer service, equipment procurement and maintenance, travel arrangements, routine technology tasks, budget, payroll and human resources functions.

To take on these roles, look for capable people in your immediate sphere. Some may need training; all will need guidance. Review their work regularly and provide constructive suggestions. Always recognize good work.

Delegating doesn't just free up some of your time. It also engages employees. Giving them new responsibilities shows you value them and want them to thrive.

By combining good people and conflict-resolution skills, technology and operations knowledge, and the ability to delegate successfully, you can create and maintain an office that works. And you won't end up being spoofed in prime time.

