Creative Office Manager

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From Food to Fabrication: How to Thrive as an Office Manager in a New Industry

Q: *I recently took a job managing the office of a small machine shop after years of working for a food wholesaler. The change has been good—I'm closer to home and I like the team—but I feel completely out of my depth when it comes to the industry itself. I'm an experienced office manager, but I don't understand the terminology, the workflow, or what our customers are asking for half the time. I'm embarrassed when I have to ask people to explain things multiple times, even how to spell words for phone messages. How can I get up to speed and be effective in a workplace that's so unfamiliar to me?*

—Feeling Lost in the Shop

A: First of all, welcome to the club—many office managers have found themselves in your steeltoed shoes after switching industries. The good news is, the skills that make you a great office manager do transfer. Now it's just a matter of building your industry-specific knowledge, and you're already on the right track by asking how to do that.

Here's how to get your footing and start feeling confident in your new role:

1. Acknowledge that being new is okay. You weren't hired to be a machinist—you were hired to manage and support the business. Give yourself the

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grace to learn. Most people respect curiosity and humility more than bluffing your way through.

2. Build your own "Machine Shop 101" cheat sheet.
Start collecting key terms, common customer requests, names of parts and processes, and a rough idea of how the workflow happens from order to delivery. Jot down questions and answers as they come up—you'll be surprised how fast you start making connections.

3. Ask for help privately.
If you're hesitant to ask "basic" questions in front of the team, pull aside a kind and knowledgeable colleague and say, "I'm still learning the industry—can you walk me through what that means?" Most people are happy to explain when they know you're asking to do your job better.

4. Listen and learn from the floor.
Spend a few minutes each day watching what goes on in the shop, if possible. Ask to see a finished part, or what a setup looks like. It's easier to understand technical terms when you've seen the tools and products in action.

5. Create a call-handling cheat sheet.
If incoming calls are confusing, make a list of common customer questions and the best person to route them to. Over time, you'll start to recognize patterns and know exactly how to respond.

6. Use online resources.
YouTube is full of videos that show how machine shops work—from CNC (that's Computer Numerical Control, in case you were wondering) basics to shop walkthroughs. A few short videos a week can go a long way in helping you understand the big picture.

7. Lean on what you do know.
You already know how to manage schedules, coordinate teams, handle paperwork, and keep things running smoothly. Those skills are just as valuable in a machine shop as they were in food distribution.

You're not lost—you're learning a new language with words like "flanges," "bearings," "bushings," "lathes" and "jigs." Give yourself 30 to 60 days of steady effort, and you'll feel a whole lot more at home in this industry. Keep showing up, stay curious, and remember: your fresh perspective is a strength, not a weakness. ◼

Revenge Quitting: Why Employees Are Sabotaging Employers on Their Way Out

By Lynne Curry

On Adam's last day, he recorded a TikTok video walking through his employer's facility, pointing out every OSHA violation. The video amassed millions of views, prompting an investigation and hefty fines for the company.

Maggie managed her company's social media accounts. After a heated argument with her boss, she changed all the account passwords and quit. The company's online presence froze overnight and attempts to reset the accounts revealed Maria had tied them to her personal email.

After being berated by his manager too many times, Sam quit during a staff meeting. Before leaving, he sent out an email blast to the company's most important clients, listing every unethical practice he had witnessed.

Heather worked in a small boutique firm. Her boss allowed her to take frequent personal day—even entire weeks off—to deal with family matters. When Heather decided to leave, she deleted the records showing she'd worked a part-time schedule for full-time pay and filed a lawsuit claiming she had worked excessive unpaid overtime. She used her lawsuit to pressure her former boss into letting her steal reams of proprietary material so she could set up a rival company.

Raj, an IT technician, hated his employer. On his last day, he deleted a series of crucial files, claiming they were no longer necessary. A week later, when the company scrambled to recover them, they discovered the backups were mysteriously corrupted.

Nancy handled payroll. On her last day, she "accidentally" deleted the master payroll file. Employees didn't get paid on time. Nancy claimed it was an honest mistake, but her smirk during the exit interview told another story.

Revenge quitting—abrupt resignations paired with destructive behaviors—has become the latest workplace trend, and the damage is real. A 2024 survey of 2,300 employees reports that that nearly one out of every six employees had witnessed a coworker deliberately alter crucial employer data prior to quitting. One in ten of those surveyed admitted to destroying files themselves before leaving.

Why the surge in revenge quitting? Experts point to a cocktail of rising workloads, difficult managers, and unpopular return-to-office mandates. Many angry employees see revenge quitting as a tool for sending a message or "getting even;" some, like Heather, are opportunists.

How employers can respond

Spot warning signs and red flags among employees.

Disengagement doesn't happen in a day. Employees telegraph their dissatisfaction through missed deadlines, lack of collaboration, and waning motivation. Leaders must tune in before frustrations explode. missed deadlines. Employers need to stay tuned to what's going on with their employees. As highlighted in *Managing for Accountability*'s chapter 8, top executives need to step outside their leadership bubble and discover what they don't hear or see when they live in the good-news cocoon that dilutes bad news.

Revenge Quitting: Why Employees Are Sabotaging Employers on Their Way Out

Build trust and engagement.

Leadership starts with action. Employers need to rebuild trust with employees by keeping their word. When employers promise employees growth opportunities and professional development, they need to deliver.

Business owners and managers need to show they're genuinely interested in their employees. They can do this by conducting skip-level meetings, and stay interviews.

Respect matters—yet only 37% of employees currently feel respected at work, a steep drop from 44% in 2021.

Plan for the worst.

No organization is immune to data sabotage, but many leave themselves vulnerable. Only 43% of companies have tools in place to ensure employee data is backed up. Employers must create redundant systems to protect critical information and prevent irreparable damage.

Act now.

The warning signs are clear if employers open their eyes. Gallup's November 2024 poll of 20,000 U.S. employees reveals over half (51%) are actively looking for a new job, the highest figures since 2015. With a cooling job market and fewer opportunities to switch jobs, frustrations among employees are boiling over. Employers must act now—through trust, engagement, and proactive security measures—or risk even greater losses.

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Banish Bad Passwords

One of the simplest—and most overlooked—security threats in any office is weak passwords. They might seem harmless, but bad passwords are like leaving the front door unlocked. All it takes is one compromised login to give hackers access to sensitive data, client information, or internal systems.

The good news? It's one of the easiest problems to fix. It starts with understanding what makes a password "bad" in the first place.

What Makes a Password Bad?

A bad password is one that's easy to guess, commonly used,

Banish Bad Passwords

or reused across multiple accounts. These kinds of passwords can be cracked in seconds using automated tools—or even by someone taking a lucky guess.

Here are some of the worst offenders:

- 123456
- password
- qwerty
- letmein
- admin
- iloveyou
- abc123
- office2024
- welcome1
- companyname123

Yes, people still use these. Even in professional environments.

Why People Still Use Weak Passwords

It's usually about convenience. With so many logins to keep track of, people default to what's easy to remember—even if it puts the whole organization at risk. Reusing the same password across accounts is also a major problem. If one account is compromised, everything else using that same login becomes vulnerable.

How to Build Better Habits Across the Office

A few simple steps can dramatically improve password security and help prevent costly mistakes:

Set Password Rules

Create clear standards for workplace passwords:

- At least 12 characters long
- Includes uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols
- No repeating previous passwords
- Require updates every 3–6 months

Discourage Password Sharing

Remind everyone: passwords should never be shared over email, chat apps, or on sticky notes. If someone needs access, it's better to set them up with their own login whenever possible.

Use a Password Manager

Password management tools like 1Password, LastPass, or Bitwarden can store and autofill complex passwords for employees. These tools also generate strong, unique passwords automatically—taking the pressure off staff to create and remember them.

Offer a Quick Training or Tip Sheet

A short lunch-and-learn or a simple email with password dos and don'ts can make a big impact. Most employees want to do the right thing—they just need the information.

What a Good Password Looks Like

Strong passwords can still be memorable—especially when built using a phrase, random words, or a personal system. Some examples:

- H0liday@72!Beagle
- Sn0w_Globe!2025
- T&bPastaCar#004
- gR@p3fru!t_T!g3r

Better yet, let a password manager create them so no one has to struggle.

The Bottom Line

Weak passwords are one of the easiest ways into a workplace's digital systems—and one of the easiest threats to prevent. Taking time to promote better password habits now can save everyone a lot of stress, downtime, and potential data loss down the line.

Security doesn't have to be complicated. It just has to be smart. And it starts with saying goodbye to 123456. ∎

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Create Your Own Key Contacts Cheat Sheet

When things go sideways in the office—a printer meltdown, a flooded bathroom, or a sudden software crash—you don't want to waste time digging through old emails or shared drives to find the right person to call. That's where your Key Contacts Cheat Sheet comes in.

Think of this as your office emergency contact list and your daily go-to. Whether you're onboarding a new team member, organizing a vendor delivery, or just trying to figure out who has the key to the supply closet, this list saves time and stress. It's also a handy tool to keep in a shared drive or print and post in a secure spot.

Here's what to include:

☑ General Office Contacts

Reception/Front Desk:
Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Office Manager (You!):
Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Assistant Manager/Back-Up Contact:
Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

☑ Building & Facility Management

Building Management

Company:
Name: _____
Phone (day): _____
Phone (after-hours): _____
Email: _____

Maintenance Request Contact:
Name: _____
Online Portal (if any): _____

Security Desk or Guard:
Phone: _____
Notes: _____

☑ IT & Technology Support

Internal IT Team Lead or Support Contact:
Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

External IT Vendor/Help Desk:
Company: _____
Contact Name: _____
Support Line: _____
Ticket Portal: _____

Network/Internet Provider:
Company: _____
Customer Service: _____
Account #: _____

☑ Office Services & Vendors

Cleaning or Janitorial Service:
Company: _____
Contact Name: _____
Schedule: _____
Phone: _____

Office Supplies Vendor:
Company: _____
Account Manager: _____
Phone: _____
Portal/Login: _____

Coffee/Water/Breakroom

Supplier:
Company:
_____
Phone: _____
Notes: _____

Shredding/Records Disposal Service:
Company:
_____
Phone: _____

☑ Human Resources & Payroll

HR Contact (Internal or External):
Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Payroll/Benefits Admin:
Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

☑ Emergency & Safety

Fire/Emergency Evacuation Warden (if designated):
Name: _____
Phone: _____

First Aid or Health/Safety Officer:
Name: _____
Location of First Aid Kit:
_____

Local Emergency Services (Non-911):
Building Security or Emergency Line: _____
Local Hospital/Urgent Care:
_____

■

How to Track Employee Hours

Keeping track of employee hours might not be the most glamorous part of your job, but it's one of the most important. Whether you're managing a bustling office or a small, hybrid team, accurate time tracking keeps payroll on target, ensures compliance, and gives you visibility into how your team spends their time. The good news? There are more options than ever to make this part of your job easier, smarter, and more efficient.

Here's a guide to help you choose the best method for tracking hours—along with tips for putting a solid system in place.

Start with the Basics: What Do You Need?

Before choosing a method, take a minute to assess your team:

➤ Are your employees hourly, salaried, or a mix?

➤ Do you have in-office, hybrid, or remote workers?

➤ Do you need to track time by project or just general attendance?

➤ Is your current system working—or creating more headaches?

Your answers will help guide which tools make the most sense.

1. Time Tracking Software: Fast and Flexible

Digital time tracking tools are a go-to solution for many office managers. Employees clock in and out via a web browser, mobile app, or desktop widget, and the software takes care of the rest.

Popular tools include:

➤ **Clockify** (free and user-friendly)

➤ **Toggl Track** (great for project work)

➤ **Harvest** (includes invoicing and budgeting features)

➤ **TSheets by QuickBooks** (syncs well with payroll)

These platforms generate timesheets, automate reports, and even help identify trends in productivity or attendance. Many offer integrations with payroll and HR systems, saving you time on data entry.

2. Digital Time Clocks for On-Site Teams

If your team works on-site and has regular start and end times, a digital punch clock might be your best bet. These range from simple PIN-based systems to more advanced fingerprint or facial recognition clocks.

Why they work:

➤ Easy to use and reliable

➤ Helps reduce time theft or "buddy punching"

➤ Offers clear start/stop records for payroll

Look for models that store data securely and let you export reports easily.

3. Manual Tracking with Spreadsheets

Still using a spreadsheet? That's okay—many small teams do! A well-designed template can get the job done, especially if your workforce is small and work hours are fairly consistent.

Tips to make it work:

➤ Require weekly submissions with electronic sign-off

➤ Use formulas to calculate totals automatically

➤ Check entries regularly for missing or unusual times

Manual systems take more oversight, so make sure someone (probably you!) is reviewing them consistently.

4. Project Management Tools with Time Logs

If your team works across multiple projects, logging hours by task can give you a better sense of where time is going—

How to Track Employee Hours

and how to plan resources. Tools like **Asana, ClickUp,** or **Monday.com** often include built-in time tracking or integrations with apps like **Toggl**.

These are great for:

➤ Billing clients by the hour
➤ Tracking workload across teams
➤ Managing time budgets on complex tasks

5. Mobile Time Tracking for Remote or Field Teams

When you're managing employees who work from home or in the field, mobile apps make it easy to keep track. Look for apps that allow:

➤ GPS check-ins
➤ Offline tracking
➤ Easy clock-in/clock-out from a phone

Apps like:

➤ **Hubstaff**
➤ **Time Doctor**
➤ **ZoomShift**

Just make sure you're being transparent with employees about what data is tracked and why—it builds trust and avoids misunderstandings.

6. Establish Clear Policies and Expectations

No matter which system you use, success depends on consistency and communication. Set clear expectations for:

➤ When and how employees should clock in and out
➤ How breaks are handled
➤ What to do if someone forgets to log their time
➤ How and when timesheets are reviewed and approved

Put your time-tracking policy in writing, and make sure everyone knows where to find it.

Final Thoughts: The Right Fit Makes All the Difference

The best system for tracking employee hours is the one that fits your team, your tools, and your workflow. You don't need the fanciest tech—just a solution that's accurate, consistent, and easy for everyone to use. Once it's up and running, you'll spend less time chasing timesheets and more time focusing on what really matters: keeping your office productive, efficient, and on track.

Let your time tracking work for you—not the other way around. ■

Performance Goals That Work: Setting Clear Expectations for Success

You are responsible for ensuring your team operates at its highest potential. Setting clear and achievable performance goals is a vital part of this process. Well-defined goals not only provide direction but also motivate employees and foster a sense of accomplishment. Here's how you can set effective performance goals for your team.

Understand the Purpose of Performance Goals

Before diving into the specifics, it's important to understand why performance goals are crucial. They help employees focus on what's important, align their efforts with the organization's objectives, and provide a clear benchmark for evaluating progress. Goals also promote accountability and can lead to higher job satisfaction by giving employees a sense of purpose and direction.

Performance Goals That Work: Setting Clear Expectations for Success

Align Goals with Organizational Objectives

Performance goals should be closely aligned with the overall objectives of the organization. Start by understanding your company's mission, vision, and strategic goals. Then, translate these broad objectives into specific, actionable goals for your team. This alignment ensures that everyone's efforts contribute to the company's success and that employees understand how their work fits into the bigger picture.

Make Goals SMART

The SMART criteria—**Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant,** and **Time-bound**—are essential for setting effective performance goals.

Specific: Goals should be clear and specific, answering the who, what, where, when, and why. For example, instead of saying, "Improve customer service," specify, "Reduce customer complaints by 20% in the next quarter."

Measurable: There should be a way to measure progress and determine when the goal has been achieved. Use quantifiable criteria, such as numbers, percentages, or deadlines.

Achievable: Goals should be realistic and attainable, considering the resources and constraints. Setting overly ambitious goals can lead to frustration and decreased morale.

Relevant: Goals should matter to the employee and align with their responsibilities and the organization's objectives. They should focus on areas where the employee can make a significant impact.

Time-bound: Goals should have a clear deadline or timeframe to create a sense of urgency and keep progress on track.

Involve Employees in the Goal-Setting Process

Involving employees in the goal-setting process can increase their commitment and motivation. Discuss potential goals with each team member, listen to their input, and consider their strengths, interests, and career aspirations. Collaborative goal-setting helps ensure that goals are meaningful and that employees are fully invested in achieving them.

Break Down Larger Goals

Large, complex goals can be overwhelming. Break them down into smaller, manageable tasks or milestones. This approach makes the goals more achievable and allows for regular progress checks. It also provides opportunities for quick wins, which can boost morale and keep employees motivated.

Provide the Necessary Resources and Support

Employees need the right resources and support to achieve their goals. Ensure that they have access to the necessary tools, training, and information. Offer regular feedback and guidance to help them stay on track. Your role is to facilitate their success by removing obstacles and providing the support they need.

Monitor Progress and Adjust as Needed

Regularly monitor progress towards the goals and adjust them if necessary. Hold periodic check-ins to review achievements, address challenges, and provide feedback. Be flexible and open to revising goals if circumstances change or if the original goals prove to be unrealistic. Continuous monitoring ensures that goals remain relevant and attainable.

Performance Goals That Work: Setting Clear Expectations for Success

Celebrate Achievements

Recognizing and celebrating achievements is crucial for maintaining motivation and reinforcing positive behavior. Acknowledge employees' efforts and accomplishments, both big and small. Celebrations can range from a simple thank-you note or verbal acknowledgment to more formal rewards and recognition programs. Celebrating successes builds a positive work environment and encourages ongoing effort and improvement.

Reflect and Learn

After goals are achieved, take the time to reflect on the process and outcomes. What worked well? What could be improved? Discuss these insights with your team and use them to inform future goal-setting efforts. Continuous learning and improvement are key to effective performance management.

Setting performance goals is a powerful tool for driving individual and team success. By aligning goals with organizational objectives, making them SMART, involving employees in the process, and providing ongoing support, you can create a motivated and high-performing team. Remember, the ultimate aim of setting performance goals is not just to achieve targets but to foster a culture of continuous improvement and excellence. ■

Revenue Beyond the Obvious: Finding New Income Streams in Your Office

When you think of profit, you probably think about cutting costs or increasing efficiency—and those are great strategies. But there's another side to the equation that office managers sometimes overlook: generating new income. Even if your office doesn't directly sell a product or service, there are often hidden opportunities to bring in extra revenue. With a little creativity and smart planning, you can help your workplace do more than just save money—you can help it earn more too.

Here are several ways to start thinking beyond the usual budget lines:

1. Offer Value-Added Services

Does your office already interact with clients or customers? Consider whether there are additional services they would be willing to pay for. For example:

A consulting firm might offer premium onboarding packages or industry webinars.

A training company could sell digital workbooks or recorded sessions.

A property management office could offer maintenance packages or priority response options.

These kinds of "add-on" services often use your existing staff and systems, which means higher profit margins.

2. Rent Out Office Space or Meeting Rooms

If your office has extra space that isn't being used every day, that space could be working for you. Renting out conference rooms, training areas, or unused desks can bring in consistent side income, especially if you're in a location with high demand for short-term workspace.

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Revenue Beyond the Obvious: Finding New Income Streams in Your Office

Some options:

➤ Post availability on platforms like Peerspace or LiquidSpace.

➤ Partner with local freelancers or remote teams.

➤ Rent space to business groups or clubs after hours.

You may need to adjust security or access procedures, but the payoff can be worth it.

3. Host Paid Workshops or Events

Tap into your team's expertise and turn it into a learning opportunity for others. Hosting a seminar, training session, or professional development workshop—either in-person or virtual—can be a great revenue stream. If you already create internal presentations, you might just need to tailor the material for a wider audience.

Think about:

➤ Charging a registration fee

➤ Offering premium materials or follow-up consultations

➤ Recording sessions and selling access on-demand

4. Start an Affiliate Program or Partnership

Your office probably uses a variety of tools, apps, or services—everything from office furniture to software platforms. Many of these companies offer affiliate or referral programs. If your business has an email list, social media presence, or regular client communication, you may be able to promote these products and earn a small commission for referrals.

This works especially well if:

➤ You already recommend the product or service to others

➤ You're in a niche where your audience trusts your suggestions

➤ The affiliate arrangement fits naturally into your existing communications

5. Sell Branded Products or Materials

If your organization has a strong brand or loyal following, you might consider selling branded merchandise or custom materials. This could include:

➤ T-shirts, mugs, or stationery

➤ Branded notebooks or welcome kits for new clients

➤ E-books or guides based on your office's expertise

These items can generate revenue and promote your brand at the same time. ■

Tracking ROI on Office Technology: Is Your Investment Paying Off?

In today's fast-paced work environment, investing in the right technology can be a game-changer for productivity and efficiency. But with so many tools, apps, and software solutions available, it's easy to overspend—or end up with systems that don't deliver the results you expected. To make sure your office technology investments are truly paying off, it's important to track their return on investment (ROI) regularly. Here's how to evaluate whether your tech is boosting productivity or simply adding to expenses.

Tracking ROI on Office Technology: Is Your Investment Paying Off?

1. Define Clear Goals Before Investing

Before purchasing or subscribing to any new technology, establish what you expect it to achieve. Are you aiming to:

➤ Reduce time spent on repetitive tasks?

➤ Improve team communication and collaboration?

➤ Cut down on errors or manual data entry?

➤ Enhance reporting and data analysis?

Setting clear, measurable goals upfront gives you a baseline to compare against later.

2. Measure Productivity Improvements

Once your new tool is in place, track relevant productivity metrics such as:

➤ Time saved on specific tasks

➤ Number of errors or rework incidents before and after implementation

➤ Employee adoption rates and usage frequency

➤ Impact on project turnaround times or customer response rates

If the technology isn't making work faster, easier, or more accurate, it may not be delivering the ROI you need.

3. Calculate Cost vs. Benefits

Don't just look at the sticker price or subscription fees. Factor in:

➤ Training costs for your team

➤ Time spent troubleshooting or managing the tool

➤ Any needed hardware upgrades

➤ Savings from reduced paper, travel, or outsourced services

4. Solicit User Feedback

Your team's experience with the technology is a key part of ROI. Even if the numbers look good on paper, if staff find a tool frustrating or hard to use, productivity may suffer.

Regularly gather feedback through surveys or check-ins to understand:

➤ How intuitive the tool is

➤ Whether it actually addresses pain points

➤ Ideas for improvements or alternatives

5. Review Alternatives Periodically

Technology evolves quickly. What made sense a year ago might be outdated today. Schedule periodic reviews—quarterly or semi-annually—to reassess your technology stack.

Ask:

➤ Are there better, more cost-effective tools available?

➤ Is your current tech scalable as your team or needs grow?

➤ Are integrations with other software smooth and efficient?

Being proactive helps you avoid sinking more money into tools that aren't keeping pace.

6. Track Impact on Business Outcomes

Beyond internal productivity, consider how technology affects broader business goals:

➤ Has customer satisfaction improved due to faster response times or better service?

➤ Are sales or client retention rates positively impacted?

➤ Has compliance or data security strengthened?

Final Thoughts: Technology Should Empower, Not Burden

Investing in office technology isn't a one-and-done decision—it's an ongoing process of evaluation and optimization. By defining clear goals, measuring impact, factoring in total costs, and listening to your team, you can ensure your investments truly pay off.

In the end, the right technology should help your office work smarter, not harder, driving productivity and profitability rather than just adding to expenses. Keeping a close eye on ROI ensures you get the best bang for your tech budget. ■