

Talking with Your Manager About Your Workload

1st May 2020

If your workload sometimes feels like too much, you're not alone. Studies have shown that many people feel that their workloads have increased due in part to technology which sometimes makes employees feel like they need to be available to work 24/7.

It's important to talk to your manager if you have more work than you can handle so that you can find ways to keep your workload at a manageable level while meeting your organisation's needs.

Are you hesitant to talk about workload to your manager?

Even if you have a great relationship with your manager, you may hesitate to bring up valid concerns about your workload. Here are some common reasons why:

- You don't want to sound like a complainer.
- Your manager always seems too busy to talk.
- You know that your colleague's workloads have also increased.
- You think it should be obvious to your manager that you have more work than you can handle comfortably.
- You think your manager believes you could be doing more.
- You hope the problem will go away on its own when the busy time has passed.
- You'd like to have more responsibility at work and are worried that you won't get it if you say you feel overstretched.
- You've tried to talk to your manager before about your workload, and it hasn't changed anything.

Feelings like these are natural, but your manager needs to know if you have more work than you can handle. They may have ideas on how to ease the burden on you while making sure that all the necessary work gets done.

The benefits of talking about workload with your manager

An honest conversation with your manager about your workload can have many benefits for you and for others.

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A conversation can:

Help you set priorities. Workload problems are often a result of people spending too much time on “low-value” work that isn't a priority for the business. Your manager can help you determine and prioritise which of your responsibilities have the most value.

Keep the problem from becoming worse. If you feel stretched to the limit, ask yourself how you would cope if you had an urgent, last-minute request from a customer or client or if you were faced with a personal crisis or family emergency. If you aren't sure, a talk with your manager could keep the situation from turning into a crisis.

Show that you take your work seriously. Discussing your workload with your manager shows that you value your job and that you want to continue giving your best every day. It's especially important to have the conversation if you feel that you are getting seriously behind with client requests. Your manager may not realise how much you have on your plate or how much your workload has grown.

Help your manager and organisation plan for the future. Some workload issues take time to resolve, for instance, when the solution involves hiring additional staff or shifting staff responsibilities. You'll help your manager and organisation make realistic plans for the future if you're honest about how much you can and can't do.

Achieving peace of mind. Even if there isn't an immediate solution to your concerns, it can be a big relief to know that your manager understands the situation and wants to help. Your manager may also be able to give you some perspective by telling you how long an unusually heavy workload will last.

Having the conversation with your manager

Don't wait until a crisis occurs. Bring issues and concerns about your workload to your manager promptly.

Schedule the conversation. Tell your manager what you'd like to talk about and ask if you could set up a brief meeting.

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Plan ahead for your meeting. Gather as much information as you can about your workload. For example, if you often work after hours, write down how often this occurs and how much time you spend on the work. If you've been doing work that doesn't appear in your job description, make a copy of the description and list what's been added to it.

Offer solutions. Before your meeting, try to come up with at least one or more potential solutions to your workload concerns. Offering solutions will make it clear that you want to help and you're not taking an all-or-nothing position.

Be open to your manager's ideas. No matter how many solutions you propose, your manager may know of an option that would work better for your organisation. Be willing to try a new idea even if it hadn't occurred to you.

Follow up. After you discuss your workload with your manager, send a brief note or email thanking them for listening to your concerns. Briefly review what, if anything, you agreed on as a way to adjust your workload. Regularly check in with your manager to keep them up-to-date on your solutions and make adaptations if needed.

Consider talking to a professional. Most managers want to help with workload concerns, but a frank conversation with your manager may not always be possible. If you have concerns about your workload that you can't resolve with your manager, a confidential conversation with your human resources (HR) representative or your assistance programme can help.