Keeping Teams Engaged During Summertime

By Shawn Dickerson, Director of Solutions Marketing, Workfront

It's summertime, and the living's easy — and that's typical for many companies during the summer months. Lighter workloads and more frequent vacations can make the usual fast-paced office environment feel uncomfortably slow. However, those phases in a team's bandwidth should be seized as valuable opportunities to refine internal processes, identify new opportunities and experiment with new techniques. Check out a few of my tips for keeping teams engaged during — what appears at face value — to be slow summer work days, but in actuality, are chances to amplify capabilities and refine existing procedures.

Re-Ignite an Employee Wellness Program
Staying glued to your desk for eight or nine hours leads to low productivity. If there's an expectation that not leaving your desk equals points with the boss, then that can create a downward spiral of inefficiency.

Breaking up the day helps employees retain information and be sharper during work time, when concentration is required. Take a walk around the building or chat with a coworker about the latest television phenomenon, and take a lunch break. The numbers don't lie — 67% of participants in The Wellness Effect study from *The Economist* and Humana said they felt an employee

wellness program increased their engagement in their employer's mission and goals.

Manage Incoming Work — Don't Let It Manage You

To work in communications is to know the meaning of work chaos. All of the moving parts can easily create more work than there are hours in a day — even when there seems to be less projects on deck. It's no small feat to manage all incoming work, but managers can help their teams stay focused in busy — and slow — periods by deciding what to work on first, plan how to get it done, and figure out who to involve. At Workfront, we use our Agile Project Management capabilities to help us manage incoming work requests and build in time to address last-minute work requests. Agile itself can be unfairly misunderstood by marketers — it's an actual work management methodology that requires marketers to change the way they think about, organize, plan and manage their work — it's not just about being more flexible.

One way to think about incorporating Agile into your day-to-day is to determine how to funnel to-dos, then establish a way to evaluate the priority of the work. Nearly one-quarter of marketers say their work priorities shift daily, resulting in wasted time and increased stress. In slower seasons like the summer, it can sometimes become *more* difficult to prioritize a task list without the stream of fast-approaching deadlines. In the absence of the high-pressure or survive-or-die demands, it's important to avoid letting a slower cadence of requests mean longer project completion stretches. One way to prioritize what needs to be done first is to create a scorecard for all requests based on who requested the work, the importance of it, and the urgency for it to be completed. This establishes a system to assign priority and help others understand how you manage work, whether there are 20 or two active projects.

Talk It Out

We say it a lot in the industry, but communication really is

key to developing fluid collaboration and maximum productivity. With shorter to-do lists and team members out of office, it's important to touch base with employees regularly on what's expected and where they should be allocating their time. On average, 30 – 35 percent of project time in marketing is spent on rework, including revisiting decisions, waiting for approvals, redoing work, and correcting errors. To avoid that quicksand effect on summertime productivity, make a point to start projects with clear and collaborative communication among your team, clients, and execs.

This conversation should also include a production schedule with timeframe updates and deadlines for drafts and approvals — nothing kills productivity like bottlenecks in the workflow! If colleagues are out on vacation, make sure responsibilities are distributed evenly among the right team members. A long wait for an approval can derail an otherwise on-time project.

By taking a few minutes to think about the management nuances of a summertime slump, you can see major benefits in work processes and productivity—and get the most out of your days spent hard at work when you're not on the beach.

About the Author: *Shawn has nearly 20 years of marketing and demand generation experience, encompassing Fortune 1000 companies, venture-backed firms and small startups. His passion for bringing the Agile methodology to marketing teams shines through in his focus on giving organizations the visibility and tools needed to grow revenue and generate demand. Shawn is currently the Director of Solutions Marketing for cloud-based Enterprise Work and Project Management software company Workfront.*