

## IT and Time management

The majority of people using computers, both at home and in the workplace are self taught. This does not often mean that they have followed an online training package, but that they have experimented or tried things out until they worked. Computers are ideal for this, but there is a downside. The availability of information on the net, the predominance of computers on the desk and the lack of 'Computer' training has led to people spending a lot of time getting answers. Unless this is managed, it can be a drain on your staff time and the jobs that they are paid to do.

The answers lie in training and effective management. What follows are some pointers to enable you to deal with computer issues effectively.

### Within your organisation

- 1 Identify those people with skills and see if it is appropriate for them to be called on to deal with specific kinds of problems. By having more than one person dealing with things, it reduces the pressure on the 'expert'.
- 2 Keep a log of problems and issues and see how much time they take up. If there is a pattern, there may be a technical issue or a training issue.
- 3 If you have IT support, are there any problems that don't go away. If so, see if the root problem is being dealt with (such as inappropriate use of technology or lack of skills for example).
- 4 If you need to call in outside support, be clear about what you want this to achieve, and make this clear at the outset. 'I think we have a problem that needs dealing with' gives a lot of freedom to the technician. 'I want this problem resolved within x hours or for you to identify what the problem is, how long it will take to repair and how much will it cost' gives a far clearer message and reaches a solution. If a solution is not reached, then address its resolution with 'if you cannot deal with this then we will move on to another person'. Although degrees of subtlety may need to be employed, the same approach should be taken with voluntary support. Otherwise, you may fall into the trap of not resolving the issue because the volunteer either does not know the answer or is learning on the job (but it is free).
- 5 Free does not mean good value.
- 6 If staff are spending time on supporting IT (sometimes outside of their JD), make sure to include it in appraisal and to identify it as a (core) cost. It may throw up issues of time spent on doing the 'real' job.
- 7 Establish a documented reporting procedure for problems and under what circumstances to call outside help

### As an individual

- 1 If there is an (IT) issue to resolve, firstly try to ascertain what the real problem is. For example, my printer isn't printing could be an issue with the printer, the network, the computer, or the software.
- 2 Allocate a specific amount of time to think about and resolve the problem, such as 15 minutes.
- 3 After the initial period, assess the situation.
  - a. Do you know what the problem really is
  - b. Do you think you have the skills to address the problem and how long will it take
  - c. Is there someone else within your organisation who can deal with it better than you
  - d. Do you think that doing some online research will give you the answer (use the Virtual Riders website)
  - e. Is this a waste of your time and would it be better to ask someone else to deal with it or call someone in
- 4 Give the problem a priority rating. Differentiate between the urgent and the vital. The urgent may be making a lot of noise to get your attention, but it is rarely vital that it be done right now or at all.
- 5 If you are going to continue to try to fix something, if you don't know the answer, ask the question (on line or to someone) rather than keeping on trying things out.
- 6 Keep an eye on the amount of time it is taking. Measure chunks of time and decide on a cut off point. If IT is not your job, does your organisation tolerate wasting more than xx hrs (suggested ½ hr) of your time on IT issues.
- 7 Accept you don't know everything, and report your problem (indicate its priority).
- 8 If in the meantime the problem 'goes away', make sure to report that it has gone away.
- 9 Once you have passed the problem onto someone else, follow procedure to ensure that it is dealt with within the correct timeframe. In other words, make sure it is dealt with within a defined time period, then follow it up again.

