

~~Protect your privacy~~

Be accessible

Is your door always open?

It shouldn't be.

You need to schedule no-hassle times when you're free to think without interruption. That goes for phone calls, e-mails, and drop-ins. Early morning, before the pace picks up, works best for some folks (if, that is, they tend to be creative and energetic early). Whenever you do it, carve out a creativity session, just you and the muse, several times a week, if not daily.

But, the rest of the time, your employees should feel free to pop in and talk. You can learn more from such informal one-on-one sessions than a dozen structured meetings.

So, you say your door is open, but nobody's walking through it?

A survey by Market Facts' TeleNation indicated that more than 90 percent of the employees polled believe they have good ideas about how their com-

panies could be run more successfully. However, only 38 percent think their employers would be interested in hearing those ideas. The same goes for complaints, only more so.

Unless you let them know you welcome their “interruptions”—and unless you really mean it when you tell them—you won’t see much of them, and you’ll be a poorer manager because of it.

Just having an open door isn’t enough. Get up and get out of the office (“management by wandering around,” they call it). Be where they can find and approach you easily.

Here are three suggestions for making those informal encounters profitable:

Listen actively: Of course you’re in a hurry to get back to your own work. But, put it aside for a minute and make sure you hear what they’re saying.

Ask follow-up questions: If you don’t understand a point, say so. Don’t bluff so you can appear to be the all-knowing expert on everything.

Accept bad news as well as good: If they think you only want to hear the good stuff, that’s all you’ll get, at the expense of knowing what’s really going on.

“You show that you value an opinion by listening to it, by taking it seriously, and by rewarding it.”