Getting a job out the door: managing implementation and deliverables.

What's the problem?

The problem is getting a job out of the studio when everyone wants to spend 'just five more minutes'.

And wanting more time isn't about being naughty. Most designers genuinely think they need the additional five minutes to make the design better, make the client happier and ultimately deliver a better result.

Understanding what's asked.

The first step of knowing when a project is finished is by absolutely understanding what has been requested.

You can do that by revisiting the briefing document.

The brief should clearly outline the deliverables. It should clearly state what is expected and by when.

It's the role of the design studio manager to identify when those deliverables have been met and the job is ready for delivery, and that's not as easy as it sounds.

 (It's good tome to note that the aesthetics and strategy of the design is often the responsibility of the design director so a studio manager needs to work closely with the design director and ensure their needs are met.)

Ensuring everyone takes responsibility for their role.

Team members should understand what is being asked of them, and by when, at the beginning of a project.

Delegating is often discussed but it's worth reiterating the importance of everyone understanding your expectations of their role and accepting the responsibility to deliver.

One way to do that is to encourage team members to ask questions, especially at the regular WIP meetings.

As the saying goes: 'there's no such thing as a stupid question'. It's an example of working smarter. A hard worker might spend two hours online seeking an answer. A smart worker asks others if they know the answer. Two heads are better than one... shared knowledge is the advantage of working in a team as compared to working solo.

If a colleague does know the answer, a problem might be solved within five minutes. If no-one knows, the solution can be found and shared, so everyone knows in the future.

Getting stuff out of the studio.

Getting stuff out of the studio is not about making everyone work harder. It's about working smarter, increasing efficiency and productivity.

Clearly state the deadline at the start and at regular touch points throughout the project. Regularly ask if there are any foreseeable roadblocks to getting the job out on deadline. Designers need to take responsibility for their action but from time to time you may need to step in and help resolve a blocker.

That may include streamlining everyday processes so work can be delivered more efficiently.

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Encourage breaks.

It's not intuitive to encourage a break when a deadline is looming but staring at a computer for hours on end gets tiring and monotonous. That's when people get tired and bored, and that's when they are less productive and quality drops.

Short, frequent breaks are more efficient than a longer break less often. Encourage your team to get up to stretch, get a coffee or a glass of water once an hour.

These short breaks also help designers physically move away from the problem and that often leads to an unexpected solution.

You have to recognise that everyone works in a different way and catering to this can help your team become more efficient. Encourage people to ask questions and take breaks and then help them further by streamlining processes and prioritising work.

Consider workload and prioritisation.

Good studio managers don't overload their team with work. Giving an employee a pile of work and tell them it all needs doing 'as soon as possible' isn't managing, it's dumping.

It's your role to protect the design team from the pressures of conflicting deadlines by prioritising tasks.

That doesn't mean drip feeding. It means giving your team the work that needs doing in a prioritised order so they understand where they need to start and what needs to be done and when.

So what about those extra five minutes?

Sometimes the design team needs to be told when a job is finished and that's the role of the design studio manager.

We call it the 95% rule.

A majority of the inspiration and energy is spent at the start of the project. Often the last 5% spent is unwarranted and not of value.

It would be unusual for a project to progress much in that 5% of time. Similarly, most clients can't recognise the difference between a design handed over when 95% finalised as compared to one that has had an additional 5% of energy and time spent on it.

But a design studio owner does. If every project is stopped at the 95% mark, the extra 5% is profit. That soon adds up and can be the difference between a successful studio and an extremely successful studio with funds to reinvest in new equipment, and people.

The skill is in identifying when a project is finalised and negotiating with the designer to help them identify that the brief has been met. It's not about a reduction in quality. It's about recognising when the work is done.

It's also part of enabling your team to work smarter and stop them from burning out or getting stressed.