

**OPINION**

## **Are you a human bottleneck, slowing progress in the workplace?**

---

**MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI**

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED 5 HOURS AGO

**FOR SUBSCRIBERS**

---

0 COMMENTS

SHARE

TEXT SIZE

BOOKMARK

---

In the manufacturing and computing worlds, a bottleneck is a point of congestion that occurs when workloads arrive too quickly for the production process to handle. The resulting logjam creates inefficiencies and usually results in delays and higher costs. There is also another kind of bottleneck – the human bottleneck. It arises when work slows down or even stops because activities need to be funnelled through a single individual so that they can be modified, validated or approved. It, too, creates inefficiencies.

Could you be a bottleneck? If others have stopped their work because they are waiting for information or action from you, then the answer is “yes.” If you are the person who is impeding day-to-day processes from moving forward, or slowing progress in a project or initiative, then it’s time to reassess your practices.

Here are some clues that you might be a human bottleneck.

- Do you always seem to have too much on your plate?
- Are you often struggling to get to the really important things on your to-do list?
- Are a lot of people waiting for you to get back to them with information or decisions?
- Are a lot of people coming to you for answers to their problems?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then it is very possible that you are indeed affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of others.

And if you answered mostly “no” to the questions, it’s still worth checking once more with others on your team. Ask them:

- Are you often waiting for decisions or information from me that prevents you from getting things done?
- Are there times when you’d like to make a decision or take action without consulting me first?
- Does my style prevent you from doing your job better?

You may discover that all is well, in which case, bravo! But more likely, you might be surprised at how your (lack of) actions are creating obstructions in moving things forward.

Keep in mind that inefficiencies are not always under your control. While the hold-up could be because you are juggling a variety of high-priority issues, it could just as easily be because organizational roadblocks exist that limit access to needed information. Either way, there are specific things you can do to become less of a bottleneck.

### **Share information**

Keep others apprised. The more your team members know, the less they have to wait around hoping you (or someone else) will give them what they need to get their jobs done. Get in the habit of putting relevant documents into a common drive that is accessible to your team. Hold regular update meetings with your co-workers so everyone is in the know. This way, people aren’t waiting on you to get the data they need.

### **Clarify deadlines**

Clarify what is expected of you from your co-workers, your staff, your manager, and by when. Likewise, let the person you’re waiting for information from know that you’re working toward a specific deadline. That way, both of you can prioritize your work to help you achieve goals.

## **Identify issues and reassess processes**

Be pro-active about identifying situations in which you could become the bottleneck. If you know you're going to get pulled away into a forthcoming project, then determine what obligations you need to address or reassign so that others won't be waiting on you to complete their responsibilities. Ask yourself: Is it really necessary for every activity or decision to be channelled through you? Involve others on your team in these dialogues, and be open to the suggestions they offer.

## **Delegate more**

If you are in a position of leadership, then look for ways to delegate some of your tasks to others on your team. Could you let others proofread documents, or make the final call on a problem or issue? Could your staff go directly to others along the chain of command without having to use you as a conduit? If you're having difficulty in relinquishing control, then honestly question yourself as to why this is so. Increased oversight by you is an admirable objective, but is it worth the inefficiency you are creating by being the bottleneck?

*Merge Gupta-Sunderji is a leadership speaker, consultant and the founder of leadership development consultancy Turning Managers Into Leaders.*

*Stay ahead in your career. We have a weekly Careers newsletter to give you guidance and tips on career management, leadership, business education and more. [Sign up today.](#)*