

Office Distractions & Workplace Habits Survey Report

Executive Summary

In today's working environment, the ability to focus has become more valuable yet more difficult than ever, particularly when coupled with new digital advancements meant to give us instant gratification. Modern offices have become a variety of open-plan offices, hybrid working models, and constant digital communication, all of which introduce new layers of distraction.

Yet it's not only digital attributes that can distract us. While collaboration and accessibility are essential for productivity, they often come at the cost of deep, uninterrupted work. Notifications, informal conversations, and spontaneous interruptions can fragment attention, making it harder for employees to sustain concentration and complete complex tasks efficiently.

At the same time, not all distractions are inherently negative. Interactions with colleagues allow for collaboration, strong work relationships, and even improve morale. The challenge for offices is finding the right balance: enabling communication and teamwork without creating an environment where focus is constantly disrupted.

Cartridge People recently conducted a survey to explore how employees experience distractions in their day-to-day work, the behaviours that have the greatest impact, and how both individuals and organisations are currently responding.

Key findings at a glance:

- 47% of employees say colleagues stopping by to chat is the most common distraction
- 39% say emails and notifications are a persistent digital disruption
- Half of respondents say "quick questions" are the most disruptive behaviour
- 73% of employees say they experience distractions multiple times a day or more
- Most employees require 1-10 minutes to regain focus each time they are distracted
- A significant proportion of employees are not actively managing distractions, pointing to a gap in workplace strategies and support

All data was collected on 19th March, 2026
from 500 responses.

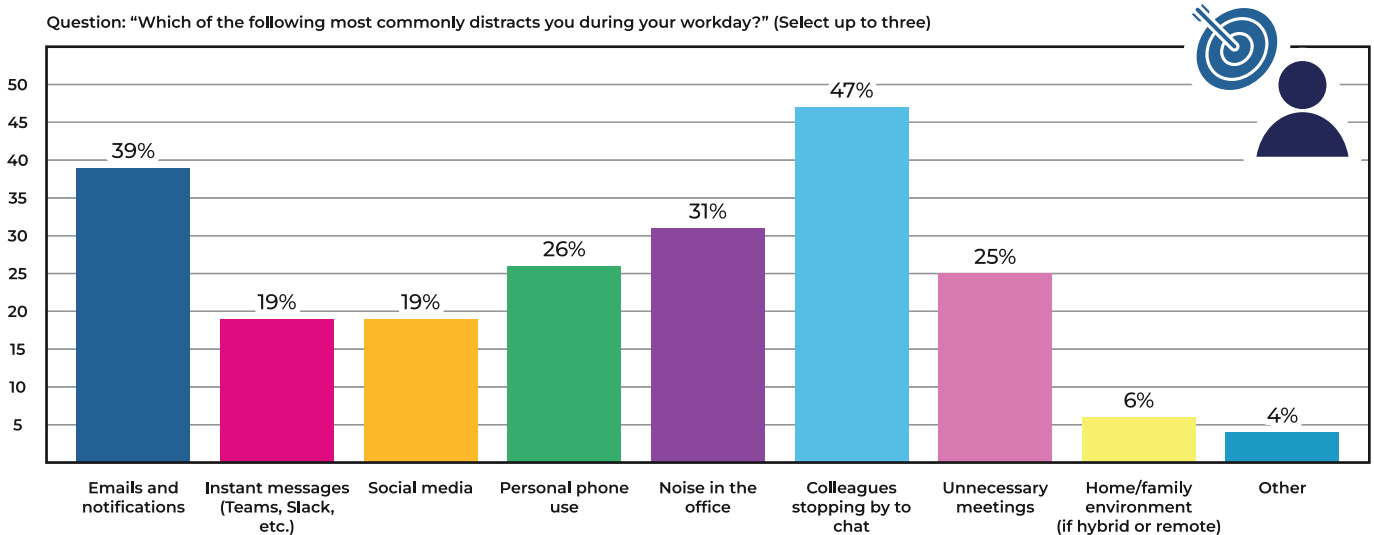
Top Workplace Distractions

While digital tools such as social media are often blamed for reduced attention spans, the data suggests that when it comes to the office, human interaction is the primary source of disruption.

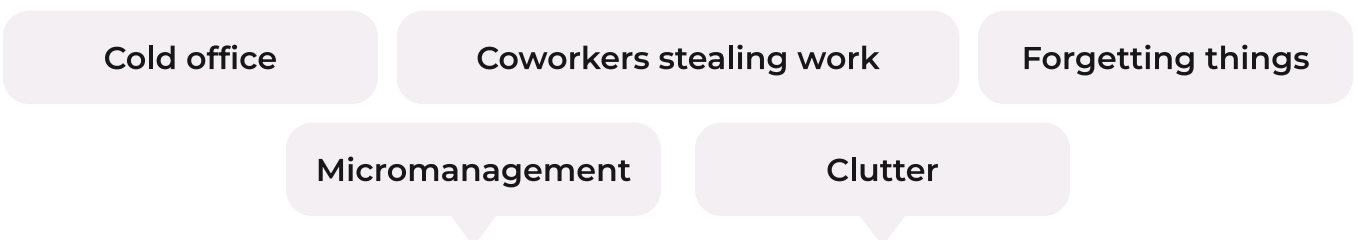
Nearly half of respondents report colleagues stopping by to chat as a key distraction. This reflects the realities of open-plan offices and collaborative cultures, where accessibility can unintentionally reduce boundaries.

Emails and notifications also seem to play a major role, reinforcing the idea that employees are managing multiple channels of communication simultaneously, instead of segmenting their time to focus on one task at a time. This creates a fragmented workflow, where attention is repeatedly pulled in different directions.

Office noise and unnecessary meetings further contribute to an environment where sustained focus becomes difficult.



Inputs from 'Other' form section:

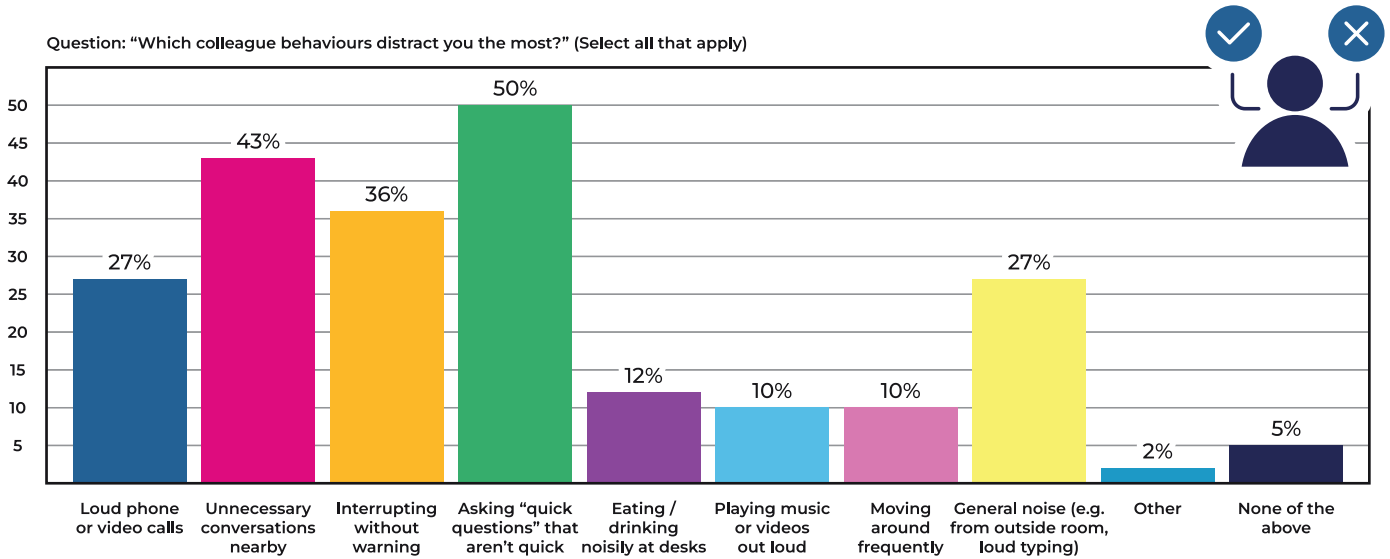


Most Disruptive Colleague Behaviours

The most disruptive behaviours share a common theme: they interrupt focus under the assumption of urgency or convenience.

For example, a colleague asking a "quick question" that turns into a long conversation ranks highest, indicating that even well-intentioned interactions can have disproportionate effects on productivity. Similarly, unnecessary conversations nearby and interruptions without warning can all impact how effectively people can work within the office.

Interestingly, traditional “noise” factors such as loud calls seemed to rank lower than more direct interruptions from fellow employees. It suggests that while loud noise can be distracting and frustrating, it is far more common for work to be interrupted more directly.



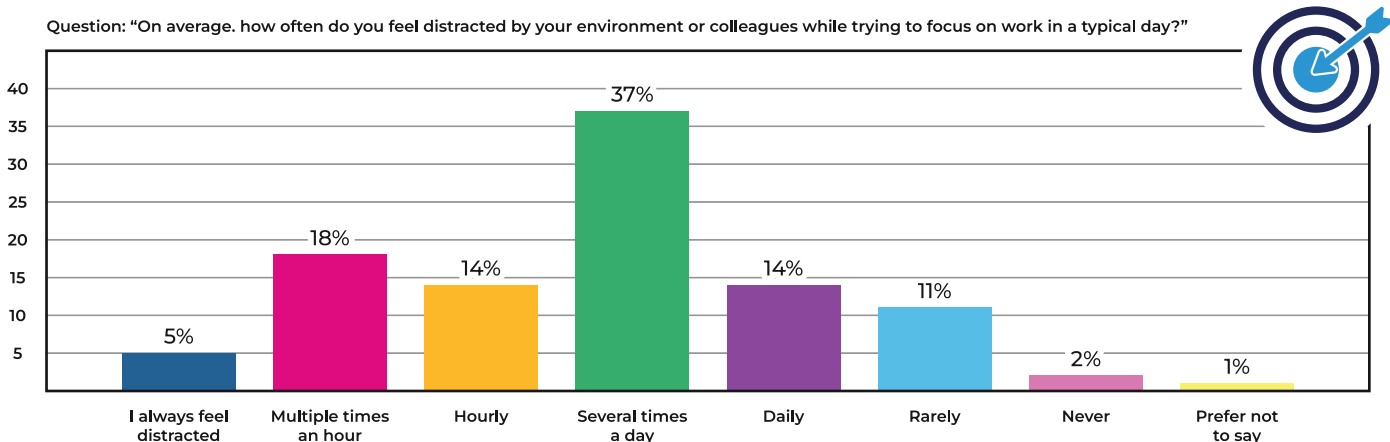
Inputs from 'Other' form section:

Talking to me about stuff I'm not remotely interested in

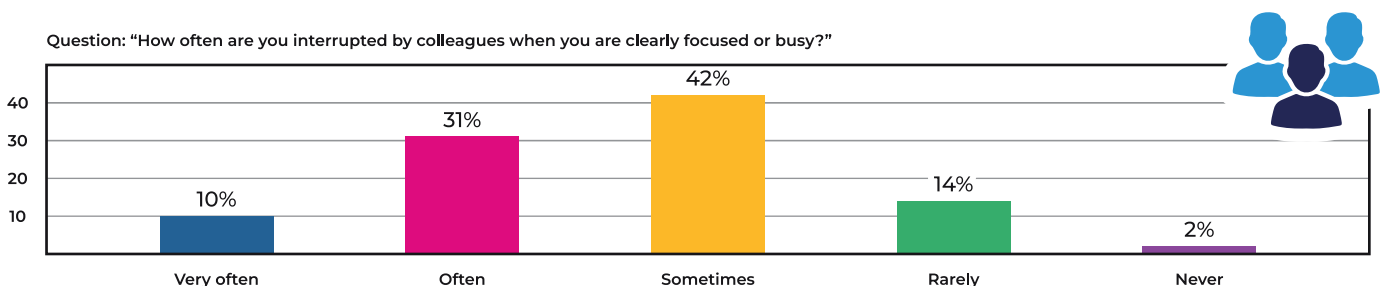
Asking me what I'm having for dinner

How Often are Employees Distracted?

With 37% saying they experience distractions several times a day and a further 32% reporting to deal with interruptions hourly or more, most employees operate in a near-continuous state of interruption.



Frequent interruptions prevent employees from entering “deep work” states, where complex thinking and problem-solving occur. However, it is difficult to distinguish how much these interruptions are truly distracting and have no value to work being done, and how much are valuable but annoying interruptions.



Impact on Focus and Productivity

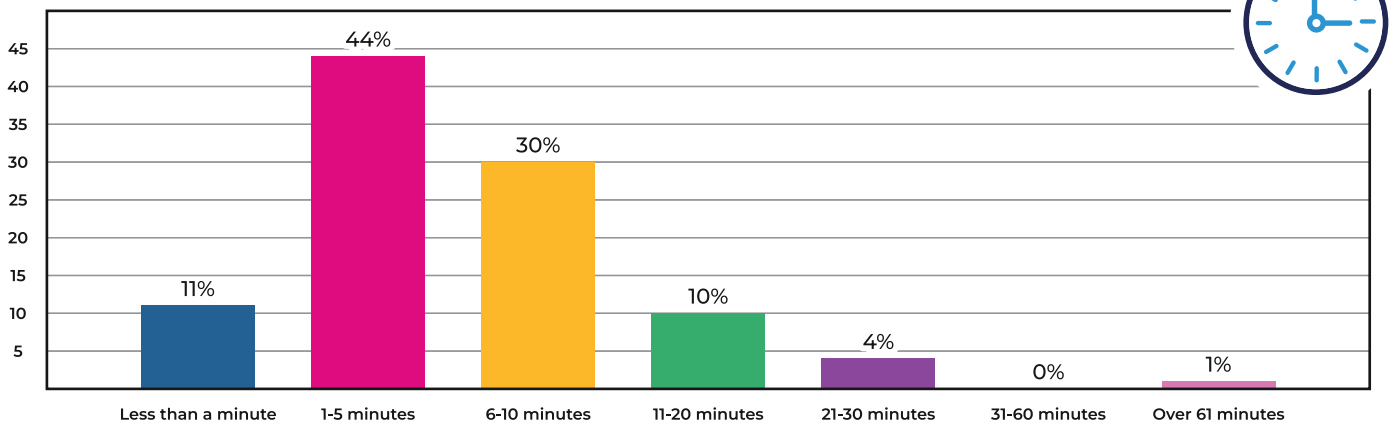
Getting distracted is frustrating, but it's important to understand how that impacts further work from being done.

While a single interruption may seem minor, the data shows:

- 44% need 1–5 minutes to refocus per distraction
- 30% need 5–10 minutes
- 14% need 10 minutes or more

When combined with the high frequency of interruptions, this creates a significant hidden cost in lost productivity. Additionally, 57% of respondents report needing to work late at least sometimes due to these distractions, which can increase stress levels and the risk of burnout.

Question: "When a colleague interrupts you, how long does it usually take to regain focus?"

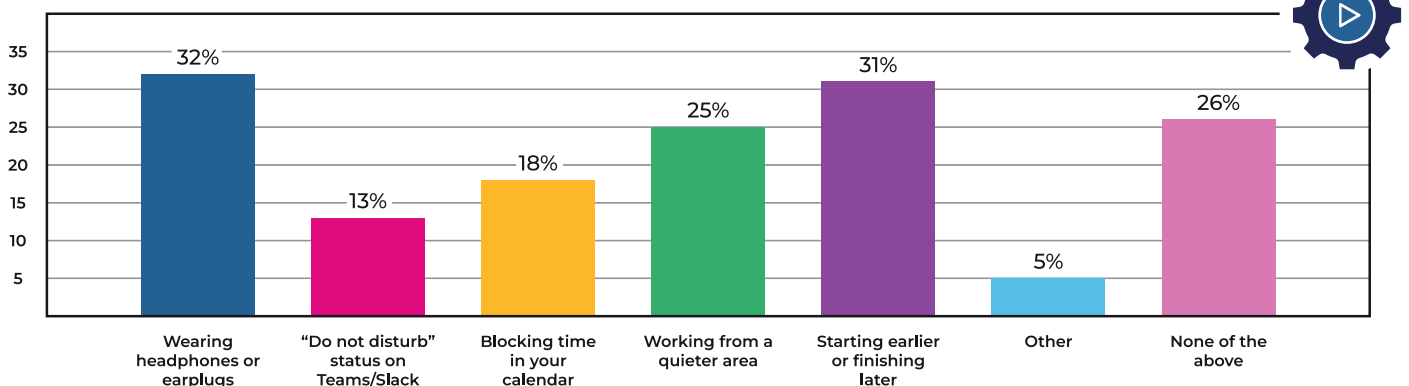


Managing Distractions

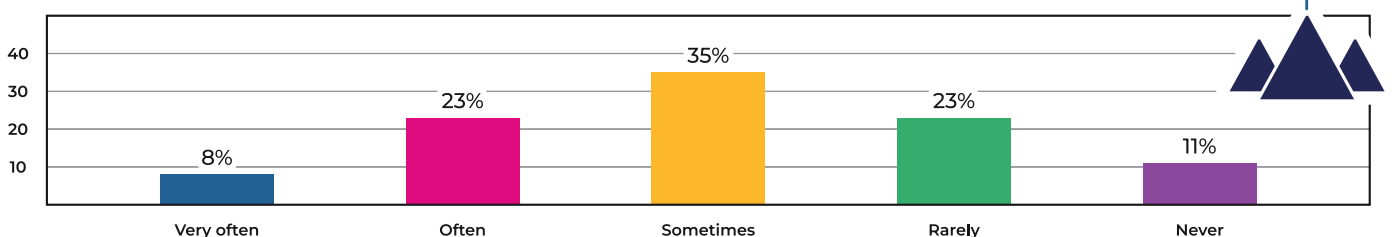
Despite the prevalence of distractions within offices, there is no single strategy for managing them.

While some employees use headphones to block out noise or adjust their working hours to avoid such distractions, fewer rely on more structured approaches like calendar blocking or "Do Not Disturb" tools. Notably, over a quarter do nothing at all to manage distractions.

Question: "Which of the following do you use to manage distractions at work?" (Select all that apply)



Question: "How often do you take intentional measures to reduce distractions?" (e.g stepping away, changing location, putting headphones on)



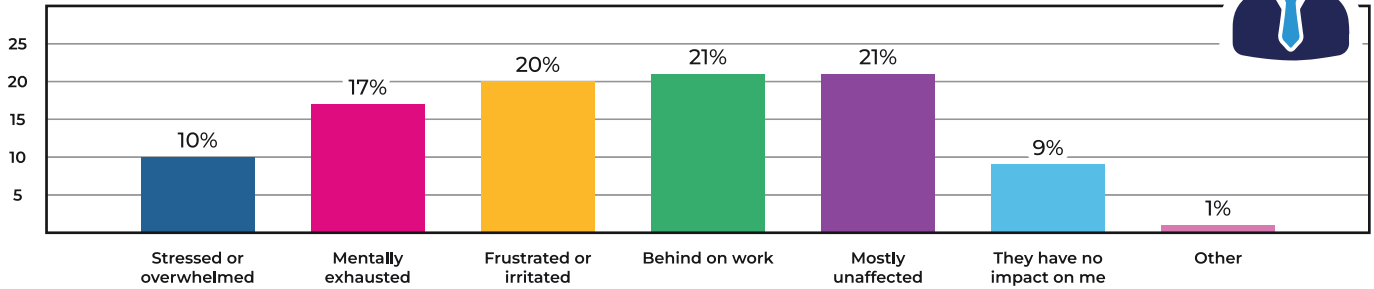
Emotional Impact

The emotional responses to distractions reveal their broader impact beyond productivity:

While some employees report being unaffected, a significant proportion experience negative emotional outcomes, such as feeling behind on work, frustrated, mentally exhausted and stressed or overwhelmed.



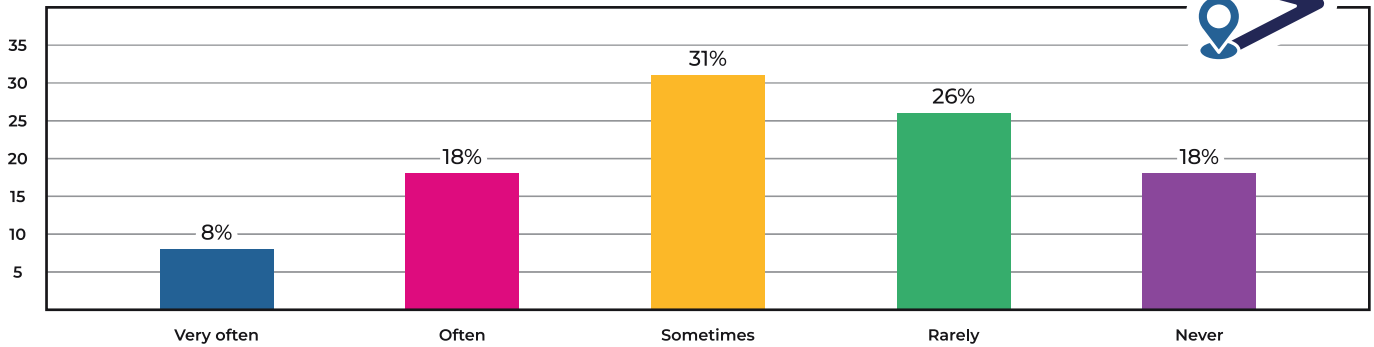
Question: "How do workplace distractions make you feel by the end of the day?"



These feelings can accumulate over time, contributing to reduced job satisfaction and increased stress. The sense of "always catching up" can be particularly damaging to morale.



Question: "Because of workplace distractions, how often do you have to work late to catch up outside normal hours?"



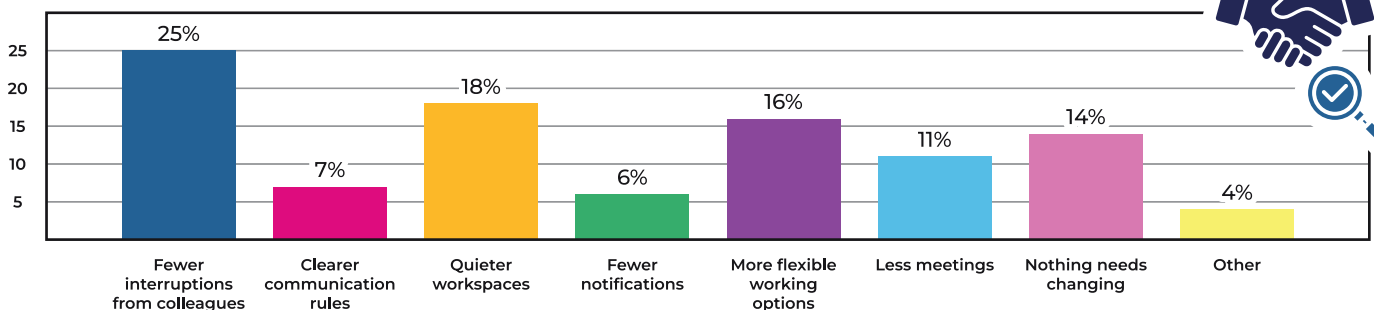
What Employees Want to Change

The most desired improvements focus on reducing interruptions and improving the working environment, such as fewer interruptions from colleagues, offering quieter workspaces employees can use when completing a complex task, more flexible working so people can work in environments and hours where they are most productive and less meetings.

The data shows that employees are not necessarily asking for less collaboration, but instead are asking for more structured and valuable communication.



Question: "Which ONE change would most improve your ability to focus at work?"



Finding the Right Balance

The findings highlight a clear battle within the office: the need to collaborate versus the need to concentrate.

Distractions are not inherently negative. Informal conversations, spontaneous questions, and building relationships between colleagues can improve workplace culture, morale and even productivity. In many cases, these interactions are essential to how work gets done.

However, without boundaries, these same behaviours can create an environment where focus is constantly disrupted, productivity is reduced, and employees feel overwhelmed.

The key is not to eliminate distractions entirely, but to manage them more intentionally.

Practical considerations for organisations:

- Encourage awareness of when colleagues are in focused work
- Normalise the use of signals (e.g. headphones, status indicators)
- Create a mix of collaborative and quiet spaces
- Set expectations around interruptions and response times
- Review meeting culture and internal communication practices

By striking the right balance, organisations can create environments that support both collaboration and concentration, rather than forcing employees to choose between the two.

Supporting Your Workplace with Cartridge People

Creating a productive workplace isn't just about behaviour; it's also about having the right resources and equipment in place.

Cartridge People's Business Accounts help organisations streamline their workplace needs, supporting teams to work more efficiently and with fewer disruptions.

With a Cartridge People Business Account, you can:

- Easily order office supplies and equipment for everyday operations
- Benefit from interest-free monthly credit
- Communicate with your dedicated Account Manager to get the best prices and recommendations

By simplifying procurement and ensuring teams have what they need for a great price, Cartridge People helps businesses stay focused on what matters most.

