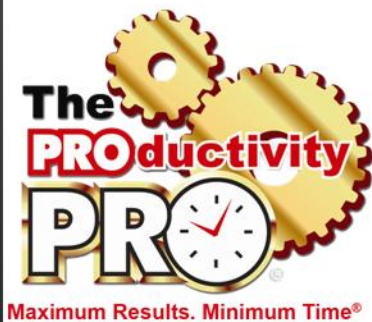




What To Do When There's Too Much To Do

BOOK CLUB MATERIALS
LEADER GUIDE

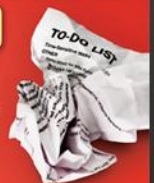


By
Laura
Stack

LAURA STACK
Author of Leave the Office Earlier

WHAT TO DO
WHEN THERE'S
TOO MUCH
TO DO

Reduce Tasks,
Increase Results,
and Save 90
Minutes a Day



LAURA STACK, MBA, CSP

Speaker • Author • Consultant



President and CEO

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, has consulted with Fortune 500 corporations for nearly 20 years in the field of personal productivity. She helps leaders develop high-performance cultures and achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time® for their employees, teams, and themselves. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., which specializes in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations; she is also the 2011-2012 president of the National Speakers Association.

Keynoter

Laura presents over 100 practical, high-energy keynotes and seminars each year on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces and homes. She is one of a handful of professional speakers whose business focuses solely on time management and productivity topics. Laura is a high-energy, high-content speaker, who educates, entertains, and motivates professionals to improve workplace productivity. She has earned the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, the highest earned designation given by the National Speakers Association (NSA).

Author

Laura is the bestselling author of five books, including *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks, Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day* (Berrett-Koehler 2012); *SuperCompetent* (Wiley, 2010); *The Exhaustion Cure* (Broadway Books, 2008), *Find More Time* (Broadway Books, 2006), and the bestselling *Leave the Office Earlier* (Broadway Books, 2004), which was hailed as "the best of the bunch" by the *New York Times*. Her books have been published in nine countries and translated into six foreign languages, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Italian, and Romanian.

Recognized Productivity Expert

Widely regarded as one of the leading experts in the field of employee productivity and workplace issues, she has been featured nationally on the CBS Early Show, CNN, NPR, Bloomberg, NBC TV, WB News, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *WashingtonPost.com*, *O Magazine*, *Entrepreneur*, *Readers Digest*, and *Forbes* magazine. Laura has been a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, Skillsoft, Office Depot, and Xerox, and she is the creator of The Productivity Pro® planner by Day-Timer.



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WELCOME TO THE *WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S TOO MUCH TO DO* BOOK CLUB!

Congratulations on bringing the SAVE 90 MINUTE culture to your organization! Your participation in this program demonstrates your organization's willingness to invest in its employees' success. Here are some answers to frequently asked questions that might be helpful as you form your club:

- GROUP FORMATION.** How should I form the groups?
 - Some organizations begin an open enrollment "book club" and provide this program as an optional developmental opportunity. Some target the roll-out to a HiPo or leadership development group.
 - Others have focused a concerted effort on developing the Save 90 Minute culture within their organizations and rolled it out to a larger population (virtual discussion groups at multiple sites around the country).
- GROUP SIZE.** How many people are in a group?
 - The ideal size is between five to seven people per discussion group (if you have 25 people show up for a book club meeting, divide the larger group into five smaller groups).
 - I don't suggest permanent teams, since some people are on vacation or miss a club meeting due to another meeting conflict, etc.
- LOCATION.** Where should I hold the meetings?
 - If you have logical geographical teams, you can hold them onsite.
 - If your teams are remote, you can hold meetings via phone, video conference, gotomeeting, or other virtual platform.
- FREQUENCY.** How often should the discussion groups meet?
 - The book is divided into six chapters/steps, so six sessions are logical. A weekly meeting may be too much, but a monthly meeting will cause the group to lose interest. Reading the book in one month also seems daunting.
 - Twice a month seems to be the right number; the program would run three months using this structure, plus perhaps an introduction or "kick off" meeting. Feel free to adjust to the needs of your groups.
- LENGTH.** How long should the meetings run?
 - One hour to 90 minutes seems to work best.
- SPEAKING.** Can you "kick off" the program and speak at the first meeting?
 - Absolutely. I would be delighted to chat with you about this option. Email me at Laura@TheProductivityPro.com or 303-471-7401. Depending on the number of books you purchase, we offer credits toward Laura's speaking fee.

7. **RESOURCES.** Does the program use other resources in addition to the book, *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do*?
- Yes, download the workbook/discussion guide and send to each person, as well as the leader guide for the facilitator(s).
 - Take the optional self-assessment at <http://www.bkconnection.com/what-to-do-assessment.asp>.
 - As participants read the book, the workbook will lead them through a practical application of the material to their jobs and your organization. They answer the questions for each chapter at the conclusion of each.
 - At www.save90minutes.com, participants may subscribe to a free, 6-video series of Laura discussing each step in the Productivity Workflow Process (PWF) and watch the correct video prior to the book club meeting.
8. **DEVELOPMENT.** How do we tie this into development plans?
- The workbook may be part of a developmental plan for participants with these identified performance issues:
 - Burnout or Work/Life balance
 - Organizational issues
 - Reliability problems
 - Time management challenges
 - Lack of follow up or inefficiency
 - Productivity concerns
 - Leaders and co-workers can take the assessment online to evaluate in a 360 fashion the employee's strengths and weaknesses. See <http://www.bkconnection.com/what-to-do-assessment.asp> for more information. Make their mentors aware of the book club, so they can engage in discussions as well.
 - Ask some of your more experienced leaders to be a "guest speaker" at a meeting to share their insights.
 - Executive coaching with Laura is also available.
9. **CULTURE.** How should we follow up to "hard wire" the learning or provide training?
- You can discuss actual case studies and best practices at staff meetings, project updates, websites, and blogs.
 - Post stories and best practices on your intranet.
 - Train-the-trainer and licensed WHAT TO DO curriculum is available for half-day and full-day training sessions.
10. **REWARDS.** How can we encourage participation from the beginning to the end?
- If you wish, we have digital "prizes" and bonus resources we can donate (such as eBooks, videos, and MP3s), for any participant who attends all six sessions.

Step-by-Step Implementation Plan

Before the meeting:

1. Determine how many book clubs you will run and the makeup of those groups.
2. Decide how often your book club will meet and how much content you will cover in each session (read FAQs above for more information).
3. Query the group to discover any major scheduling conflicts.
4. Select the book club meeting dates, realizing that conflicts are inevitable, and you'll never be able to select dates that work for everyone. We find that scheduling all six sessions in advance increases the likelihood participants can work around it.
5. Invite participants and secure confirmations. From those attending, some leaders also secure the small-group facilitators in advance; some assign on-site at the meeting.
6. Handle logistical details, such ordering books and booking conference rooms.
7. Ask each participant to download the Discussion Guide at <http://www.theproductivitypro.com/whattodo/wtd-book-club>
8. If taking the assessment, send participants to <http://www.bkconnection.com/what-to-do-assessment.asp>. Ask them to complete it and print their results.
9. Decide if participants should watch each online video at www.save90minutes.com privately before coming to each meeting, or if you're going to watch it as a large group for a kick-off activity.
10. Send out a meeting reminder before each club meeting. Include the link and password to the online video (if applicable). Remind them to read the chapter for that Step in the PWF and complete the questions in the Discussion Guide. Encourage them to come to each meeting fully prepared. Remind them that careful preparation will greatly enrich their learning and time spent in group discussion.
11. Read the book. This may seem obvious, but it's one of the most important. Plan on finishing the book a little earlier than you might otherwise, so you have time to review and plan each book club meeting. Write down important page numbers that made an impact on you or gave you an "ah-ha!" Answer the questions for yourself in the discussion guide.

During the book club:

12. At the meeting, welcome participants and make any opening comments. Show the video for that step if you wish.
13. Feel free to add new questions to cover their personal observations, interpretation, or application on the implications for their particular job, team, or situation.
14. Divide the large group into smaller discussion groups of approximately five people (larger groups make active participation more difficult). For your own learning experience, you'll probably want to participate as an active group member, rather than standing around. You can excuse yourself if necessary if something comes up.
15. Select a facilitator for each discussion group. We find that it's best to change the small groups and group leaders each meeting, so participants can interact with many different people. You can brief them on the role of the facilitator (or send in advance of the meeting)
 - Guide each small group through each chapter and its discussion questions.
 - Ask questions.
 - Move the conversation along efficiently.
 - Rein in tangents (going a little off topic is fine, but they should recognize that people have read the book and expect to talk about it).
 - Read each question and let others answer first.
 - Don't try to be a teacher.
 - Rotate who answers first, so everyone has a chance to participate and express opinions and insights.
 - "Go with the flow," in any order that makes sense for that small group. (If someone gives an answer to question 5 that connects well with question 8, don't feel obligated to answer questions 6 and 7 in order before moving to 8.)
 - Occasionally direct questions toward quiet people, without putting them on the spot.
16. Remind participants to stick to the topic being discussed, listen attentively, and engage all members equally.

At the end:

Wrap up the discussion by asking questions of the larger group if you desire or ask for input from each of the small group facilitator on their conversations.

The Discussion Guide materials for individual participants follow.

WELCOME TO THE *WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S TOO MUCH TO DO* BOOK CLUB!

Congratulations on taking the next step to SAVING 90 MINUTES a day! Your participation in this program demonstrates your organization's willingness to invest in your future, and your contribution of time to this program will help you go even further. Whether you're a manager, salesperson, or individual contributor, the skills you gain from this book club will help you grow exponentially and achieve even higher levels in your career. *WHAT TO DO* will give you proven methods to reach peak performance and achieve breakthrough results through greater productivity. You'll save 90 minutes a day AND skyrocket the value you bring to your organization.

Typically, you will meet six times with your group (your leader will determine how frequently your club will meet). You'll be discussing one chapter per meeting.

Before each book club meeting, I recommend you:

1. Watch the online video that corresponds with that chapter. Register for the free video series at www.save90minutes.com.
2. Read one chapter every couple days (it's potentially difficult to absorb a chapter in one day). The "clock" icons throughout highlight tips and areas to reflect upon.
3. Answer the discussion guide questions in this manual as you complete each chapter, while the content is still fresh in your mind. Questions may cover your personal observations, interpretation, possible applications, or the implications for your particular job, team, or organization.
4. Come to each book club meeting fully prepared – don't try to "wing it." Conflicts arise, but do your best to be consistent in attending. You'll find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your learning and time spent in group discussion.
5. Participate! Your leader and small group facilitators will not be lecturing; rather, they will encourage you to discuss what you learned and how to apply it.
6. Stick to the topic being discussed; listen attentively; and engage all members equally.

Introduction: The Case for Reduction

What To Do When There's Too Much To Do is unique in its approach to workflow, and I think you'll find it a breath of fresh air in an overcrowded and increasingly redundant field. Simply stated, my central message is *it's better to do less, not more, so you can do better, more focused work.*

Many workers find this a startling concept, because they increasingly have to work harder and longer with fewer resources – and that's precisely why my message is so very important. You see, over the last few decades we've learned to be superbly productive, but only in a way that can't be sustained over the long haul.

I honestly believe an abandonment of unnecessary chores, and a drastic triage of all that remains, is the only way to be consistently, profitably productive in this economy without destroying your health, your family life, and your joy. In this book, I'll show you how to train yourself out of the overwork mentality. *Reduce, reduce, reduce* will become your new mantra, to the tune of about 90 minutes a day. This 90-minute savings isn't a guess – it's what clients have told me these methods have saved them.

Instead of accepting your fate and allowing it to overwhelm you, step up and take your future in your own hands – and do what's necessary to achieve a work/life balance that you can manage indefinitely. With the new system I offer you, it's simple to rearrange your life so you can *have* a life outside of work. Not necessarily easy, mind you – but simple and straightforward to implement. With that in mind, I'd like to introduce the Productivity Workflow Formula™ (PWF).

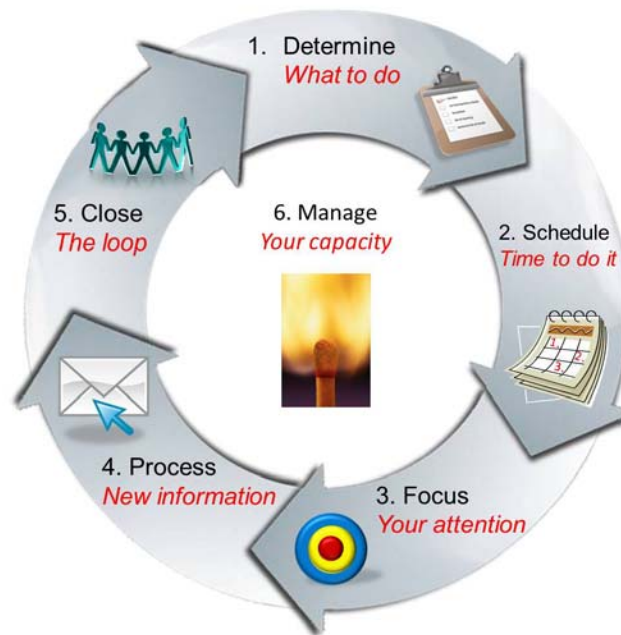
A Brand New Model

The PWF breaks down into six primary steps:

1. **Determine what to do.** Study your work requirements closely; triage your to-do list; and decide to do only what really matters. **REDUCE YOUR TO-DO LIST.**
2. **Schedule time to do it.** Assign time slots and durations appropriately; say no when appropriate; and control your meetings. **REDUCE YOUR OBLIGATIONS.**
3. **Focus your attention.** Hone your concentration to razor sharpness; shut out distractions; and avoid multitasking. **REDUCE YOUR DISTRACTIONS.**
4. **Process new information.** Research effectively; and quickly handle incoming email voicemail, and paper. **REDUCE INCOMING INFORMATION.**

5. **Close the loop.** Determine what does and doesn't work; solve people problems and bottlenecks; and tighten up systems as you go. REDUCE INEFFICIENCIES.
6. **Manage your capacity.** Focus on the physical factors affecting your energy; and manage sleep, diet, and exercise. REDUCE ENERGY EXPENDITURES.

Graphically, the PWF looks like this:



The model is circular by design, which suggests continuity, as well as a process that can (and should) be repeated again and again. In other words, you get into a continuum and don't have to leave it; it just becomes part of your life. Plus, instead of thinking of productivity as a straight line from A to B (followed by . . . nothing) it becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy. Each improvement gets you to a new place, instead of to some plateau you never leave again.

The Productivity Workflow Formula™ (PWF)

Determine + Schedule + Focus + Process + Close + Manage = PRODUCE

If you incorporate the PWF into your life, you really can save yourself 90 minutes a day that you can use to live your life, instead of working it away. If you feel shackled to your desk, this may sound odd, but it really *is* possible to get more done while doing less work. You just need to separate the valuable wheat from the non-productive chaff.

So let's take a look at how you can become more efficient, step by logical step.

CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY: DETERMINE WHAT TO DO

You can't exorcise the demon of overwork until you first determine exactly which tasks you need to perform on a regular basis, and then commit to doing only those tasks whenever possible. Start by studying your work requirements closely, and then make a sincere effort to apply the medical concept of triage to your task lists. Cut back or eliminate the timewasters and set out to do only what truly matters.

Common offenders include:

- Paying too much attention to e-mail
- Overuse of the Internet, including social networks
- Excess socializing
- Handling personal issues on the clock
- Smoking
- Arriving late/leaving early
- Too many meetings

Many of our reasons for having too much to do are hollow, with tasks imposed on us by other people, or taken on due to bad math, indecision, disorganization, fear, or lack of direction. Cut back on tasks that have no long-term consequences to your job, so you can catch enough breath to recover from work and enjoy the rest of your life. The concept of triage really comes into its own here, because it helps you establish task priorities on the fly, and push aside anything minor until you either can take care of it, or it drops off your to-do list.

Speaking of to-do lists, don't just toss everything willy-nilly onto one big one and then expect to be anything but overwhelmed. Leverage the concept of the master list, where you put all fundamental and "someday" tasks – the important but non-urgent items – while funneling the "right now" tasks to your daily HIT list, where you can handle them immediately. Furthermore, compile a *Not-To-Do* list, where you track the things you refuse to clog your schedule with.

The more you can trim the waste out of your schedule, the more valuable you become to your organization – because you're much more productive than before, even though you may work fewer hours. Too many people confuse activity with productivity, forgetting that staying busy doesn't necessarily mean creating results, no matter how many hours you work.

If you'll just shift your focus to the right things, you can do more in eight hours than you did in twelve before – and you'll preserve your health and sanity along the way.

Questions to Consider from Chapter 1

1. Why is it so critical to use time productively?

2. How do you know if you were productive each day vs. just “busy”?

3. What is your Personal Return on Investment? What are your critical or key tasks in your job that ACTUALLY contribute to the bottom line of your organization?

4. Which of your tasks yield the best return for your time investment? How much time of every day do you spend on these high-impact activities?

5. What did you do in the last week that directly contributed to some of your high-value goals or projects?

6. What did you do in the last week that did *not* contribute significantly or help you make progress towards a high value goal or project?

7. What actions could you take in the next 7-14 days which would contribute significantly or at least progress toward a high value goal or project?

8. What do you do when someone asks you to do something that doesn't fall under your responsibilities?

9. What are some of the items you would add to your Not-To-Do list?

10. How do you separate your Master (ongoing) to-do list from your HIT (daily) tasks?

11. Is your system organized, to the extent you know what you should be working on every minute of the day? Or do you ever wonder what to do next?

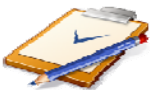
12. Do you conduct regular reviews of your system or lists: monthly, weekly, and daily?

13. Do you tend to work on things in the order they “show up” or in order of importance? How will the triage idea help you work differently?

14. Do you ever feel guilty about where you spend time? What are some of your most common timewasters?

15. Where do you put others’ requests ahead of your own needs? When is this desirable, and when does it cause you to sacrifice time with your loved ones?

My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 1



CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY: SCHEDULE TIME TO DO IT

Once you've identified the critical few tasks you should focus on, you'll need to find the time to do them. This process requires careful scheduling, whereby you assign appropriate time slots and durations for each appointment and task. In addition, you must make decisions quickly, learn to say no to unwelcome work, and control your meetings.

Time management isn't really time management, but self-management – your willingness to stop misusing time in ways that limit your productivity. In pursuit of this effort, establish routines to help you keep moving forward, and set realistic deadlines to decide when and how to accomplish each task.

Once you've established a deadline for a particular task, calculate how much time you must work on the task each day. Then fit the time into your schedule according to the task's priority, utilizing the triage system from Step One. Emergencies and other crises aside, tasks generally fall into three scheduling categories:

- "Have-to" items required by your job
- Routine daily tasks
- Items from your HIT list

Further reduce your commitments in any way possible: by asking yourself and others, "How long will this take?" for each task, by applying the "availability caching" concept, and by turning down any work that you don't want or can't handle. Many of us have trouble turning people down, but you should learn to do so effectively, so people won't take advantage of you. Follow these guidelines:

- Say no in an upbeat, positive way.
- Don't make empty promises.
- Don't apologize or explain yourself.
- Negotiate as necessary.
- Meet the other person halfway.
- Be persistent and consistent.
- Be crystal clear.
- Don't worry about someone's feelings over your own needs.

Last, many meetings are unnecessary, so find ways to trim as many as you can out of your schedule, and let people know you're willing to do so. Finally, exercise clarity, discernment, and vision to make the correct choices "in the moment," so you don't waste valuable time by allowing yourself to be derailed between tasks.



Questions to Consider from Chapter 2

1. Do you consider delegating, outsourcing, or eliminating those tasks that others can do more cheaply? What % of your tasks are things that others could do?

2. Have you ever delegated work to someone and then taken it back, because that person didn't do it "the right way"?

3. Are you booked back-to-back all day, or do you try to block time out of your schedule to complete high-value work?

4. Think back to a time when you were overcommitted and continued to take on work. What were the results?

5. How good are you at saying "no" to others if needed? Do you need more work on limiting your availability and putting appropriate boundaries around your time?

6. What tasks, projects, or volunteer work have you said "yes" to in the past that in hindsight, you wish you'd said "no" to?

7. What are some creative ways you've learned to "just say no" without actually using the word "no"?

8. How do you handle meeting requests that don't have a defined objective or demonstrated return on investment?

9. Do you find that some of the items on meeting agendas could have been handled more efficiently with a phone call or email? How do you address this?

10. What does your daily “routine” look like? In general, do you work on the right tasks at the right time?

11. Do you make productive choices when faced with discretionary time?

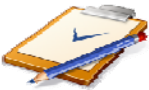
12. In the last 48 hours, how was your planned work interrupted?

13. If you classified the list above into types of disruptions, would you find any recurring themes?

14. Can you quantify the impact of interruptions on your productivity?

15. Realistically, how long could you have a “do-not-disturb” period and what would be the best time? How would you let others know?

My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 2



CHAPTER THREE SUMMARY: FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION

You can achieve true productivity only when you hone your ability to focus to razor sharpness.

For most of us, distractions represent our biggest productivity hurdles. External distractions are bad enough, but at least you can escape from most of those: for example, by closeting yourself away from others, by establishing signals letting people know when they shouldn't disturb you, and by ignoring email and phone calls until you have time to deal with them.

Internal distractions are much more insidious, since your own mind creates them – and you can't easily escape yourself. Self-discipline is your watchword here. Look closely at your work day, determine which activities waste your time, and make rules to control them. Enforce those rules aggressively, especially guarding against the following activities:

- Multitasking
- Procrastinating
- Perfectionism
- Negative self-talk
- Socializing

Taken together, these things can steal hours from your work day. The worst culprit may be multitasking, because it fools you into thinking you've accomplished a lot, when you've really just kept yourself busy. Instead of haphazardly trying to do ten things at once, focus on one activity until you've completed it, and then move on to the next one.

Too many of us jump whenever our smartphones, handhelds, email, and other techno-tools tell us to, and we pay for it with lapses in productivity. If you've fallen prey to this habit, slip the electronic leash. Constant connection to the info-world can damage your productivity.

Enlist focus aids to help you maintain the thread of your daily productivity. Write down or otherwise record ideas as they occur to you, so you don't interrupt yourself to pursue a shiny new thought when you should be doing something else. Harness metacognition to help you understand how you think, so you can better head off distractions while fine-tuning your focus; and if you think it may help, try ambient sound to insulate you from external distraction.



Questions to Consider from Chapter 3

1. Have you eliminated external distractions in your environment, or are you sidetracked by noise, voices, hallway traffic, etc.? What can you do about this?

2. How would you handle it if people were talking loudly outside your office door?

3. What can you and your coworkers do to help each other concentrate better?

4. How much does multi-tasking affect your productivity? Do you feel focused on one thing at a time or completely scattered?

5. Are you like Pavlov's dogs: salivating at every ring, chime, or beep of your technology (text, IM, email)?

6. Do you ever procrastinate when you're disinterested in a task? How can you force yourself to stay head down and focused?

7. Do you have perfectionistic tendencies? How do you decide if something is "good enough" to call it done?

8. How do you normally handle a large task or project assigned to you?

9. What kind of negative self-talk goes on inside your head?

10. Do you feel focused in meetings or conference calls, or do you attempt to work?

11. How many times a day do you feel (a) the urge to check email, (b) actually check email, and (c) should check email?

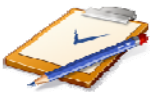
12. Is there a cultural “norm” in your company that dictates how often you should check and respond to email?

13. Do you believe you're addicted to email? How does your email behavior affect your productivity?

14. How do you keep yourself from “living” in your inbox and checking them as they come in?

15. When you think of something you need to do, what do you usually do? Are you consistent in capturing information?

My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 3



CHAPTER FOUR SUMMARY: PROCESS NEW INFORMATION

Modern office workers face an astonishing flood of information, flowing in from more sources than we've ever before experienced. If you can't learn how to filter out the worthless and efficiently organize the remainder, your productivity will inevitably suffer.

First, establish a basic filing system to track your paper documents, including the following types of files at the very least: Active/Dynamic, Project/Client, Reference, and Archive/History.

Next, set up a personal time management system, if you haven't already. It doesn't matter whether you choose a paper-based, electronic, or hybrid method, as long as it meets the HUG criteria: it must be Handy, Usable, and Garbage-free. Having these systems in place will help you tame the information glut.

Next, find ways to reduce the involuntary data inflow, especially via email. If possible, have someone else sort through it for you. Otherwise, stop receiving information you don't need, and set up spam filters, blacklists, whitelists, and rules to automatically delete email.

When voluntarily taking in information, winnow it down using the appropriate research techniques, especially when searching the Internet. In addition, leverage any available library services to cut down your research time and maximize your results.

Carry reading material with you constantly, so you can make effective use of unscheduled downtime, and investigate speed-reading techniques that let you get the most out of the reading time you do have.

Basic information handling skills are also critical:

- Don't touch things multiple times.
- Be decisive and apply the basic precepts of my 6-D Information Handling System—Discard, Delegate, Do, Date, Drawer, and Deter.
- Start what you finish.
- Do things requiring less than three minutes right away.
- Don't use your inboxes as a to-do list.
- Empty your inboxes at least once daily.

Apply these rules to all incoming information, particularly paper, email, and voicemail.



Questions to Consider from Chapter 4

1. How do you use spam-blockers, Rules, and unsubscribing to limit email?

2. How would you rate your skill in conducting internet searches and finding highly relevant information?

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your desk organization (1 being highly organized)?

4. How would you describe your paper filing system? Is it neat and orderly?

5. How long does it take you to find files on your computer?

6. What is your C-O-R system? How do you capture, organize, and reference information?

7. How many emails do you generally have in your inbox (read and unread)?

8. Are you diligent about processing email and emptying your inbox?

9. What do you do with emails you need to handle at a future date, but you don't want to leave them in your inbox?

10. What email protocols and guidelines could you and your coworkers follow to save time for everyone?

11. Does your personal time management system meet the HUG criteria (Handy, Usable, and Garbage-free)?

12. Where do you feel like you're "fighting" with your time management system, trying to make it work? What is inefficient about it?

13. How could your system be more effective and organized (handheld, web-based, paper copies, software, shared calendars, etc.)?

14. What do you do when you receive junk, newsletters, jokes, virus warnings, or other non-essential email at work? What if the sender were a friend?

15. What would you do if you were driving and thought of something you need to do?

My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 4



CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY: CLOSE THE LOOP

Once you've learned how to triage your commitment load, schedule your tasks appropriately, focus your attention, and process new information, it's time to consolidate everything into a single, efficient, time-saving system.

Closing the loop means tinkering with your workflow until all the components work smoothly together, weeding out the unnecessary at every turn and replacing anything that doesn't work as well as it should. Begin by creating a plan of action to organize your life and workspace for maximum efficiency, then start clearing the clutter. Do all you can to minimize the effort and time you spend on basic processes.

You can't avoid all the human factors that may inhibit your workflow, but do your best to limit confusion by making sure you communicate clearly and with a minimum of "noise." Get straight to the point, avoid hedging, make your needs plain, and require acknowledgement in all directions.

If you find yourself faced with micromanagers, do what you can to work around or accommodate them, so they don't completely ruin your productivity. If necessary, confront them politely but directly with your inability to work under the conditions they impose; they may back off.

You'll inevitably face workflow inefficiencies and bottlenecks, some of which derive from inefficient processes you can either upgrade or replace. Again, however, people often cause such blockages. Whatever the case, step in immediately, and do your best to put them right. If you can't clear a bottleneck, don't obsess over it; maneuver around it and move on to what you *can* fix.

In the modern workplace, teamwork is especially important; so like it or not, you may find yourself depending on others to keep your workflow steady. Strive to make it easy for everyone involved. Start by clarifying the group workflow process, providing milestones and deadlines, and assigning tasks to particular individuals. Set up contingency plans for handling crises and emergencies, especially when dealing with people in other organizations.

All in all, you must continually tighten your workflow loop, making consistent efforts to maximize your efficiency. Constantly evaluate what works and what doesn't, learn from your mistakes, fill in the gaps as they occur, and keep reaching toward the brass ring of doing less and achieving greater results.

Questions to Consider from Chapter 5

1. Do you have a bullet-proof follow-up and reminder system?

2. Do you always close communication loops with others at the conclusion of a project and debrief what could work better the next time?

3. Do you ever feel micromanaged or give your boss a reason to micromanage you?

4. How do you rate your communications in terms of being clear (non-confusing), concise (short), and direct (to the point)?

5. How often do you make changes or improve your own work methods and procedures? Give an example of a recent one.

6. Do you and your co-workers ever meet specifically to focus on revisiting workflow processes and improving efficiency?

7. What do you do when someone ignores your email? Doesn't meet a deadline?

8. Who is your greatest human bottleneck (use code if there are others around you)? How can you keep this person from impacting your work as much?

9. Do you ever keep from taking something on, for fear of failure? For fear of success?

10. What decisions, if made now by you and your team, would immediately propel you forward on a project of major significance?

11. Could your team cut back on the number of meetings? Meet for a shorter period of time? Increase efficiency or effectiveness?

12. Do you feel like you know all the software on your computer “like the back of your hand”? Where could you be more efficient, if you increased your skills?

13. How do you measure productivity improvements in your job over time? How do you KNOW if you've become more productive?

14. What is the #1 thing that you would have to change about yourself if you were to be more productive?

15. What is the #1 thing that would need to change at your organization if you're going to be more productive? What can YOU do to influence this change?

My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 5



CHAPTER SIX SUMMARY: MANAGE YOUR CAPACITY

Establishing and maintaining an effective workflow routine isn't enough. You have to power it with your personal energy, constantly and reliably, or everything falls apart.

Managing your capacity is central to the entire PWF process. So focus on the physical factors affecting your energy: sleep, diet, exercise, and your own happiness. Take care of yourself, so your workflow engine stays up and running with a minimum of fuss. You can't prevent every potential "power outage," but you can prevent most of them if you'll try.

First, take steps to reduce your energy expenditure. Your personal "battery" only has so much capacity, so learn to work within your limits and recharge whenever necessary. Overwork will drain you so far you won't be able to get anything done productively. When possible, take your meal breaks, rest breaks, weekends, and vacations – or you'll pay for it with flagging energy and mental strain.

Be sure to get plenty of sleep, too; it reduces stress, evens out your biochemistry, allows your muscles to restore themselves, and gives your brain time to process and deal with new information. Implement simple actions to keep your sleep schedule steady: control the thermostat, shut out snoring, take power naps when necessary, and keep your bedroom sleep-related.

You also need to watch your diet, focusing on portion control and making sure you eat foods that boost your energy rather than drag you down. Add exercise to your daily routine, whether you maintain a regular workout schedule or sneak in "subversive exercise" like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking at the far end of the parking lot so you have to walk farther, or watching TV from a treadmill.

Don't leave your mental health out of the equation! Do everything you can think of to make yourself happier. For example:

- Make empowered choices.
- Spend more time with your family.
- Do something nice for someone else.
- Laugh at adversity.
- Surround yourself with happy things.

The PWF will work for you only if you focus on making it work. Step up and make every effort you can to maintain your energetic edge, so your workflow process will keep running without a hitch.

Questions to Consider from Chapter 6

1. Do you take enough breaks at work to recharge your energy and creativity, or do you tend to work non-stop?

2. Do you feel well-rested during the day and get ample sleep for your requirements?

3. Is your diet well-balanced? How could your food intake better support your energy levels?

4. Are you good about ample fluid intake? Are you drinking the right things at the right time (caffeine, sugar, protein, etc.)?

5. Would you say your activity levels support high energy? What could you do to get more consistent exercise into your life?

6. Would your family agree that you spend ample time with them?

7. Do you think you're a workaholic? Are you just fooling yourself or rationalizing?

8. What are the conditions in which you run your battery dry?

9. What do you do "for fun"? How do you make sure you don't end up at the bottom of your to-do list?

10. Do you spend time fixing your own mistakes? When do you notice you're prone to errors?

11. During periods of overwork (tight deadlines, projects, etc.), how do you maintain your sanity? How do you get back to "normal" when it's over?

12. What is the impact of negative emotions on your relationships, health, or work performance?

13. What do you think is the #1 cause of any stress in your life right now?

14. How can you change your belief that you CAN do something if deep down, you believe you CAN'T? What does this make you think about?

15. Think of someone you find difficult to deal with at work. Describe what makes that person difficult. What would this person say about you?

My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 6



CONCLUSION

"Stress is your body's way of saying you haven't worked enough unpaid overtime." -- Scott Adams, American cartoonist (*Dilbert*)

One of the reasons that Scott Adam's cartoon *Dilbert* is so popular is that it wryly captures precisely what American office workers experience and feel on a daily basis. The above quote, attributed to evil HR Director Catbert, resonates with those who feel overworked, put-upon, and stretched thin – especially during this time of economic downturn.

As I write this, we're still mired in the Great Recession, although some government analysts would say otherwise. Productivity is down and the job market is tighter than it's been in decades, which means that most of us are willing to do whatever it takes to keep the jobs we have. Fear is often a great motivator. People work ridiculously long hours in a desperate attempt to maximize productivity, no matter what, because they're afraid of losing their jobs in a down economy without the reassurance of getting another one.

Sadly, this often ends up hurting us more than it helps. Given our temporal constraints, life must be a series of tradeoffs; when you say "yes" to one thing, you have to say "no" to another. One of the worst things about working long hours is that it keeps you away from friends and loved ones. Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but only up to a certain point; you have to spend time with those you care for, so you can maintain and develop your relationships. Your children especially need you, as a positive role model at least.

Furthermore, many busy people push taking care of themselves down to the bottom of their to-do lists, where it often falls off and becomes lost in the daily triage of time management. This is bad enough, but too much work also results in exhaustion, which in the short term causes mistakes and rework, resulting in even lower productivity.

Remember this: You're not a machine, so don't try to be one. A decent work/life balance and plenty of rest are required for any human being to productively thrive. The true bottom line is that it's in your best interest, and your company's, for you to trim the fat out of your schedule and tame the beast of overwork. You can't be successfully productive if you work yourself into the hospital...or an early grave.

Rather than ruin your health, alienate your family and friends, and lose yourself, take steps to nip workaholism in the bud right now, while you still can. Pull back. Weed out the unnecessary and trivial.

Beating overwork requires self-discipline and a willingness to put yourself and the things that truly matter to you first rather than last. Clearly, you have plenty of self-discipline; otherwise you wouldn't be working so many hours. Making yourself a priority is probably a bigger problem. But it's worth trying, because implementing the workflow formula that I've described in this book will make life a lot easier for you by freeing up valuable recharge time without forcing you to sacrifice one jot of productivity.

They say hard work is good for the soul, and it can certainly help you get ahead. But as with anything, moderation is the key here. Too much work can keep you away from what really matters to you. It can also cause both physical and mental stress, which can have devastating health effects.

Keep all that from happening. Give the Productivity Workflow Formula a try. You've got absolutely nothing to lose – and a whole new productive lease on life to gain.

Go to www.LauraStack.com/whattodo to receive complimentary bonus material, tip sheets, and group discussion worksheets.

Go to <http://www.bkconnection.com/what-to-do-assessment.asp> to assess your strengths and improvement opportunities around your PWF.

Educational Resources by Laura Stack

Screenshots of Microsoft Outlook Inbox and Tasks tricks:

www.TheProductivityPro.com/download.htm

Download the Laura Stack app for a free eBook! www.TheProductivityPro.com/app

Subscribe to our weekly one-minute productivity video training series “The Productivity Minute”! <http://www.theproductivitypro.com/productivityminute/>

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