



111 Ways to Improve Personal Productivity

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM
THE PRODUCTIVITY PRO



By Laura Stack,
MBA, CSP



ABOUT THE PRODUCTIVITY PRO, INC.



Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, has consulted with Fortune 500 corporations for nearly 20 years in the field of personal productivity. She helps her clients achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time® and develop high-performance cultures. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., which specializes in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations. Since 1992, Laura has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. 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.

Laura is the bestselling author of four books, including *SuperCompetent: The Six Keys to Perform at Your Productive Best* (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. She is also a contributor to two of the popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books. Laura's popular monthly electronic newsletter has subscribers in 38 countries. She is a Microsoft Certified Application Specialist in Outlook.

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*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *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. Her client list includes top Fortune 500 companies, including Starbucks, Wal-Mart, IBM, GM, MillerCoors, Lockheed Martin, Wells Fargo, and Time Warner, plus a multitude of associations and governmental agencies.

Laura holds an MBA in Organizational Management (University of Colorado, 1991), integrating the importance of productivity in business with employee retention and satisfaction. She is the 2011-2012 President of the National Speakers Association (NSA) and is the recipient of the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, NSA's highest earned designation.

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By Laura Stack, MBA, CSP

1. Do the task you LEAST look forward to first thing in the morning! Knock out that high-priority, yucky task right away, so it isn't hanging over your head all day. Don't procrastinate and put it off, or you'll end up working late. Throughout the day, ask yourself, "What's the best use of my time right now?" As the day grows short, focus on projects you can least afford to leave undone.
2. Schedule personal appointments on your calendar, so you can concentrate on high-priority projects. Sneak away to a conference room or empty office if possible, to minimize the chances for interruptions.
3. Stick to a color scheme for your wardrobe. I purchase mostly black, red, and navy clothes. When you do this, you won't waste a lot of time hunting down accessories that only go with one outfit or trying to mix and match correctly.
4. Make school lunches in the evening while preparing dinner. This leaves one less thing to do and clean up in the morning.
5. Ask for a flexible work schedule, so you can have extra time when you need it. You can occasionally work through lunch and get to the gym. You can come in early and leave early for a kid's soccer game, or come in late after a dentist appointment. Or try a compressed workweek-work four 10-hour days, and use Fridays for appointments and doctor's visits.
6. I used to think having someone clean your house was a waste of money...until I starting tracking how much time I spent cleaning...five hours a week on average! That's 20 hours per month and approximately 250 hours per year! Now I have a woman who comes into my home every other week. She cleans the entire house in four hours and charges me \$15 an hour. Is it worth it? For 250 hours a year...you bet! Think about hiring out your yard work, paperwork and filing, laundry, errands, and gardening.
7. Use voice mail to increase efficiency. If you need uninterrupted time to finish an important project, voice mail allows you to identify who's calling and temporarily screen out less urgent calls. If you're in a hurry, leaving a voice mail message will let you avoid lengthy conversations punctuated by the usual social niceties.

8. Do you have a jam-packed life because you just can't say, "NO"? Be realistic about what you have time for. Think of creative ways to accommodate requests made by others. Instead of baking homemade brownies for the Girl Scout meeting, offer to buy the paper goods. Purchase them on your regular grocery store trip. If your boss is overloading you, say "I'll be glad to handle that for you. However, I can't get to it until I finish the XYZ project. That will be..." Or, ask what the priorities are for the different pieces of work on your plate and negotiate a due date. That's a reasonable way to call the existing workload to your boss's attention, and you won't be fired for pointing out that you can only do so much at a time.
9. Stop wasting the first hour of your workday! Having the chat and first cup of coffee, reading the paper, and socializing are the three costliest opening exercises that lower productivity.
10. Have you ever delegated a task, just to take it back again, because the person didn't do it "the right way"? If your spouse agrees to go to the grocery store for you, and you complain about the wrong type of peanut butter, he or she won't want to go again. That task is back on your plate again. If your assistant makes an occasional blooper on an internal memo that's not even going outside the company, or has a writing style that you don't prefer, do you have to "fix" it if it's technically correct? Of course, if it's a seven-million-dollar proposal, you cross every "T" and dot every "I." But if it's good enough, let it go. Instead of having unrealistic expectations, ask yourself, "Is this good enough?"
11. Think about having groceries, diapers, stamps, milk, office supplies, and dry cleaning delivered. In most cases, it's cheaper than doing it yourself, if you factor in the value of your time. Look at every responsibility in your life and ask yourself if there's another way to get that task done.
12. Spend twenty minutes at the end of each week and ten minutes at the end of each day planning your to-do list. When you "download" the day's activities before you leave work, you will be fully present to your family. Planning helps you leave work at work. I know I haven't done a good job planning when I'm reading a book to one of my children, and I haven't heard a word I've read. I'm only thinking about what I need to do when I'm done reading the book. That's when I confess to my family that I need ten minutes in the office, and then I'll emerge again, fully ready to be mommy and wife.
13. Note a discard day on all papers before filing in reference files. Later, your once-a-year purge will be a snap. Or, discard all outdated papers each time you use a file or while you are on hold.

14. Make sure all your files begin with a NOUN instead of an ADJECTIVE. For example, Auto Insurance, Medical Insurance, and Homeowners Insurance would all be located in different sections of your files. Use Insurance, Auto; Insurance, Medical; and Insurance, Homeowners instead, so the files all end up in the same place. Wouldn't you want to go to ONE place in your files to find all information related to insurance?
15. Many times interruptions don't come from the outside. We interrupt ourselves, acting like a butterfly – flitting from one task to another. It takes valuable time to start and stop work on each activity. Instead, act like a postage stamp – stick to one thing until you get there! Even Montessori pre-school teachers tell four-year-olds to stick with a task until it's done. If kids do it, you should do it, too.
16. If you haven't finished a project, put the materials away in a project folder or binder off to the side of your work area. Write a note in your planner or on your Task List to cross-reference the location and next steps. Keep them out of sight until you can finish the work.
17. Learn to be ruthless when discarding information. It's been estimated that 80% of what we keep we never reference again. Don't be a packrat! Multiple copies of the same item usually exist in both electronic and paper formats. If someone else created a document electronically, you can easily obtain it again. Toss away!
18. Don't wait on hold on the phone – purge a file while you're at it. While exercising on your treadmill, get through a current magazine or trade journal. While waiting for reports to print out, book your next dentist appointment. While commuting to work, listen to current business books on tape or just relax and enjoy the music. Make use of your available downtime!
19. You may know someone open to exchanging services. They may love doing a chore you hate and vice versa. If you hate to wash windows, trade it with your neighbor to steam clean their carpets. Trade baby-sitting services for gardening. I know two women that have a wonderful trade going. One loves to do crafts, and the other loves to bake. So, at holiday time, one wraps the other's presents and decorates her home, and the second woman bakes all the holiday goodies for the other and prepares her holiday meals. What a great exchange!
20. When writing in MS Word, I often need to change the case of my text from sentence case to capitals, and I find it tedious to use the menu system. So I've discovered a handy shortcut! With the cursor on the word to capitalize, hold shift and press F3, once to capitalize the first letter, twice to capitalize the entire word, and a third time to lower case. If the word is already capitalized the sequence works anyway: "Capital" becomes "CAPITAL," becomes "capital" in that order.

21. If someone is capable of performing a task 80% as well as you can, delegate it to them. We often have the misperception that only we can do a task perfectly. Delegate tasks that others could do efficiently at a lower cost to the company. Give clear instructions, issue a deadline, and follow up.
22. Handle each piece of paper that crosses your desk only ONCE using the “6 D” System:
 - Discard (toss)
 - Delegate (route to someone else)
 - Do (if you can complete it in three minutes or less)
 - Date (put in your tickler file for future action)
 - Drawer (project or reference files)
 - Deter (get off the distribution list)
23. Before you put a piece of paper in your “to be filed” bin, mark it with the name of the file folder it belongs in. Then you won’t have to re-read the item again when it’s time to file.
24. If you’re procrastinating about starting an important project, perhaps it’s too daunting. Try the “salami technique” – break it up into small slices. Instead of looking at a large 20-hour project, you can think of it as 10 two-hour projects.
25. If you have a hard time saying “no,” provide alternatives. “I’m sorry I can’t chat right now, because I’m up against a tight deadline. Can I call you back at 3:00 to discuss it?” “I can’t meet today, because I’m leaving at noon, but I can meet with you tomorrow or the next day. Which is best for you?” This defuses a confrontation over “no,” and allows a discussion about which “yes” works best.
26. Look at airplane trips and doctor’s visits as opportunities, rather than ordeals. Rip out magazine articles and keep them in a “to be read” folder. During visits and long trips, pull them out. Or write articles, read the “heavy” books, or plan out your monthly goals.
27. Have a designated day of the week (ours is Sundays) for “Family Day.” Family members take turns deciding what we will make for a special breakfast, where the family should go that day (movies, Chuck E. Cheese’s, bowling, etc.) and which restaurant we should visit that evening.
28. Pay a responsible high school or college student to provide transportation and care for your children for a few hours a day, a couple times a week. Ask friends and neighbors for recommendations and check with local colleges, especially in the elementary education department.

29. The secret to a smooth, sane morning is doing as much as you can the night before. Lay out clothes for everyone, including stockings, hairpieces, shoes, etc. Set out the breakfast dishes. Get the backpacks loaded with homework, permission slips, and gym clothes. Pack your briefcase, fill the gas tank, and make sure you're ready for the next day. For women, file your nails, do your eyebrows, and shave your legs before bed. Leave as little preparation as possible until the last minute – you'll thank yourself in the morning.
30. Once the kids are in bed, curl up with a good... checkbook? By devoting only 15 minutes a day to tracking, filing, bills, and mail, you can keep from getting buried in paper.
31. The easiest way to prepare meals is to not cook at all! Takeout dinners, butchers, delis, precooked, delivery services, leftovers, freezer meals, or prepared foods from your supermarket can all feed your family, nutritiously and without fuss. Or prepare several meals on the weekend, or prepare large batches and trade with friends.
32. Buy two of each of your favorite cosmetics (three if you travel frequently). Keep one in your bathroom for your morning routine, one set stashed in your office for touchups (or in case you don't have time to apply it at home), and one in your suitcase, always ready to go. This will eliminate the time and hassle to transport makeup back and forward between these locations.
33. My daughter, Meagan, loves for me to "time" her when getting ready for bed. We make a race and a game out of brushing teeth and hair, putting on PJs, getting room cleaned up, etc.
34. Pretend that you have a bus to catch at a specific time each night. Make up an arbitrary time, such as 6:04 p.m. (depending upon when you want to depart the office). You will use time in the late afternoon more efficiently, knowing you have to "get out the door" to make it on time.
35. Always have a "Plan B." Despite your best-laid plans, you're bound to get socked with an unexpected obstacle from time to time: your baby runs a fever, your car breaks down, your dog runs away, or a blizzard closes your daughter's school down. Have an arrangement with a neighbor, friend, or relative to step in when there's an emergency.
36. If you're running on an empty tank and fumes of habit, everyone loses. So rid yourself of the guilt you feel when you relax, refuse a request, or take time for yourself. You need it and deserve it if you want to be at your productive best! Schedule one vacation day per month for a day of pampering. Do only what you love to do!

37. Once everyone begins to gather at home at the end of a long day, allow yourselves some time to reconnect. Instead of immediately launching into dinner preparations, spend a few minutes cuddling on the couch or blowing off steam in the backyard. It takes only five or ten minutes of attention to keep kids happy while you make dinner. Also, let them have a small, healthy snack to take the edge off hunger and get rid of grumpiness.
38. To avoid getting into a long, drawn-out conversation with Mr. Difficult or Ms. Chatty, call them during lunch. Chances are, they will be out, and you can leave a short voice mail message. Or call at the end of the day, when you know people are trying to get home and will be less likely to talk incessantly.
39. By some estimates, managers are interrupted an average of six times an hour. To counter this, some managers have found it helpful to establish daily office hours, such as 9:00 to 9:45 and 4:15 to 5:00, to field questions and concerns. If you consistently adhere to this schedule, your employees and co-workers will soon honor it, too.
40. When you're asked to attend a meeting, find out if your presence is really necessary. Perhaps you could give your input in advance, in writing, or orally to a designated representative. Or send someone in your place. You'll quickly eliminate unnecessary meetings and gain more control over your time.
41. Because there are so many demands on our time than ever before, we need to be more selective. Before starting a task, ask yourself, "Do I really need to be doing this now, or is there a better time?" And "Is this the best use of my time RIGHT now?" By becoming more conscious of how you spend your time, you can gain more control over it.
42. Keep a stash of cards, envelopes, and stamps at your desk. Then you won't have to run out if you've forgotten a birthday or need to get a quick thank-you note in the mail. Stock up and organize cards at home with a discount company such as Current (they have a great greeting card organizer, 1-800-848-2848). Order stamps over the phone and you'll save yourself another trip. Call the U.S. Postal Service at 1-800-782-6724 and order in larger quantities; they deliver in three days.
43. Tame your TV. The average kid spends 25 hours a week on television and adults aren't much better! That's a great deal of time that could be spent completing projects, enjoying hobbies, or simply being together. Make a rule with yourself about how many hours of TV you can watch a week, sit down with the TV guide on Sundays, and select which shows you will watch. Turn on the TV and turn it off again immediately when your show is over. Or use your VCR to tape your favorite TV programs and fast-forward through the commercials when you view it. You'll save about 15 minutes for every hour of programming.

44. Don't waste alone time. If for some odd reason, I find myself alone in our house, besides shouting "Whoo-hoo!" in my head, I resist the urge to do something "productive." Funny as it seems coming from me, this is NOT the time to throw in a load of laundry or tidy up the house. Instead, I do something I can't do when the kids or my husband are home. I ask, "Can I do this activity when James is around?" If the answer is yes, I find something else creative to do. For example, I like getting out the photographs I've been stacking for the last few months and putting them into their file boxes. Praying and meditating are good options for me. I also like calling a friend, so I can have a decent conversation for once without a child's interrupting chatter.
45. Don't allow your kids to over schedule themselves. Have older kids select a couple of activities that they really enjoy and drop the rest. The rest of their free time should be spent with the family. They won't feel overextended or harried, and you'll spend less time shuttling them to and fro.
46. If you suspect you're not using your time as efficiently as possible, use a time log to keep track of HOW you spend your day. (Let me know if you need a sample form.) Write down what you're doing throughout the day and how long it takes---you may find that you're wasting time in surprising ways.
47. Make a list of things that consume or waste your time. Separate the list into things you can't do anything about and things that you can. Focus your energy on rethinking those you can change---and stop stressing over everything else.
48. Always put your keys in the same place! You could put hooks by the front door, then walk in, and immediately hang your keys. Or ALWAYS place them in your purse. Or a drawer in your kitchen. If you're consistent, you'll eliminate the frantic scramble to find them as you're trying to get out the door.
49. Pay attention to your peak energy times. The mid-morning hours are often the most productive and a good time to handle important tasks, major decisions, and items that require complex thought. Force yourself to "knuckle down" and do your work during this time; we are usually "up" and enjoy socializing and wasting time instead.
50. Make the most of your down time. In the car, you can listen to books on tape or catch up with friends on a cell phone (don't dial while driving, however). Carry paperback books or light reading from work with you everywhere. Or clip magazine articles and keep in a "To Be Read" folder. Read a bit while waiting for a client to arrive at a luncheon, in the lobby for an appointment, while picking up children from school activities, waiting in the doctor's office, at the bank or the drive-through, etc.

51. Try to give yourself the first two hours of your workday to concentrate. Attempt to steer meeting times around it, let the phone go to voice mail, don't check your email, and schedule later times with drop-in visitors. You'll be amazed how much you can accomplish in two hours of focused concentration.
52. Life is full of delays! Instead of steaming when an appointment is late, put this time to work for you. Create a folder of reading material and correspondence and keep it with you. Grab it before you leave the office or house. When you're in stuck a traffic jam, waiting for a lunch date, or sitting in the car before soccer practice ends, you can get something done. It's a great way to keep your stress level low and your productivity high.
53. Sometimes a change of scenery can be a real productivity booster. The next time you need a block of uninterrupted time to finish a report or research a project, move into an empty office or book a conference room. If your schedule permits, you may choose to work at home or at a local library for a couple of days. A change of scenery not only curbs interruptions, it also gives you a fresh perspective.
54. Do as much as you can the night before. Have an outfit picked out and ready to go, making sure it's pressed, not missing buttons, etc. Choose a pair of run-free stockings, matching accessories, and the jewelry you will wear. Pack your briefcase, make the kids' lunches, and find the field trip money. Advance preparation will save you time and frustration while trying to get everyone out the door in the morning.
55. Have dinner with your loved ones at least three times per week. It's the best time for casual conversation to listen to what those close to you feel is important in their lives. Mealtime is a time to engage in dialogue. Tape the shows that interfere with supper together. Make dinner time family intimate networking time
56. We keep a running list on the fridge of things we need from the store. Everyone uses the same list to jot down ideas as they come to mind. When you think of something you need, discipline yourself to walk immediately over to the list. If you don't, you'll clutter your mind with reminders. Then all you have to do is grab the list and go. No more deliberating about what you need or having to run out later for a forgotten item.
57. If you have a file that you need to open but don't want to change (accidentally or otherwise), you can open it as a copy or as read-only. Instead of just clicking on the Open button, click on the down arrow on the right of the Open button. Choose the most appropriate option.

58. Did you know that salted water takes longer to boil? So when making pasta or recipes requiring you to boil water, boil the water first, and then add the salt!
59. This is an incredibly handy little program (Windows only) that will show you the actual password hidden in all those asterisks. If your email program (or whatever) was set up ages ago and you have no idea what the password is any more, this program is your answer. And, there's no charge for it at <http://www.lostpassword.com/asterisk.htm>.
60. If you ever lose your menus, don't panic. You can use your keyboard to get to the menus. Just hold down the Alt key and click F. That will bring down the File menu. From there you can use your mouse to move around the menus. If you want to use those shortcuts regularly, you can hold down the Alt key and type whatever letter is underlined in the menu title you want (E for Edit, V for View, I for Insert, O for Format, etc.).
61. I keep a blank lined piece of paper marked "Gifts" behind the "G" address tab in my planner. Anytime I think of something I want to purchase for my husband or children on the next special occasion, I flip to the on-going list and write it down. When a special day arrives, I no longer have to wrack my brain about what to buy my family members.
62. Remember the old saying, "A job worth doing is worth doing well"? Forget it! Some tasks are worth doing just OK. Writing and rewriting trivial memos, for example, is not an efficient way to spend your time. Distinguish between a high standard and an unrealistic expectation for the type of work you're doing. Make the output match the importance.
63. The National Sleep Foundation reported that drowsy workers cost U.S. employers an estimated \$18 billion annually in lost productivity. Too little sleep also suppresses your immune function, which leads to increased infection and illnesses, creating more absenteeism. If you add errors, damage, and health consequences, the costs are even higher. Overall, the quality of work, the amount of work, and your concentration EACH decline by 30% when you're sleepy. Sleepiness also impairs memory, reaction time, and alertness. Talk about a productivity loss!
64. Organize a car pool with a parent who's available early in the afternoon to drop off kids at practice or Scouts, and then volunteer for pickup.
65. Forget perfectionism: it's a form of procrastination. Don't put it off until you have time to "make it better." For most things, it's good enough. Go with what you've got. If a deadline is looming, deliver. You can always improve the memo or presentation later.

66. If your doctor told you she had a new drug that would prolong your life, reduce your chance of death from all causes by 50 to 70 percent, improve your quality of sleep, and improve your ability to manage stress, would you take it? The only catch is it takes about 15-30 minutes a day to “swallow.” You may be tired of hearing how important exercise is for your energy level, but most people need to hear it again, because over 60 percent of us don’t exercise regularly. No other factors influence your productivity at work and the quality of your life at home more than your mental and physical health.
67. Take five minutes and create a “master” to-do list. Grab something you can write fast with, and just dump everything that pops into your mind that you have any attention on right now. Don’t analyze or organize. You can use it later to analyze, plan, schedule. Whenever you think of something you want/need to do that doesn’t have to be done on a certain day, add it to your master to-do list. Review your list monthly and select some things you feel you can accomplish that month.
68. Every week, pencil time for yourself into your calendar. Pick one evening to indulge in a “mini spa.” Soak in the tub, shave your legs, deep condition your hair, do a facial mask, read a book...whatever you like to do to pamper yourself! Treat it as you would any other important appointment and don’t cancel it!
69. When you start feeling burned out at work, take a vacation day for yourself. Don’t make any plans, just wake up and figure it out. Do whatever relaxes you or will lower your stress level. Leisurely read the paper over a cup of tea. Knock out a few of those “half-done” projects. Weed your flowers. Dig out the holiday boxes. Nap when you feel like it. Use the entire day to make yourself happy, whatever comes to mind. It’s not selfish...it’s great therapy! You’ll be refreshed, more focused, and more productive the next day.
70. Don’t feel guilty about taking advantage of shortcuts like store-bought treats! Just because your mom did something one way doesn’t mean you have to follow her lead. The time you save in the kitchen will give you more time to create your own family traditions.
71. Don’t hesitate to say NO to some invitations and obligations. After all, spending time with family is what the holidays are about. There’s no need to attend every event, especially those on your “B” list.
72. Let children help out. They can easily decorate cookies (they don’t have to be “perfect”) or put mailing labels or stamps on cards. Who cares if the ornaments are all hanging on the bottom half of the tree?
73. Consider taking a few days off this month from work to bake and freeze cookies, get some shopping done, wrap presents, and write holiday cards. Alleviate the last-minute rush!

74. Order your holiday stamps over the phone and save another trip. The U.S. Postal Service will deliver them in 3-5 days. Call 1-800-782-6724 for the stamp fulfillment services division.
75. You can order your Christmas tree by phone! You can get a six-foot Fraser Fir (my favorite!) by calling Laurel Springs Christmas Tree Farm at 1-800-851-2345.
76. Brave the malls again after Christmas is over, to pick up next year's treasures at a reduced cost! If you buy holiday greeting cards off-season, you're likely to get a big discount. Stock up on wrap, ribbon, candy, stocking stuffers, and decorations.
77. Don't paralyze yourself by over-planning and scheduling more in a day than you can handle. If you have 3 hours of meetings, an hour of interruptions, an hour of email, and a half-hour of phone calls, you've already got 5 ½ hours of uncontrollable time. Why write six hours of work on your to-do list, knowing that you won't be able to get it accomplished in the controllable time available? Determine how much of your time will be controllable each day and plan to accomplish what you can realistically do with what's left. Learn the difference between what's ideal and what's possible. Then make sure to do the higher priorities first. You'll leave your office without feeling like a failure each day.
78. Are you making the most of the technology available in your office? Do you even know what capabilities your office offers? Do you have desktop fax capability? Teleconferencing capabilities? Do you know how to use the cool organizational features of Outlook? When I do individual organizing coaching, it amazes me how much is available to employees that they don't know exist or know how to use properly. Invest time in taking training courses to save time long-term. Technology can be one of the most effective timesaving tools; use it to your advantage.
79. Keep only those things that you touch or use DAILY on top of your desk. Anything that isn't used frequently shouldn't be out cluttering up your surfaces. When you finish using an item, put it back immediately.
80. Some people I work with have developed this neat excuse for procrastinating: "I'm organizing." It's the type of organizing that's equivalent to sorting your paperclips by size and color. It's all too easy to spend more time preparing to do a task than it is doing it. Leave the mail alone, skip the voice mail messages, and tackle the next item on your list for an hour. If you are falling victim to organization paralysis, try your organizing tasks at the end of the day. Force yourself to only check your email four times a day. Don't succumb to obsessive-compulsive "putting things in place" with no forward movement.

81. Stop nagging your children about getting ready for school in the morning! I grew weary of reminding Meagan to do certain things every morning. So we sat down and listed out all of the tasks, no matter how small, that are required to get her out the door every morning. We came up with 15 things! No wonder I felt like a broken record. So we made a checklist, and now Meagan can completely get herself ready for school with NO help from me! If you'd like a copy of our neat checklist, go to http://www.theproductivitypro.com/r_free_stuff.htm.
82. Buy a vertical file to hold one file folder per member of your family. Get each person to agree to put important papers for other members of the family into the appropriate folder. This will keep multiple piles from forming and looking for an item won't require a search of the entire house. When the mail arrives, place each person's mail in the correct folder. Kids can empty permission slips or schoolwork that you need to see into your folder. You can place phone messages in the folders also.
83. Consider the physical layout of your office. Does your desk face a door or a hallway? Humans are curious beings. When someone walks by, it is our nature to look up to see who just passed. If that person is wandering around looking for someone to bother, they will catch your eye and smile. Not wanting to be rude, you smile back. They enter your office and ask the death question, "Hi, how's it going?" Congratulations, you just bought yourself an easy ten-minute interruption. One solution is to rotate your desk or change the layout of your cubicle so that your back is facing the door. If someone walks by and sees that you are busy, they are less likely to interrupt you (but not always). As an added benefit, you focus longer on the work in front of you. If you can't rotate your desk completely around, try at least to work sideways and use a computer screen or cabinet to block your view to the corridor.
84. Calling a client back very soon after they leave a voicemail message to let them know you got the message buys more time to prioritize the item correctly instead of feeling like you have to hurry to do the item.
85. Do you think you watch too much TV? Try this trick: Tape your favorite shows for one week and view them on your own time. The benefits are two-fold. First, you can fast-forward through the commercials. Second, you might discover you don't even miss certain shows. You may be in the habit of watching simply because the TV's on. What will you do with an extra hour to yourself?
86. If you write checks or pay bills manually, always order duplicate checks! This will keep you from forgetting to record a check in your register. If you must have single checks, get into the habit of writing the amount in the check register first, then write the check.

87. Attack your reading pile. Throw away all but the current issues of Newsweek or USA Today. The rest is old news. Don't read magazines cover to cover. The task is simply too overwhelming. Go through the table of contents, allow yourself a maximum of three articles per issue, rip them out, and then throw the rest of the magazine away. When you're through weeding through your stack, the actual task will be much less formidable. Then spend the rest of the weekend catching up on the important reading. You could try the timer technique for each article. Get an egg timer and set it for 15 minutes for each item. When it goes off, toss the article. Another tip comes from Nobel laureate Herbert Simon, speaking in People magazine, "Reading daily newspapers is one of the least cost-efficient things you can do...read the World Almanac once a year. What's happening you'll hear by lunch anyway." To get rid of reading piles permanently, try subscribing to a clipping service, downloading articles to your PC from the Internet, or taking a speed-reading course. Or, try a newspaper diet by shifting to liquid television.
88. Make a master list of the birthdays and anniversaries for all your friends and family you plan to buy for next year. Then take a trip to your local card shop and buy ALL (yes, all) of the cards at once. I go so far as to address them. Mark the important date lightly in pencil in the upper right-hand corner, so the stamp will cover it when you mail it. File the cards in your tickler file. Stock up on all your stationery, envelopes, postcards, and stamps. Put them in a little basket in your nightstand or next to your easy chair and in your briefcase so you can dash off a letter when you have a free minute. Take some time to put return address labels and stamps on a stack of blank white envelopes. Then if you're reading an article you think your mom would enjoy, you can simply rip it out and get it going out the door to her. Or if you have to mail bills that don't have a pre-addressed envelope, you have envelopes ready to stuff and mail.
89. I have a carry-on suitcase that's always packed with toiletries I take on the road. It'll save you packing and unpacking everything each time you travel.
90. Backup your computer's hard drive weekly! Even if your IT folks are backing up your company's shared drives, your hard drive isn't included. If you save information directly to the c: drive, you will lose everything if (and when) it crashes. Schedule a backup for a specific time of the week; say Friday afternoons, so that you don't forget. As a reminder, schedule them on your calendar. Keep a large supply of CDs or disks handy, so you don't have an excuse for not running it.
91. Don't forget that your in-box is not a storage folder! Once you've taken something out of your box, don't put it back in. You must either toss it, route it to another person, complete it, put it in the tickler file for future action, file it in a project file, put reference material in your "to be filed" folder, or put articles in your "Reading" file.

92. For the week, on one sheet of paper, I draw lines to set up a box for each major area of "do." Then, I list all actions, calls, and tasks. I choose the top three for the day and mark off as they are done. Archaic, I know, but the electronic task list just isn't visual enough. I need to see what area of life it's about.
93. Simplify your cooking! My mother had a core of 21 meals that everyone in the family liked and were easy to fix. Each Sunday, she grabbed that week's pre-made shopping list and bought the ingredients so she'd have the right things on hand. It wasn't a huge amount of variety, but we repeated meals infrequently enough that she didn't get complaints, and she could whip up something in a hurry without having to think about it each night.
94. If you use the Windows version of Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser, it's not necessary to type the whole domain name (e.g., www.yahoo.com) to get to a Web site. Just type the middle part ("yahoo"), hold down the CTRL key and press Enter. Internet Explorer will add the "http://www." and the ".com" and go right to the site, rather than doing a search on "yahoo" as it does if you don't hold down CTRL.
95. Sometimes you want to connect a file on your hard disk with an appointment or a task. To do this in Microsoft Outlook, open the appointment or task and put your cursor in the Notes area. Then, click on Insert menu and choose Object. In the dialog box, click on Create from File, and then click on the Browse button. Find the file and click OK. When you're back at the dialog box, click so there's a check mark in the Link box and in the Display as Icon box. Just click OK and you'll get a shortcut to the file in the Notes section of your appointment or task.
96. If you've asked a company to remove you from its mailing list, and you continue to receive mailings from that company, you'll be interested in this tidbit! The U.S. Postal service will help you eliminate mailings from particularly stubborn companies. At any post office, you can fill out Form 2150, a simple form that prohibits a particular company from sending you solicitations in the mail. It is illegal for them to send you anything 30 days after the form is filled out and sent. The form was originally created to stop pornographic mail, but the Supreme Court decided someone could use it to object to mailed solicitations of any kind. In short, you get to decide what you consider objectionable.
97. When in doubt, right-click. When you right-click (Microsoft Windows-based PCs) you get a context-sensitive menu. That means you get a list of what you can do with whatever your cursor is on when you click. For example, if you click on a paragraph in your word processor, you can Format Paragraph, Indent, and other things related to text or paragraphs.

98. If you're going to do something more than 3 times, automate it. Since it will take at least three times longer to do it with technology the first time, you want to make sure it's something you'll do often enough to make it worth the effort. It can be small things like creating a shortcut on your desktop to a frequently opened file or creating an email template for a common response, or big things like mailings to thousands of people.
99. If you use PowerPoint to give presentations, you can create a quick-launch icon right on your desktop! In the PowerPoint presentation (on the laptop you plan on delivering the presentation), click Save As, click the down arrow, select Desktop, and select type PowerPoint show, name the file and click OK. An icon appears on your desktop, that when double-clicked, automatically launches that PowerPoint slide show.
100. I finally took to the time figure out how to create a macro in my ACT contact management database for printing an envelope. I am amazed how much time that saves. I've determined that it took me at least 10 times as long to do the task the first time when I was figuring out how to use the feature and record the macro. After that, the automated process has saved me time a hundred fold. So I'm going to stick with a new rule for myself: if I'm going to do something more than three times, I will figure out how to automate it. Look through the tasks that you do every day, week, month, over and over again. What can you do to replicate that task using technology? Create a shortcut on your desktop to a frequently opened file? Automate a mailing? Create a report? Run labels? You'll want to make sure it's something you'll do often enough to make it worth the effort.
101. Consider "masking" your email address. Masking involves putting a word or phrase in your email address so that it will trick a harvesting computer program, but not a person. For example, if your email address is "johndoe@myisp.com," you could mask it as "johndoe@spamaway.myisp.com." Be aware that some newsgroup services or message boards won't allow you to mask your email address and some harvesting programs may be able to pick out common masks. If you use chat rooms, use a separate screen name that's not associated with your email address. Use that screen name only for online chat.
102. Set up disposable addresses. Use two email addresses -- one for personal messages and one for posting in public. Use a disposable email address service that creates separate email addresses that forwards to your permanent account. If one of the disposable addresses begins to receive spam, you can shut it off without affecting your permanent address.
103. Also, anytime a Web site asks your age, answer that you are under 13 years of age. That way this will discourage them from pestering you with targeted spam emails as most advertisers don't want to market to under-13-year-olds.

104. If a Web site asks for personal information and you do not want to provide it, what do you do? Create a fake email account! Simply create an email account with one of the free email sites such as Hotmail or Yahoo Mail. When signing up for this email account, simply enter false information and use the fake email anytime a Web site asks you for personal information and you do not want to provide it. That way you will not be bombarded with spam and no personal information will have been given out!
105. Keyboard shortcuts are faster than pointing and clicking with a mouse. At <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/help/results.aspx?qu=keyboard+shortcuts&sc=9> you will find a list of the most common keyboard shortcuts. Most are a combination of two or three keys that you will need to hold down simultaneously to trigger the command. While they may seem a little awkward at first, they will become second nature once you start using them regularly.
106. Don't have time to read any of the 150,000 books published in the US each year? Neither do I! I signed up for a Book Review-a-Day (<http://www.powells.com/review>) from Powell's Books. At least this way, I feel like I'm keeping up with the most popular books and can hold my own in a conversation at a cocktail party!
107. Instead of watching television, why not read a good fiction or non-fiction book; write a letter; engage in a hobby or craft; call a friend or someone in need of encouragement on the phone; network on your computer; go out to an ethnic restaurant, a home show, an entrepreneurial show, a musical recital, a play, a fitness class, a cultural event, to the park with your kids. Take an art or photography class or something you've always wanted to know more about.
108. A subscriber asked about junk faxes. If the same company repeatedly bothers you especially after attempting to remove yourself from the list, complain to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html>. Click "Form 475," and check "Unsolicited advertisement sent to a facsimile machine" on question 6A. The form takes about three minutes to complete and should end the problem!
109. If you use Outlook to send an e-mail message to a group of people, you can have the responses automatically sent to a co-worker or assistant! When you're composing the new message, select "View" menu, then "options." Under "delivery options," click the box "Have replies sent to," then select the name from the address list. This setting will only apply to the current message.

110. Limit your web surfing. Ever sit down to look something up on the Web and later look up at the clock, only to discover that you just spent three hours surfing in Cyberspace? Mindlessly surfing the web not only wastes time, but also brings you lots of information that is of no use to you. Go to the web with a specific purpose in mind. Focus on what is useful and skip the rest.
111. While using the Internet to research material for my book, I was always frustrated by how many old, irrelevant pages were listed in my searches. With ideas from the Google "help" I discovered some easy solutions. You can exclude a word from your search by putting a minus sign ("-") immediately in front of the term you want to avoid. (Be sure to include a space before the minus sign.) When conducting research, you probably don't want any product information or commercial sites in your search results. So you can type your search string, followed by -.com to eliminate those sites. You can also add "20xx" to the end of your search string, so you only see the most recent information.

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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).

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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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