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

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

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In today's high-octane office environment, it seems like there's never enough time to do everything you need to do, no many how many hours you work. Worse, the pressure of fatigue and the steady demand to do more with less can stress you out both mentally and physically, ultimately strangling productivity altogether. In this ebook, adapted from her book *What To Do When There's Too Much To Do*, Productivity Pro® Laura Stack introduces a solution: the groundbreaking Productivity Workflow Formula™ (PWF). This simple, straightforward time management system lets you take control of your life again, so that you can *have* a life outside of work.

(303) 471-7401
9948 S Cottoncreek Drive
Highlands Ranch, CO 80130
Laura@TheProductivityPro.com
www.TheProductivityPro.com

ALSO BY LAURA STACK

SuperCompetent: The Six Keys to Perform at Your Productive Best (Wiley, 2010)

The Exhaustion Cure: Up Your Energy from Low to Go in 21 Days
(Broadway Books, 2008)

Find More Time: How to Get Things Done at Home, Organize Your Life, and Feel Great About It (Broadway Books, 2006)

Leave the Office Earlier: How to Do More in Less Time and Feel Great About It (Broadway Books, 2004)

PRAISE FOR
WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S TOO MUCH TO DO

"With the world spinning faster every day, Laura Stack's advice is especially timely. Her easy-to-implement system will get busy workers off the treadmill and on the right track."
—Harvey Mackay, author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*

"Practical. Precise. Pithy. Stack's finest work to date. If you want a solution to that overwhelmed condition, this book provides a productive path to a satisfying work style and life."
—Dianna Booher, author of *Creating Personal Presence* and *Communicate With Confidence*

"I don't know anybody who is more organized, or who has more energy and who has more fun getting things done than Laura Stack. No kidding. She doesn't just write about what she knows; she writes about what she lives. If you feel like there's too much to do, read this book for tips, tactics, and strategies that will decrease the time you invest and increase the results you enjoy."
—Mark Sanborn, author of *Up, Down, or Sideways*

"Laura Stack is an extraordinary teacher, speaker, and coach who inspires people to become peak performers. This book is a must read for anyone who wants to stop 'doing more with less' but 'do less to achieve more.'"
— Dr. Nido R. Qubein, President, High Point University, and Chairman, Great Harvest Bread Company

"This book will save you time, money, and most of all—your sanity. In our fast moving, multi-tasking world of now-now-now, Laura Stack is an extraordinary resource for you, and her expertise is delivered with this book."
— Tim Sanders, former Chief Solutions Officer at Yahoo and best-selling author.

"Laura Stack improved our work flow, communication, coordination, documentation support, and teamwork. Her touch to our business made and continues to make a lasting change for the better. I can't say enough about how helpful her knowledge and training has been."
Montague Boyd, Senior Vice President, Investments, UBS Financial Services

"Laura's Productivity Workflow Formula will help you become the 5% employee that creates 95% of the company's value. Yet another high-value tool from the Productivity Pro!"
— Jeff Bettinger, Chief Career Strategist, HelpMyResume.com

"I am a raving fan of Laura Stack because she is the absolute master of teaching me how to do less and achieve more. For me, like so many others, time has become the new currency. I can always make more money, but I can't make more time. Laura teaches me to make much better use of the time that I have so that I can do more of what I want to do. For me, that's priceless. This book will motivate you to do the simple, yet powerful things that can make your work and your life immeasurably more productive and fulfilling."
— Joe Calloway, author, Becoming A Category of One

"Leadership, strategy, and business acumen are essential for being successful in business today. At the heart of Laura's effective productivity system are strategies to maximize these essential business skills. Read this book! Adopting her system will unleash your strategic thinking potential and productivity in your business and maximize your results. It has worked for us, and I guarantee it will work for you!"
— Mike Howard, Chief Security Officer (CSO), Microsoft Corporation

"Stack's incredible book shows you how to get organized better and get more done faster than you ever thought possible."
— Brian Tracy, Author, *No Excuses!*

"Counterbalancing my practices that "If you aren't overwhelmed, you're not reaching your greatest productivity" is Laura Stack's most logical advice found in her latest book. By following Laura's philosophy that what you opt *not* to do is often as important—and often more important—than that which you do choose to do. This book is all about productivity and making the most of the time that we all find in such short supply. Take the time to read the book and you'll amaze yourself at the demonstrated and proved results."
— Tim Jackson, CAE, CMP, President and CEO of Colorado's new car dealer association

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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 lists; handle timewasters; and decide to do only what really matters.
2. **Schedule time to do it.** Assign time slots and durations appropriately; say no when appropriate; make decisions quickly; and control your meetings.
3. **Focus your attention.** Hone your concentration to razor sharpness; shut out distractions; learn focus techniques; and avoid multitasking.
4. **Process new information.** Research effectively; file digital information; and quickly handle incoming email, voicemail, and paper.
5. **Close the loop.** Determine what does and doesn't work; reduce inefficiencies; solve people problems and bottlenecks; and tighten up systems as you go.
6. **Manage your capacity.** Focus on the physical factors affecting your energy; manage sleep, diet, exercise, and your own happiness.

Graphically, the PWF looks like this:
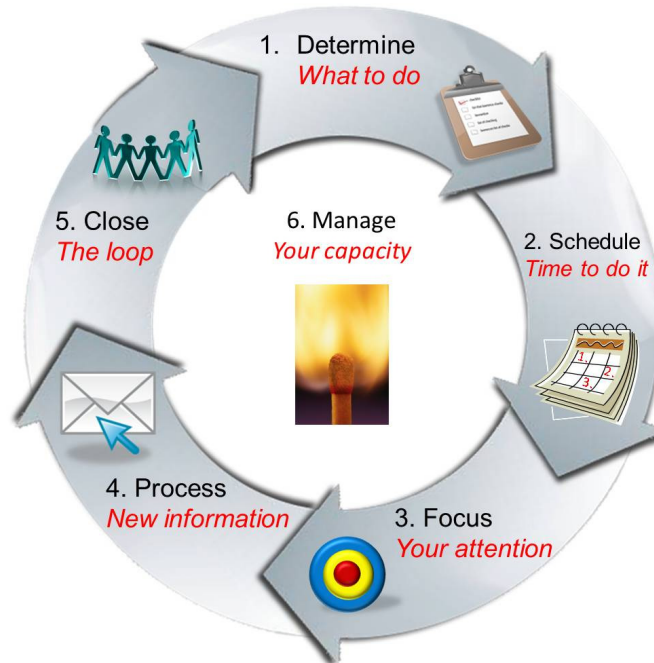
The model is circular by design, which suggests continuity, as well as a process that can (and should) be repeated again and again. In other words, you get into a continuum and don't have to leave it; it just becomes part of your life. Plus, instead of thinking of productivity as a straight line from 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.

Step One: 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.

Step One Tip Sheet

1. At the end of every workday, take a moment to ask yourself: Was I productive today, or did I just stay busy?

2. Would you like it if people gossiped about you? No? Then stop gossiping about them. It's a hurtful waste of your time.

3. Recalculate your personal Return on Investment periodically. This will help you determine what you need to brush up or cut back on.

4. If one of your tasks properly belongs to someone else, hand it back to them—even if they don't want it. Your needs must come first.

5. Prepare a list of time-wasting things you refuse to do. Keep this Not-To-Do list close, and refer to it frequently.

6. Instead of putting all your tasks on one huge list, establish separate daily High Impact (HIT) and master lists so you can prioritize appropriately.

7. Perform a "brain-dump" of all your important but non-urgent tasks, as well as all the "someday" tasks you want to accomplish. This will form the basis of your master to-do list.

8. Spend 15 minutes a day assigning the tasks on your HIT list P1-P4 priorities, following this schema:

    *   P1: You'll get fired if this isn't done today
    *   P2: A valuable long-term activity that should be done soon (often from the master list)
    *   P3: Someone will be unhappy if you don't do this eventually
    *   P4: Human "pain-management" activities such as socializing and Facebook

9. Stop viewing your HIT list as a "Must Do" list. Instead, consider it a "Want to Do" list, and stay flexible.

10. Occasionally, triage your master list to cull any tasks you will clearly never do, or that are out of date.

Step Two: 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.

Step Two Tip Sheet

1. If you don't already, learn to love what you do—or change careers. You can't maximize your productivity if you don't enjoy your work.

2. Establish daily routines for common work tasks, such as checking email or compiling your HIT list. This allows you to make fewer decisions, reducing your energy expenditure.

3. If someone hands you a project without a deadline, set one yourself to help you stay on track.

4. Practice purposeful abandonment, letting low-priority tasks drop off your list—at least temporarily.

5. Once you've filled your schedule, stop. You'll always have more tasks than time.

6. Hold onto your time with both hands. Don't easily let anyone (except your boss) take it away from you by adding items to your task lists.

7. Stop being so generous with your time, and relearn the value of saying "no" when doing so is appropriate.

8. Rather than waste time on meetings, distribute necessary information via email, phone calls, and other media.

9. Be willing to leave a meeting if it doesn't finish on time or wanders into uncharted territory.

10. Before you take a break between tasks, consider how long it may take you away from work—and how that will affect your productivity.

Step Three: 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.

Step Three Tip Sheet

1. Explore the possibility of telecommuting if you can't escape the distractions in your office.

2. Don't allow people to hold conversations outside your cubicle or office door. Politely but firmly shoo them away so you can get your work done, and don't worry about what they think.

3. Stop multitasking. It just dilutes your attention and fools you into thinking you're productive, when you're really just busy.

4. If you break down a large task into subtasks in order to overcome procrastination, make sure you set deadlines and internal milestones for each of the subtasks, and track them carefully.

5. Rather than let perfectionism paralyze you, get to work and figure out the details as you go along.

6. If you ever find yourself thinking you can't possibly accomplish a task, challenge that negative self-talk instantly with the facts.

7. Turn off your electronic devices before you attend client meetings. It's too easy to let electronics distract you when you absolutely need to focus on face time.

8. If you don't already have a voice recorder app on your smartphone, get one so you can capture ideas as they occur to you.

9. When working, listen only to music you're thoroughly familiar with. Otherwise, you'll focus too much on the music and not your work.

10. You needn't become a social pariah just because you'd rather work than socialize. Consider arranging social outings outside of work hours so you can stay in touch with your coworkers.

Step Four: 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.

Step Four Tip Sheet

1. If it takes you more than a minute to find a file, something's wrong. Develop a more efficient information processing/filing system.

2. Don't just create a paper-based filing system. Develop a logical system for your electronic files as well, using easily remembered naming conventions.

3. You can still use the tickler file concept even when trying to go paperless. Once you configure them properly, most email clients can send you reminders, as can online services like Nudgemail (Nudgemail.com).

4. Test your personal time management system for HUGability. It needs to be Handy, Usable, and Garbage-free.

5. A contact file should include the person's office phone number, cell phone number, email address, office/cubical number, physical address, IM address, and their supervisor's contact info, just in case you can't connect any other way.

6. Do you really need to receive the jokes and lists your coworkers circulate by email? Just reading them wastes your time, so politely but firmly ask your colleagues to stop sending them to you.

7. Not everything has been digitized yet, so if your library lacks a particular resource you need, ask the librarian to arrange an interlibrary loan.

8. If you'd rather not carry around a bundle of papers for downtime reading, consider carrying an e-reader or small tablet computer. You can easily convert paper files to electronic formats, and most tablets have apps that let you mark them up, too.

9. If you lack pen and paper or a voice recorder to hook a slippery idea with, leave a voicemail on your work phone.

10. Although I've designed the 6-D System specifically for handling information, you can also apply the general concepts more broadly to task triage, per Step One.

Step Five: 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.

Step Five Tip Sheet

1. Don't change things just to change them. If an existing system works reasonably well and you can't think of a better way to do it, then why fix it?

2. Learn the keyboard shortcuts for all your computer programs, and program macros for common tasks. You'll save a surprising amount of time.

3. If someone doesn't acknowledge a communication, repeat it. If they still don't respond, contact them through another medium. If they keep ignoring you, go over their head or around them.

4. Even if you can't tweak a particular process into usefulness, it may be possible to merge it with another idea that didn't quite work and come up with something that does.

5. If you can't clear a human bottleneck, look for a way to bypass him or her.

6. Make contingency plans for your own unavailability. Coordinate with a coworker to handle your part of a project if you're unavailable, and make sure your project resources are easily accessible and understandable.

7. To clear the path to greater group productivity, meet with your team only when absolutely necessary—and then only briefly.

8. Whenever you can spare a little extra time, polish one of your critical productivity skills. Focus on one at a time, and never accept just good enough as good enough.

9. Don't fear failure, but don't assume it's inevitable. Fortune favors the bold, so once you've made your basic preparations, dive right in and deal with the details as they arise.

10. Keep an eye on your productivity metrics. The numbers will tell you what works and what you'll need to fix.

Step Six: 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.

Step Six Tip Sheet

1. Instead of being depressed because you can't perform at superhuman levels all the time, readjust your expectations to fit your energy levels, and stop running your "battery" dry.

2. If you spend a lot of time fixing your own mistakes, you may be working more hours than your body can handle. Do you need to cut back on your work schedule, or do you need to repair your energy habits—or both?

3. When you have no choice but to overwork yourself, try to do so in short bursts separated by longer periods of normal work—or rest. Otherwise, you'll soon hit the wall and your productivity will diminish sharply.

4. If you suffer from insomnia, try drinking a soothing herbal tea in the hour or so before bed, or consume some dairy products. Avoid caffeine and sugar after about 2 PM.

5. Watch what you drink, too. Stay hydrated, but limit your intake of coffee and colas. The caffeine causes a diuretic effect that can dehydrate you even more.

6. Join forces with an "exercise buddy" to help you stay on track, especially if you have trouble maintaining your exercise routine.

7. Consider joining a professional group, so you can surround yourself with others who know exactly what you have to deal with—and who may have some tips on how to handle those things successfully.

8. Consider mentoring someone new in your field. Not only will you get a natural high from helping someone, the teaching process tends to go both ways. You may just learn a thing or two from your mentee.

9. If you ever feel the urge to burst out laughing because everything's going so badly, share the joke with those around you, so they know you're not laughing at them.

10. While working on something, give it 110% of your energy and focus, so you don't undershoot the mark. That way, you won't have to waste time doing it over.

A Final Note

"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. It 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.

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LAURA STACK, MBA, CSP
Speaker • Author • Consultant

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Maximum Results. Minimum Time®

President & CEO
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; 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 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.

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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