



Retool Your Productivity

IF YOU WANT TO BE AN OFFICE OVERACHIEVER, USE THESE HACKS TO REENGINEER YOUR DAILY HABITS AND BECOME MORE EFFICIENT. *by Daniel Bortz*

NOT ENOUGH TIME in the day for your to-do list? It's a common complaint, but if you want to be seen as a star employee, you'll need to modify your behavior. "Without systems in place, you'll lose control of your schedule, burn energy, and let your performance slip," says time-management specialist Cathy Sexton. And performance matters: It accounted for 52% of compensation adjustments in 2014, according to a PayScale study.

Use these productivity hacks to tame your in-box, eliminate distractions, and multitask efficiently.

TAILOR A DAILY ROUTINE

You may already fit your schedule to your own rhythms—early risers should tackle big projects before lunch, etc.—but deadlines can throw you off. To stay on track, keep your schedule on display, suggests productivity coach Casey Moore. And build breaks into the day to give your brain time to refresh: Web browsing aids

productivity more than personal calls or emails, National University of Singapore researchers found.

PROGRAM YOUR IN-BOX

Talk about a time suck: Average office workers spend 2.6 hours a day reading and answering email, McKinsey Global Institute found. To cut back, define which emails need immediate attention (the boss's) and set up sound alerts so that you don't need to constantly monitor the in-box, advises Laura Stack, author of *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do*. Set up filters in Outlook or Gmail to funnel away emails that are less pressing. Track how well you're doing with RescueTime software, which analyzes computer behavior and spots workflow inefficiencies; a "lite" version is free.

JUGGLE SUCCESSFULLY

Researchers at Stanford have found that multitasking impairs mental performance. In practice, however, focusing on one thing at

a time may not be realistic.

Fortunately, multitasking is a skill that can be developed, says Bob Pozen, a senior lecturer at MIT's Sloan School of Management. Pair the right activities, he says: Listen to a conference call, for example, while reading email. (Wait until the call is over, however, to hit "reply.") Physical chores, like tidying your workspace, team well with simple tasks like checking voicemail.

KEEP CHATTER AT BAY

Open-plan offices are now the norm, but the lack of privacy can be a productivity killer, studies have found. Help your team identify, collectively, a nonverbal signal (hat, headphones, sign) that discourages interruptions, suggests Sexton. Then decide what issues are worth the break-in (say, a client crisis). Use lunchtime or happy hour, however, to socialize with peers. Office friendships have been found to increase job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. **M**