Cliffs Notes for

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

How the Effective Executive Spends Time

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The PROductivity PRO
Maximum Results. Minimum Time®

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Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, CPAE, is best known by her moniker "The Productivity Pro®." Laura is an award-winning keynote speaker, bestselling author, and noted authority on employee and team productivity. She is the president of The Productivity Pro, Inc., a boutique consulting firm dedicated to helping leaders increase workplace performance in high-stress environments. Laura is a past President of the National Speakers Association.

Keynoter

For over 25 years, Laura's keynote speeches and seminars have helped associations and Fortune 1000 corporations improve output, increase speed in execution, and save time in the office. She is a high-energy, high-content speaker, who educates, entertains, and motivates professionals to deliver bottom-line results. Laura is a member of the prestigious *CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame*, which has fewer than 200 members worldwide) and has earned the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation.

Author

Laura is the bestselling author of seven books published by Random House, Wiley, and Berrett-Koehler, including her newest, *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time* (Jan. 2016). Laura's books have been published in more than 20 foreign editions, and she is a featured columnist for the American Business Journal, LinkedIn, Time Management, and Productive magazines. Laura has produced more than 50 online training programs.

Recognized Productivity Expert

Laura has been featured nationally on the CBS Early Show, CNN, NPR, Bloomberg, the New York Times, USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, Entrepreneur, and Forbes magazine. Laura has been a spokesperson for Fellowes, Microsoft, 3M, Skillsoft, Office Depot, Day-Timer, and Xerox. Her client list includes top Fortune 500 companies, including Starbucks, Wal-Mart, Aramark, Bank of America, GM, Wells Fargo, and Time Warner, plus government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service, the United States Air Force Academy, the Census Bureau, the U.S. Senate, and the Department of Defense.

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DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

How The Effective Executive Spends Time

Condensed E-Book Edition

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, CPAE
The Productivity Pro®

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Doing the Right Things Right:

How The Effective Executive Spends Time

The Effective Executive is probably the most widely read business book in the world. That's hardly surprising, since it's a brief, straightforward book on how an executive can best serve his or her organization—and it has, after all, been available continuously for just shy of 50 years. But how does the modern executive—a somewhat different animal from the executive Drucker defined in 1967—do the job both effectively *and* efficiently? How does the executive at any level mine that intersection of effective and efficient to get the right things done *right?* In this e-book, adapted from her book *Doing the Right Thing Right,* Productivity Pro® Laura Stack redefines the modern executive to match current conditions, and shows how they must mine the intersection of both efficiency and effectiveness to do the right things right from the word Go.

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Also By Laura Stack

Execution IS the Strategy: How Leaders Achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time
(Berrett-Koehler, 2014)

What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks, Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day (Berrett-Koehler, 2012)

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)

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Praise for *Doing The Right Thing Right*

"Laura Stack is one of the brightest professional people I know. Her content is useful. Her approach is practical. Her recommendations are right on. I recommend her work with conviction."
—Nido R. Qubein, President, High Point University

"If you're tired of all the business fables and want real-world coaching on getting more done, then Doing the Right Things Right is the book for you."
—Randy Gage, Author of the New York Times bestseller, Risky Is the New Safe and Mad Genius

"I hired Laura Stack personally six years ago. My staff and I were frazzled and felt overworked and out of control. Stack came to town and came to work and life has been better since. Rarely does a day go by that I don't think of one or two of the productive tips she teaches. I receive regular updates from Stack and regularly learn even more. Now, Doing the Right Things Right comes along and updates, refreshes and adds a new perspective to the science of productivity and all that I thought I knew. Read this book so you too can 'manufacture' that time in your life that you need so that you can go home early!"
—Montague Boyd, CFP®, 40-year Financial Advisor, Atlanta, GA

"Laura Stack doesn't beat around the bush when it comes to productive advice—because that would waste time. Not a word's wasted here. Her examples are to the point, her advice concise, and the book itself surprisingly brief. If she were anyone else, I'd say she tried to cram too many topics into one book, but that's part of this book's utility—this book saves time and shelf-space."
—Jeremy Eaves, Director, People Services, DaVita Inc.

"To be successful in business, you must make money, and time is money. The more time you can save, the more of it you can repurpose to higher-value activities. In *Doing the Right Things Right*, Laura Stack offers leaders a practical guide on doing their jobs efficiently and effectively."
—Alex Doverspike, Director of Financial Services, Chick-fil-A, Inc.

"Once again the 'Right' thing to do is to read Laura's latest book, *Doing the Right Things Right*. Her time-saving productivity systems are vital to strong leadership of self or team. Her practical approach, coupled with a quarter century of teaching leaders, will help you succeed without the pain of mistakes."
—Jeff Bettinger, Global Head of Talent Acquisition, Alcon, a Novartis company

"I love Laura's refreshingly practical perspective. No one really cares how many items you've crossed off your to-do list or how many hours you spend at the office. What matters is that you get the right things done -- and that's what this no-nonsense little book will teach you to do."
—Laura Vanderkam, Author, *I Know How She Does It*

"Laura Stack has taken the best ideas of Peter Drucker to a new level for the 21st Century. This book shows you how to dramatically increase your efficiency, effectiveness and results - faster than you ever thought possible."
—Brian Tracy, Author, *Time Power* and *Eat that Frog*

"I have never met a professional who provides so many immediately impactful solutions to navigating through this busy world and tough business environment. If you follow the concepts that Laura sculpts in *Doing the Right Things Right*, you can gather insight into *where* you might improve your results, understand *why* you might be falling short in some areas, and find practical *ways* to improve both your work and your life."
—Cathy Krause, Learning & Development Manager, MillerCoors

"Execute today, plan for tomorrow, and invite the very best from your team. Sound compelling? Then add Laura Stack's latest book, Doing the Right Things Right, to the top of your reading list. There's no time to waste, so use her 3T Leadership Assessment and jump straight to the content that will help you most!"
Catherine Stewart, Talent, Culture, & Organizational Development Consultant, H&R Block

"More than a book, *Doing the Right Things Right* is a complete program in leadership efficiency and effectiveness. Offering a tool for analysis, online support, and resources for additional information, Laura Stack provides an exceptional straightforward model for organizational and personal productivity."
—Karla R. Peters-Van Havel, PhD, COO, Institute for Management Studies

"I'm a big fan of concise writing and straight talk, so I found Stack's *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time* right on the mark. Stack makes it easy for executives at all levels to be effective and efficient in twelve practical chapters."
--Jennifer Colosimo, coauthor of *Great Work, Great Career* (with Stephen R. Covey), former Vice President of Wisdom, DaVita Healthcare Partners

"I hired Laura Stack personally to work with my team. Her views in *Doing the Right Things Right* are drawn from her 25 years of experience with hundreds of leaders and organizations like mine, and I give her work my highest recommendation."
—Steve Silver, Regional Human Resources Director, AlliedBarton Security Services

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Introduction

"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."—Peter F. Drucker.

This book pays homage to a man I consider one of my chief mentors and kindred spirits, though I never actually had the pleasure of studying or working with him.

When I was a business student in the late 1980s, I fell in love with Peter F. Drucker's book *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done*. It delivers a huge amount of useful, real-world information in fewer than 200 pages. Still my favorite business book of all time, I learn something new every time I read it.

Drucker published the first edition of *The Effective Executive* in 1967. While the book has weathered the years well, some of the concepts are a bit dated, particularly with today's technology and social customs. Drucker doesn't cover the electronics revolution that swept the business world in the 1980s, even in later editions; and in this book, executives are men and women are secretaries. I don't believe he intended to be sexist, however, because the secretarial pool was the main foothold women had in business then.

Regardless, I believe the time is right to update Drucker's concepts for the 21st century. *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time* focuses on time management strategies that today's executives can use to quickly obtain profitable, productive results by managing the intersection of two critical dimensions: effectiveness and efficiency. The impact of technology plays an important part in the discussions outlined here and including gender equality goes without saying.

I don't mean to replace Drucker's work in any sense, nor could I. Let me emphasize that this is NOT an attempt to rewrite Drucker's classic. However, I do hope that *Doing the Right Things Right* will stand as a companion to Drucker's work, an addition that directly addresses how the role of the effective executive has changed in the near half-century since Drucker penned the first edition of his groundbreaking book *The Effective Executive*.

I'm humbled by the opportunity to attempt it.

Defining the Problem

Let's start with the key definitions. Drucker's book *The Effective Executive* distinguishes between being effective and efficient. Here's how I differentiate the two terms:

Effectiveness refers to successfully producing the expected or desired result; it's the degree to which you achieve your objectives, solve problems, and realize profits. In business, effectiveness is summed up by "doing the right things." But anyone with the right training or a good manual can do the right things. So can a robot. Alone, effectiveness isn't enough to distinguish a good executive.

Efficiency is the accomplishment of a job with the minimum expenditure of time, effort, and cost—the shortest distance between a goal and a checkmark. In business, efficiency is summed up by "doing things right." When effectiveness lacks efficiency, it's often unproductive and can take 14 months to complete instead of four.

But efficiency without effectiveness can go devastatingly wrong. It doesn't matter how well your team climbs Mt. Everest if your intention was to climb the Matterhorn.

I'm sure you'd agree that executives should work to not only be effective but also efficient. *Doing the Right Things Right* combines Effectiveness (doing the right things) with Efficiency (doing things right) to yield the most profitable AND quickest route a leader can take to execute goals. Leaders manage time most productively at the intersection of effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, once you know you're spending time on the *right* things, you then focus on doing them *right*.

Why the Term "Executive"?

Next, I want to comment on the term "executive." In today's business vernacular, we usually assume an executive is someone in a senior leadership position. However, Webster's defines an executive as "a person or group appointed and given the responsibility to manage the affairs of an organization, and the authority to make decisions within specified boundaries."

So in reality, an executive is *someone who executes*. This can be almost anyone with the authority to make significant decisions and whose time is spent producing value and/or managing people for the benefit of the organization: an emerging leader, a front-line supervisor, a middle manager, a senior leader, or an individual contributor who hasn't received a title.

Finally, Drucker outlines in *The Effective Executive* five effectiveness practices for executives to follow, or what he refers to as "habits of the mind," which I summarize as:

1. Understand and control where time goes.
2. Focus on results.
3. Build on strengths.
4. Prioritize tasks.

5. Make effective decisions.

To be both effective and efficient, today's leaders should follow 12 such practices, which I categorize as:

1. GOALS: Set objectives and align strategy
2. CHANGE: Embrace innovation and adaptability
3. COMMUNICATION: Share mission, vision, and expectations
4. DECISION MAKING: Resolve and execute decisions promptly
5. ENVIRONMENT: Build an open team culture
6. PERFORMANCE: Forge a results-oriented team
7. MOTIVATION: Harness creativity and loyalty
8. GROWTH: Emphasize continuous improvement
9. VALUE: Focus on high-value activities
10. TECHNOLOGY: Master data handling and workflow
11. AGILITY: Maximize speed and flexibility
12. BALANCE: Sustain personal health and mental acuity

Some of these factors were not as germane in Drucker's time as they are now or were considered either less important or too obvious to state explicitly. However, priorities have changed over the decades and sometimes even the obvious must be spelled out.

These 12 practices reflect the 12 chapters of this book. For memorability and organization, I've group these practices into three parts, which reflect the three primary areas where leaders spend time, which I call "3T Leadership":

Part I: STRATEGIC THINKING (BUSINESS): acting as the organizational strategist, with the focus on business goals. The executive monitors the big picture and makes sure their team's efforts match up with and reinforce the company's goals.

Part II: TEAMWORK (EMPLOYEES): serving as the conscientious leader who focuses on employee productivity. Often, this is the low- to mid-level executive's most important role, because building and maintaining an effective, productive team is the first step toward high performance.

Part III: TACTICAL WORK (SELF): being the productive performer, focusing on task completion. Even a team member in a non-leadership position may be an executive in the loosest sense of the term, in that he or she is a productive performer, executing strategy using whatever tactics are available.

As shorthand, I'll refer to the 3Ts as THINK, TEAM, and TACTICS. They are the chief time management roles for leaders; it's what they actually "do" during the day and where they spend their time.

You may not be content with the current mix of your time in these three areas. Perhaps you feel you spend too much time "in the weeds," dealing with day-to-day operational issues and not enough time with your team. Or perhaps you spend too much time managing your team's work and not enough time focused on strategic activities.

In general, as an executive moves up the leadership ladder, the percentage of time spent in each category tends to shift, becoming less tactical and more strategic. This focus may also vary according to the executive's position or immediate project needs. With the largest investment of time listed first, here's a typical breakdown for various leadership levels, with #1 being the most time spent:

Senior Leadership (VP/C-Suite)
1. Think
2. Team
3. Tactics

Leadership Team (Director)
1. Team
2. Think
3. Tactics

Manager
1. Team
2. Tactics
3. Think

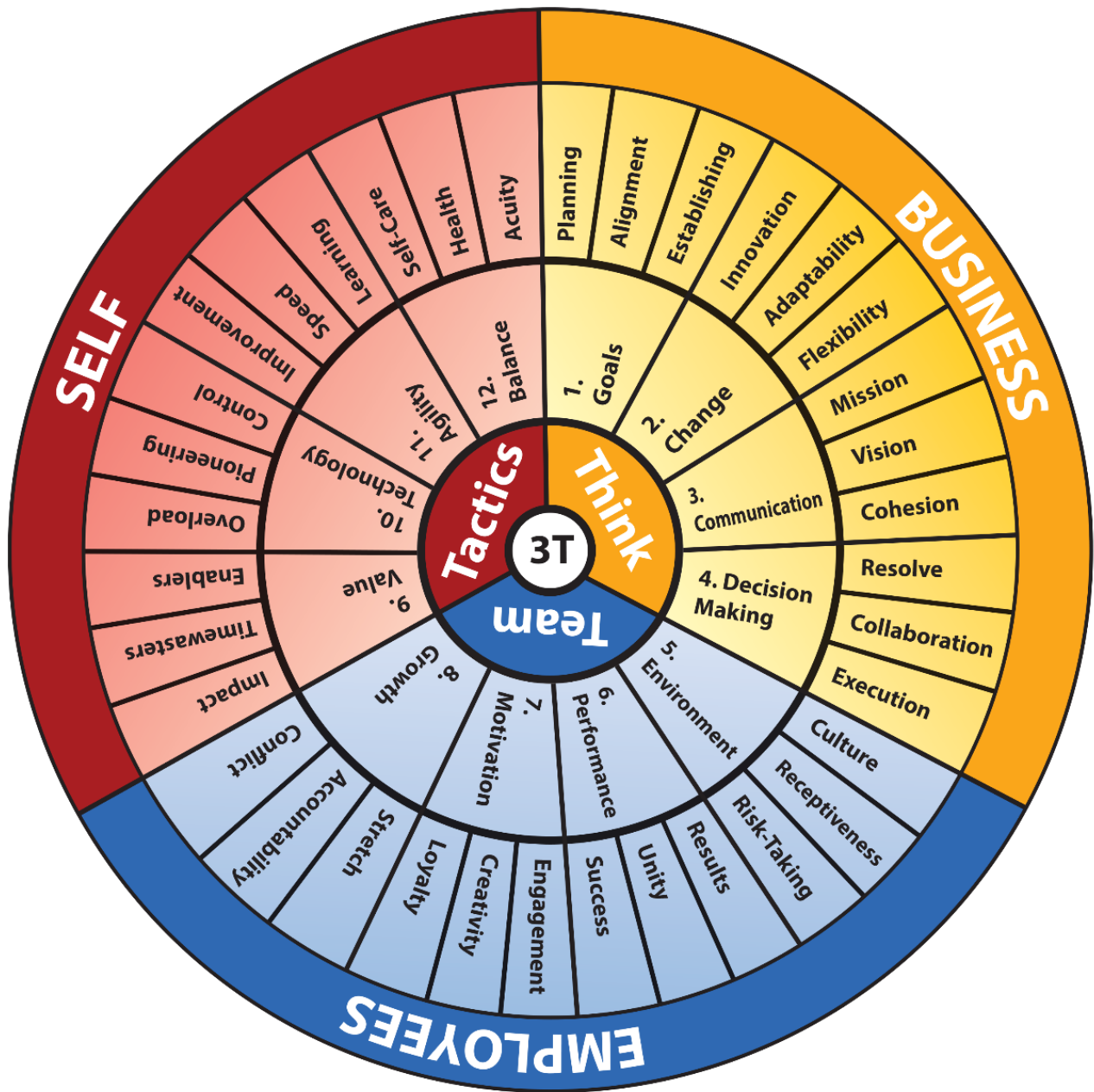**Individual Contributor**
1. Tactics
2. Team
3. Think

The chart below breaks down the categories into a colorful pie chart that aptly summarizes the 3Ts, their individual components, and the associated concepts.

The 3T Leadership Model

Now let's get started by taking the 3T Leadership Assessment. It will provide insight into your level of efficient effectiveness as you prepare to read this book.

The 3T Leadership Assessment

Strategic execution is becoming more common at all levels within the white-collar business hierarchy, making more of us *de facto* executives. Good execution requires you to do the right things right: that is, you have to be both efficient and effective in completing your tasks or meeting your objectives. Each chapter and question has a focus highlighted in bold and repeated in the scoring section.

Before you start, I recommend photocopying the assessment and working with the copy rather than marking your answers in the book itself. That way, you'll be able to come back and retake the self-assessment as your working conditions change and your career advances. You can reassess work relationships and goals, selecting new ideas to focus on as needed.

I also recommend you do three things before you start and as you conduct the assessment:

1. Take into account your current role or work situation when completing the self-assessment.
2. In that role or work situation, make note of teammates, peers, and supervisors (in all directions—up, down, and sideways) with whom you interface currently. Consciously listing names of people will help you put the tips discussed later in the book into perspective. It will also help you map out specific strategies for people management, relationship building, conflict resolution, and so on. You'll become more efficient and effective—bringing the high-level tips provided in the book into a more concrete plane.
3. List your personal, team, and organizational goals as they relate to your current role or work situation.

After you take the assessment, transfer your scores to the following Score Sheet to analyze them further.

Scale

For each question, begin by asking yourself "To what extent do I…", and then answer it using the following scale:

1 = to no extent
2 = to a small extent
3 = to some extent
4 = to a considerable extent
5 = to a great extent

PART 1: STRATEGIC THINKING

Chapter 1. Goals: Set Objectives and Align Strategy

1. Apply clear **planning** to jumpstart team goal setting? 1 2 3 4 5
2. Work toward active **alignment**, making sure our team goals arise from the same core values, mission, and vision as our organizational goals? 1 2 3 4 5
3. Focus on **establishing** team goals and encouraging teammates to take ownership of them? 1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 1 SUBTOTAL:
_____

Chapter 2. Change: Embrace Innovation and Adaptability

4. Encourage **innovation** among my teammates, helping them nurture and implement new ideas? 1 2 3 4 5
5. Facilitate my team members' **adaptability** to the agile business reality? 1 2 3 4 5
6. Ensure **flexibility,** embrace chaos to overcome cultural inertia and work around bureaucracy? 1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 2 SUBTOTAL:
_____

Chapter 3. Communication: Share Mission, Vision, and Expectations

7. Communicate the **mission** in straightforward terms, ensuring my team's understanding in multiple ways? 1 2 3 4 5
8. Promote my **vision** by communicating cleanly and clearly with upper management and my peers? 1 2 3 4 5
9. Sell **cohesion** and teamwork, taking extra care when promoting new ideas to my team and my superiors? 1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 3 SUBTOTAL:
_____

Chapter 4. Decision Making: Resolve and Execute Decisions Promptly

10. **Resolve** indecision quickly? 1 2 3 4 5
11. Emphasize **collaboration** and the value of teamwork with my teammates? 1 2 3 4 5
12. Avoid procrastination, encouraging immediate strategic **execution** and implementation? 1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 4 SUBTOTAL:
_____

PART II: TEAM FOCUS

Chapter 5. Environment: Build an Open Team Structure

13. Simplify workflow and build team **culture**?	1	2	3	4	5
14. Guarantee **receptiveness** while accelerating workflow?	1	2	3	4	5
15. Challenge my team to do better, while encouraging innovation, creativity, and **risk-taking**?	1	2	3	4	5

CHAPTER 5 SUBTOTAL:

_____

Chapter 6. Performance: Forge a Results-Oriented Team

16. Teach my team that **results** matter first, emphasizing substance over style?	1	2	3	4	5
17. Encourage **unity**, heading off clashes along the way?	1	2	3	4	5
18. Increase our chances for **success**, making sure we're productive in the right ways?	1	2	3	4	5

CHAPTER 6 SUBTOTAL:

_____

Chapter 7. Motivation: Harness Creativity and Loyalty

19. Ensure we all own, understand, and practice **engagement**?	1	2	3	4	5
20. Unleash **creativity** and productivity on my team, using the ABCs of Motivation?	1	2	3	4	5
21. Maximize **loyalty**, treating my teammates with respect, trust, and gratitude?	1	2	3	4	5

CHAPTER 7 SUBTOTAL:

_____

Chapter 8. Growth: Emphasize Continuous Improvement

22. **Stretch** my team's abilities?	1	2	3	4	5
23. Emphasize **accountability**, encouraging teammates to take responsibility for their needs, shortcomings, and errors?	1	2	3	4	5
24. Overcome **conflict** while helping my teammates accept criticism?	1	2	3	4	5

CHAPTER 8 SUBTOTAL:

_____

PART III: TACTICAL WORK

Chapter 9. Value: Focus on High-Dollar Activities

25. Maximize my personal **impact**, valuing myself and my time highly?

   1 2 3 4 5

26. Clear **timewasters** for my team, making it easier for us to be productive?

   1 2 3 4 5

27. Institute value **enablers,** such as policies against timewasting attitudes and activities?

   1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 9 SUBTOTAL:
_____

Chapter 10. Technology: Master Data Handling and Workflow

28. Deal effectively with information **overload,** setting goals to smooth workflow and efficiently handle information?

   1 2 3 4 5

29. Apply a **pioneering** approach to new technology?

30. Establish tight **control** over our technology?

   1 2 3 4 5
   1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 10 SUBTOTAL:
_____

Chapter 11. Agility: Maximize Speed and Flexibility

31. Stress **improvement** by focusing on genuine, quantifiable results?

   1 2 3 4 5

32. Emphasize **speed** and flexibility while adapting to the need of the hour?

   1 2 3 4 5

33. Use **learning** as a way to boost ROI while helping team members with their training?

   1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 11 SUBTOTAL:
_____

Chapter 12. Balance: Sustain Your Physical and Mental Health

34. Value **self-care**?

   1 2 3 4 5

35. Maintain my personal **health**?

   1 2 3 4 5

36. Work to sharpen my mental **acuity**?

   1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER 12 SUBTOTAL:
_____

The 3T Leadership Score Sheet

Copy your subtotals from the previous sections and add them up to find your grand total. See the Key below to interpret your score.

PART I: STRATEGIC THINKING

Chapter 1: Goals   Subtotal _____
Chapter 2: Change   Subtotal _____
Chapter 3: Communication   Subtotal _____
Chapter 4: Decision Making   Subtotal _____

Part I Total _____

PART II: TEAM FOCUS

Chapter 5: Environment   Subtotal _____
Chapter 6: Performance   Subtotal _____
Chapter 7: Motivation   Subtotal _____
Chapter 8: Growth   Subtotal _____

Part II Total _____

PART III: TACTICAL WORK

Chapter 9: Value   Subtotal _____
Chapter 10: Technology   Subtotal _____
Chapter 11: Agility   Subtotal _____
Chapter 12: Balance   Subtotal _____

Part III Total _____

GRAND TOTAL (Add Parts I, II, III Totals): _____

Scoring

151–180: **Congratulations**! You have a deep understanding of what it takes to be an efficient, effective modern executive and how to help your teammates maximize their productivity. At most, all you need to do is fine-tune a bit. Keep up the good work!

121–150: **You need a few tweaks here and there**. You're on the right track! Strive to improve any question where you gave yourself less than a "5." Give yourself credit for what you do well. Acknowledge where you can improve and become an even better executive.

91–120: **Average**. You're in the middle of the bell curve. You're not the worst, and you're not the best. Work on kicking up your efforts toward achieving effective, efficient execution a notch, so you can get more done and produce stellar results!

61–90: **Major overhaul required**. Get serious about changing the way you handle your team and projects. Are you efficient but ineffective, or effective but inefficient? Without neglecting the better of the two, start focusing on improving the other. This is one of those things you absolutely have to get better at, even though it's a weakness. Stop working so hard on the wrong things or doing the right things wrong—whatever happens to be the case. Break your weaknesses down into subcategories, based on the ones in the questionnaire above. Work on one item on this list every two to three weeks until you systematically improve your competence level.

36–60: **Danger**! You're both ineffective and inefficient. Your leadership productivity skills need a jumpstart *fast*! Both your job and your organization's future may depend on it, so start working hard on doing the right things the right way *right now*.

How to Use Your Scores

Are you starting to see that where you spend your time *now* isn't necessarily where you *should* be spending your time?

Comparing scores on each Part of this assessment will help you determine which of the 3Ts is the weakest link in your executive process. I've divided it as I have so that within each Part, you can delve deeper by comparing the Chapter Subtotals, thereby better understanding which topic you've expressed a weakness in. Even more useful is looking at the individual quiz items with the lowest scores; in fact, they represent your best places to start working. Regard this as a bottom-up method of continuous improvement.

As you study each chapter (especially those in which you've scored poorly), think about how you can improve your process. If your weakest of the 3Ts is Team, where do you face your greatest challenges: in Environment, Performance, Motivation, or Growth? If you've marked a full slate of 5s except in the Performance chapter (Chapter Six) where you drop to 4 on Outcome, 2 on Team Cohesion, and 1 on Improving Effectiveness, then it's a clear line of action. Start with Improving Effectiveness, followed by Cohesion.

Make a sincere effort to weld your team together as an effective, productive unit, providing the training and education needed to improve the ROIs as both individuals and a team. Aim to increase their performance all around. Do the same for yourself.

Once you're happy with your new results, move on to another unsatisfactory function and work on bringing it up to par. While I would normally tell you to focus on improving what you're already good at—i.e., pushing your scores from good to great rather than wasting time on things you don't do well—the functions I discuss in this book represent exceptions to that rule. They're so fundamental that they require the highest level of competence you can bring to bear. That way, you and your team can strategically execute on the spot so automatically that you ensure your survival in an increasingly difficult business world.

As you successfully put new concepts into play, retake the Assessment to determine how much you've improved. You may not even recognize that original *you* a year from now!

Don't forget to visit www.3TLeadership.com for additional educational resources.

PART I: STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic thinking boils down to one simple question: *What is the desired outcome?*

In this way, an executive drives organizational strategy using various ways to:

- Maximize results in minimal time,
- Maintain a bird's eye view of the big picture, and
- Ensure the team aligns its goals with those of the organization.

As a leader, you might have to regularly set aside time for strategic thinking, so you can take your team from start to finish with the least interference along the way.

This makes sense and it's easy to say, but it begs this question: what exactly *is* strategic thinking in the first place?

The Components of Strategic Thinking

Although strategic thinking varies from one team or organization to another, it generally includes these characteristics:

- It focuses on group needs.
- It leverages existing organizational structure and seeks to improve upon it.
- It's cross-functional, presuming and requiring cooperation between groups.
- It has long-term, far-reaching effects.
- It considers what group tactics you can best use to accomplish the strategy.

Applying Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking can be difficult to apply when circumstance—and sometimes people—seem determined to crush it. As an effective executive, you have no choice but to push the envelope of your team's capacities, so you can foresee and avoid potentially explosive traps in the modern business arena.

In addition to market forces and good, old-fashioned competition, you may have to adroitly deal with crises over which you have no control—like death, disaster, and the worst side of human nature. If you can't bounce back quickly, you're of little use to the organization or your team, so have contingency plans in place that cover anything that might happen. Beware, though. You can't possibly plan for everything, so don't paralyze yourself by trying to make your plans too specific.

You also have to know how to take hold of a declining team and shake it back to life, which poses its own set of problems.

Goal setting ties together all the disparate members of a team, as well as the strategies they apply both individually and collectively. It sets a course—a benchmark for the team to shoot for. In a sense, goals are promises to our teams and ourselves, dreams with deadlines that tweak our performance upward. The great thing about goals is that it's as easy to think big as it is to think small. Thinking big not only tests our reach and abilities; it also stretches our mental boundaries.

By its very nature, strategic thinking requires you to learn to make the best decisions you can as quickly as possible, boosting innovation and flexibility, helping your team adapt to circumstances as they change.

Just as importantly, you have to be able to communicate those adaptations to all involved: to communicate the new mission, to promote your vision, and to sell teamwork in a way that gets people to take notice without taking offense.

Like the captain of a ship, always consult with your officers before making a decision, taking their viewpoints and suggestions into account. But the decision is ultimately yours, and you have no choice but to make it. If you don't, circumstances will make the decision for you.

Once you've made the decision, you and your team have to execute it strategically and, if need be, on the spot.

Remember: Executives *execute*. Execution and results are all that really matter in any business. And don't assume you don't qualify as an executive. This book isn't only for C-Suite personnel, though I believe it will serve them well. An executive can be a front-line manager, an up-and-coming star, a programmer who initiates a productive change in the team process... *anyone* who strikes while the iron is hot and makes productive changes in the moment.

Chapter 1. Goals: Set Objectives and Align Strategy

Goals boost team productivity because they sow seeds of hope. They give your team something to strive for, especially in a positive, non-punitive environment where you provide valuable feedback on a regular basis. Goals also establish promises you and your team can work toward as you fine-tune performance and boost productivity. In addition to setting goals, regularly reevaluate your progress to ensure you're on the right path, and consider the possibility of course corrections that might serve you better.

Keep these factors in mind as you set objectives and align strategy:

1. **Planning**: Understand your overall strategic planning process from beginning to end.

    -   Apply the Execution Continuum to establish your plans and goals: **Core Values → Mission/Vision → Goal → Strategy → Tactics → Execution.**
    -   Define your goals and how you plan to achieve them. You can't hit what you can't see.
    -   Once you know what you want, clear a path from where you are to where you want to be.
    -   Constantly measure your progress, and make course adjustments based on those measurements.

2. **Alignment**: Work toward active alignment of your team and individual goals with organizational goals.

    -   Jumpstart your team goals with the bedrock beliefs of your company, and the statements that guide its ultimate purpose for existing.
    -   Emphasize both individual contributions and team effort.
    -   Engage and empower your teammates by telling them why their work matters and how it moves the organization forward.
    -   Focus on a few major goals at a time.
    -   Eliminate self-sabotage by squelching negativity within the team.
    -   You increase your productivity by an order of magnitude if everyone interlocks as a solid team.

3. **Establishing**: Focus on establishing team goals and encouraging your team to take ownership of them.

    -   Set reasonable goals. Goals that appeal to individual and team needs increase the possibility of success.

- Provide specific feedback based on standard metrics, telling your teammates exactly what they do right and what they need to improve.
- Provide a productive, supportive environment. Give your team all the training and tools they need to succeed.
- Invite ideas and open discussion, and share resources. Ensure enough overlap in skill-sets to fill in the blanks.
- Clear the way to the target goal.
- Continually ask the team how they think they can improve productivity.

The reward for successful goal setting and achievement is bigger goals. Good leaders give of themselves. Employees want someone to prepare the way for them, and to be there to guide them. They want you to actually *lead*. When you can do so by sincerely feeling and demonstrating compassion for them, and hold everyone to their promises—including yourself—they'll follow you to the ends of the earth.

Chapter 2. Change: Embrace Innovation and Adaptability

As the saying goes, the only real constant is change—and it's something we must all deal with and accept. There was a time not long ago when executives paid lip service to innovation, but were the first to block it. Now, there's no choice but to innovate if you want to remain relevant. Leaders have become much more adept at plugging innovation into their business and corporate cultures. More often than not, the changes passing through our organizations transform us in ways we must repeatedly take into account.

Here's how to bring order from the chaos, and equilibrium from the flux of accelerating change.

1. **Innovation:** Encourage innovation among your teammates, helping them nurture and implement new ideas.

   - Encourage creativity, allowing ideas to mature before culling them.
   - Pick your best ideas and give them your all. You only have only so much time and attention to spare.
   - Remember, experts aren't always right. Instead of dismissing an idea because someone's scoffed at it, give it time to grow, then test it to see if anything's there. The same goes for an old idea that didn't work before; it may work *now.* A project that was prohibitively expensive 20 years ago might be ridiculously cheap today.

2. **Adaptability:** Facilitate your team's adaptability to the agile business reality.

   - Business leaders who are ready and willing to embrace the future will be the ones who prosper for decades to come.
   - Striding confidently into the future means maximizing your preparedness for whatever comes.
   - By continually improving systems, processes, and productivity, you'll advance from good to great to superior.
   - Protect your own data carefully, until the law can catch up with the most recent technology.
   - Realize that as a leader, you'll find yourself becoming more of a facilitator, visionary, and cheerleader to tech-savvy, independent-minded workers than ever before.

3. **Flexibility:** Embrace chaos to overcome cultural inertia and work around bureaucracy**.**

   - Change is essential to the continued growth and development of global business. It stirs things up, cross-fertilizing ideas and aerating the waters of creativity.
   - Avoid complacency, because some hungry young company will always be pushing the envelope and trying to steal your market share. And so it should be: competition makes us stronger.
   - Overcome cultural inertia and co-evolve along with society, from upgrading your technology to retuning your team's activities.

Like creatures in the natural world, businesses must adapt or die. No matter how necessary change may be, you'll frequently encounter resistance; after all, it's much easier to stay the same than to change, since you've got inertia on your side. Don't resist change to your detriment as the world transforms around you.

Chapter 3. Communication: Share Mission, Vision, and Expectations

Effective communication sets profitable, productive organizations apart from the also-rans. It can take many forms, but the factors that work best are plain talk, honesty, and cooperation. Your communication must be simple and straightforward, especially when communicating the mission. In some cases, particularly when working with other leaders, you may have to butt heads politely and cautiously. Work hard to sell your ideas, not just to give an advantage to your team but also to the organization as a whole.

These tips will help you communicate properly with your team and your superiors.

1. **Mission**: Communicate the mission in straightforward terms, ensuring your team's understanding in multiple ways.

   - Keep your mission in front of your team. If necessary, repeat your goals until you're blue in the face. Lead by example, too.
   - Triple check for understanding before assuming your people know what you want.
   - Keep individual communication styles in mind. Some people understand your needs better when you express them verbally; others do better with written instructions. I recommend both.
   - New initiatives deserve team meetings, followed up by emailed summaries.
   - If you head a larger group, you won't be able to take everyone's background and capabilities into account. Even so, make sure your managers know what you need and that can communicate it effectively.

2. **Vision**: Promote your vision by communicating cleanly and clearly with upper management and your peers.

   - When promoting your vision with your peers, carefully prepare your arguments. Probe your arguments for weaknesses, so you can strengthen your positions.
   - Run your thoughts by neutral people and ask them to shoot holes in your argument. You may find your position fails when other factors are considered.
   - Integrate your teammates' best points into your decision-making process and hammer out a compromise.
   - Disagree early, clearly, and politely. Remain open to others' points, but make your position clear ASAP.
   - Be simple, to the point, and specific about your concerns. Don't dispute an argument in general terms; always use specific examples to refute it.
   - Once a decision has been made, support it wholeheartedly.

3. **Cohesion:** Sell cohesion and teamwork, taking extra care when promoting new ideas to your team and your superiors.

- Sometimes your attempts to promote a new idea, strategy, or beneficial expenditure result in head butting. If so, tune up your effective persuasion skills to sell the idea.
- Know the answer to this question: what makes your idea different enough to be heard?
- Take a page from marketing's playbook. Any good salesperson will tell you that to sell something, you have to be able to address all the objections the buyer has.
- Once you've dealt with the objections, show everyone why the idea profits them specifically and the organization in general.

One idea can change the world. Planes, trains, and automobiles are all good examples. At the very least, your idea can change your organization. But it won't go anywhere unless you know how to present it to those in power—and fight for it through the worst of their criticism. It may not make it, but who knows? You may end up the world's next Sergey Brin or Steve Jobs. Don't give up on an idea until it's truly dead. Even then, you may be able to resurrect it later as technology and society advance.

Chapter 4. Decision Making: Resolve and Execute Decisions Promptly

Too often, indecision rules in the workplace, because decision-makers are afraid to make mistakes. Yet the occasional mistake is the price of effective decision-making; it's better to take a wrong turn than no turn at all. Once you've made a decision, trade theory for action and start moving. Don't assume that disagreement within the team is something you should squelch. Friction can be positive, as long as helps lets you see all sides of the story before you make a final decision.

Keep these points in mind:

1. **Resolve:** Resolve indecision quickly. Don't simply *react* to the world as it changes; be *proactive* to change it.

   - Give all your business decisions careful consideration before you make them, but don't let meditation overcome motion, either.
   - Test your decision against these imperatives: (a) core values, mission, and vision; (b) outcome; (c) Return on Investment; (d) opportunity cost; and (e) efficient use of resources.
   - Do your due diligence and hedge your bets if you can.
   - Rather than overanalyze the issue, go into action once you have enough information to make the decision.
   - Don't hesitation to change direction in midstream as necessary.

2. **Collaboration:** Emphasize collaboration and the value of teamwork with your teammates.

   - Give everyone a voice in decision-making.
   - Invite spirited discussion. This gives everyone a voice in decision-making, sparks healthy competition, allows reasoned debate, and short-circuits problems that can results from festering resentment.
   - Let your team members clash at times. Rather than avoid conflict, invite discussion of innovation and ideas, and don't suppress friction. Otherwise, you run the risk of complacency and groupthink.

3. **Execution:** Avoid procrastination, encouraging immediate strategic execution and implementation.

   - Stop accepting excuses for lack of execution. Set strict milestones and deadlines for project completion.
   - Help your teammates hone their skills and structure their time, if necessary, to get the job done on schedule.

- Don't overcomplicate. All you need is a basic roadmap to get started.
- Embrace flexibility so you can turn on a dime if the situation warrants.
- Avoid making success contingent on a particular step or item, or you may end up dead in the water.
- Execution trumps all. No matter how well you've designed your Mission/Vision Statement or planned your strategy, nothing happens if you don't execute.

Action overcomes fear—and ideas are worthless until you take action. So once you have your ducks in a row, get started and meet the challenge head on. You can take care of the details as they arise. Stop dragging your heels and get to it, selecting the easiest, most direct path to success— exercising simplicity, careful direction, practicality, speed, and flexibility on the way.

PART II: TEAM FOCUS

Effective, efficient executives build ROI for their teams, because doing so benefits the entire organization. It starts with genuine concern for the teammates and their performance—an approach that previous generations of executives might have found a little too touchy-feely for their liking. Some still do.

But during the past generation or so, something unusual has happened: executives have evolved from boss to team player. Oh, they're still in charge, but smart leaders realize they get further by forming partnerships with their employees.

Modern executives act mostly as visionary facilitators, even cheerleaders, rather than as strategy imposers. They drive strategy with team input as part of our leadership role, and encourage team members to deploy their own tactics for achieving strategies. Why? By necessity.

Strategy is more fluid and responsive to change than ever before, so everyone has to execute in whatever way works best at a particular moment. As Kevin Kongs, VP at Westar Energy, told me, "A good leader has to be able to know what buttons to push, when you can push somebody to get something done, and when you have to lay off a little bit."

Since the Great Recession in 2009 hit, managerial and rank-and-file jobs have begun converging. No longer can leaders consider themselves completely distinct from non-managerial teammates. Business has always been a collaborative endeavor. Today, it must become even more so to facilitate efficient execution and greater productivity.

Executive Improvement 101

You depend on your teammates at least as much as they depend on you—probably more. So before detailing how to maintain a team focus in the next four chapters, let's consider the basics first.

Basic Principle #1: Sincerely View Employees As Your Greatest Asset

Everyone *says* they do this, but in our precarious economy, some leaders still see employees as replaceable. To some extent they must be. No one—even you—should be indispensable, partly so people can be promoted but also so the company can survive without them if they die, fall ill, or leave. But they're not interchangeable machine parts. They're people. If you take care of them, they'll take care of you.

In a knowledge-based economy, your teammates become especially valuable, because their skills are completely portable—they live in those few pounds of gray matter between their ears. Treat them well so they'll stay with you. Good workers cost a lot to replace.

Care for your team, too—don't act like a distant eminence more worried about your annual bonus than your people. Not to be cynical, but it's easier for them to like you if you care about *them*—and if you make it obvious you do. If your people feel happier, they'll perform better, and you'll all prosper as a consequence.

Basic Principle #2: Communicate Leadership by Word and Deed

Talk is cheap. If you can't keep a promise, don't make it. Otherwise, ask your people what would increase their job satisfaction and performance—and then pursue those factors.

As Chapter 1 pointed out , promises are important, particularly when goals are concerned. Similarly, don't demand the kind of hard work and focus you won't do yourself. You'll have their loyalty if you're in there actively working with them, insofar as your duties allow. You won't if you roll in at 10 a.m. and leave at 4 p.m. to play golf, even if you're there schmoozing to capture a new account.

Darren Smith, VP at John Hancock Insurance, encourages continuous improvement by expecting it in himself. "If a company and its leaders are always trying to push forward and get just a little better every day, to reach a little higher every day, and to make more of a difference every day, it quickly filters down through the company," he points out. "It's also critical to equip team members with the ability to define and measure improvement, and also recognize when there's a lack of improvement."

Basic Principle #3: Unlock Their Enthusiasm and Energy

Find reasons for your team members to pour their discretionary effort into their work. Empower them in every way possible; share your authority; provide top incentives in whatever forms work best; tackle your own work with enthusiasm and verve. given the need to do your own work, remain as accessible as you can and don't micromanage. Instead, trust your folks to do what they need to do and make it easier for them to do it.

Allowing your people to do their jobs without too much interference can work wonders. Steve Gangwish of CSS Farms points to autonomy as a big part of the loyalty recipe in his company. "We rely on leaders to be autonomous and manage their operations on their own. While we have weekly communications with everybody, a corporate leader may only get to their site a couple of times a year. So the other three-hundred sixty days of the year, [the farm managers] are in charge."

Basic Principle #4: Fight for Them

Protect your team from both the ups and downs of the economy and from misguided cost-cutting efforts initiated higher up. If lower-level managers at the electronics giant Circuit City had fought for their experienced floor-personnel back in 2007 when C-Suite execs replaced them with untrained newbies, the company might not have gone bankrupt. Some leaders can be shortsighted when it comes to protecting their own compensation.

Basic Principle #5: Proving Training

I've already said this, but it bears repeating. Give your teammates the intellectual and educational tools they need to maximize their potential. Teach them to ask themselves, "Did I pay for myself today?" If the word is no, they either need to work harder, or they need more training. Give it to them so everyone can benefit. Make the option available to anyone who qualifies and allow them as much room to improve as they can handle. You'll more than earn back the cost in increased productivity and goodwill. For example, I've recovered the investment made in my office manager's WordPress training by huge margins.

Remember, in the end, what matters is ROI, not initial cost. If you can make more money by improving your employees' performance than you spend on doing so, then do. When employees specifically tell you how you can help them boost their productivity, listen up!

Better in Every Way

If you keep these points in mind and take care to implement the suggestions I outline in the next four chapters, you'll inevitably improve your team's performance. And you may just improve the whole company's wellbeing along the way.

Keep this central thesis in mind: Never lose track of your team's best interests while pursuing your own. That's one touchstone of a good executive.

Chapter 5. Environment: Build an Open Team Structure

Sometimes a team culture forms spontaneously, evolving out of a set of core values combined with corporate mission, vision, and basic goals. But the efficient, effective executive takes a direct hand in guiding team culture while working to maintain a positive culture where it already exists. The work environment has recently moved toward an open structure marked by increased agility, flexibility, and speed. To get ahead, stop overthinking business, fearing change, and losing focus. Simplify the complex challenges, and bounce back when something doesn't work as expected.

Consider these tips as you implement your team structure:

1. **Culture:** Simplify workflow and build team culture.

   - Apply simple rules to business situations instead of building elaborate decision-making and process-flow frameworks.
   - Cut items that don't fit organizational objectives or fail to move the company forward.
   - While no one likes to let people go, layoffs may be necessary for the organization's survival.
   - Include a sunset clause for all projects and initiatives. Make the end of an endeavor part of its natural life cycle. Plan for that ending, and when it comes time to shut down, do so—unless there's an overriding reason to continue.

2. **Receptiveness:** Guarantee receptiveness while accelerating workflow.

   - Clear your team's path, fix what's broken, head off bureaucracy, and try new things occasionally.
   - Stay abreast of your team's productivity, and be willing to step forward and make changes if your people don't do so on their own.
   - Monitor trends within your industry. Know what's coming over the horizon so you can stay ahead of the pack.
   - Don't let preconceptions, habits, or narrow-mindedness keep you from considering all parts of a problem.
   - Reward efficiency among your team members.
   - Encourage diversity of thought and experience within the team.

3. **Risk-taking:** Challenge your team to do better, while encouraging innovation, creativity, and risk-taking.

   - Forget offering employees the same old "brass rings" to grab for. Challenge them by offering projects with a real chance of failure.

- Give your people a chance to excel at something that truly matters.
- Keep communication lines open in all directions, so people can "hit you with their best shots" at all times.
- Keep them busy. Workers with too much on their plate tend to be happier than those without enough work.
- Step it up to avoid boredom. Employee boredom can corrode morale and productivity—not only for those who are bored, but also for those to whom they complain.

Consistent productivity requires a culture that encourages simplicity, speed, and flexibility. Team members must be receptive to new things, especially innovation—which means rewarding risk-taking, lest unproductive habits or boredom set in. If you can help your employees fall in love with the *process* of their work, they'll never be bored. They'll always have something to anticipate or polish. Teach them to anticipate the reward that comes *after* the humdrum, especially that sense of accomplishment.

Chapter 6. Performance: Forge a Results-Oriented Team

The best teams are so close-knit and results-oriented that productivity is a given. It depends on trust and mutual respect, factors that naturally boost productivity. Everyone on the team must act as integral and active parts of the team. Move forward with positive energy, developing the talents of your team members so you'll inevitably enhance performance. A few rough edges may prove useful, by generating sparks of creativity and innovation that boost productivity even higher. There may be times when you'll have to be ruthless to revitalize your team, clearing out negative attitudes and unprofitable processes rather than people.

Gear up for success using these tips:

1. **Results:** Teach your team that results matter first, emphasizing substance over style.

   - Stop confusing "busy" with "productive." Who cares how many items you cross off your list if you accomplish nothing worthwhile? Put your priority items at the top of your list and do them *first*.
   - Work *on* your business, not *in* it, facilitating teamwork.
   - Stop trying to impress people with your personal style. Demonstrate your value through what you accomplish.
   - Recouple performance and reality. Set up some way to measure not only team performance, but also each team member's individual performance as well.
   - Break away from bureaucracy. Don't get stuck on specific "best practices" forever, ignoring the reality of change.

2. **Unity:** Encourage unity, heading off clashes along the way.

   - Remember: the modern concept of teamwork requires you not only to captain the ship, but to be an active part of the crew as well.
   - Know the difference between availability and accessibility. Being completely available ties you down and make you a less-effective leader.
   - Cultivate a limited "open door" policy. Distancing yourself from your team can damage cohesion and team unity, but you can't always be available or you won't be able to do your own work.
   - Learn how to mediate disputes at all levels.
   - Identify and deal with slackers. Be honest with them about their lack of performance. Put them on notice, motivate them, and—if nothing works—fire them.

3. **Success:** Increase your chances for success, making sure you're productive in the right ways.

- Maximize strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses, but at the same time, know your weaknesses so you can work around them—and root them out whenever possible.
- Chop out the deadwood. On most teams, processes and systems are more likely than people to be "deadwood."
- Consult your team, conduct a classic SWOT analysis, and do a big-picture audit, looking at everything you can possibly fix. Then implement repairs on your way to revitalizing team productivity.
- Engineer a quantum leap in productivity. Partner with your team on the mission, work with them to lay out the roadmap from where you are to where you want to be—then fire up the bulldozer and clear the path for your team to follow.

Let me repeat: results matter first. No matter how busy you are, if you're not posting worthwhile results, something's gone wrong. Take enough time off to study what's missing, bringing your whole team in on the task. Forge a cohesive, unified team with a well-defined work ethic and goals that benefit the bottom line. Work with your team to repair productivity, then push through into miracle territory. It takes more than just bringing your team back up to a decent productivity level. You need to make a quantum leap forward to maximize your impact and pull the organization forward.

Chapter 7. Motivation: Harness Creativity and Loyalty

Good leaders internalize the factors that motivate their team members, so they can use them to boost productivity. Invite your teammates on a journey by using the ABCs of motivation. Empower them in ways that make them your partners in success, asking for and considering their ideas and opinions. Meanwhile, take hold of your own creativity, finding ways to harness it, passing those ideas on to your teammates. Never lose sight of the fact that they *are* your teammates; you're a team member, not just a leader. Always seek employee loyalty. This won't come naturally, so find ways to demonstrate your gratitude for a job well done and tighten team cohesion at every turn.

You can ensure team cohesion by applying these steps:

1. **Engagement:** Ensure your team members all own, understand, and practice engagement**.**

   - Hold your team to a high standard. One of the factors in the excellence equation is your expectation, and your team's, that they're capable achieving excellence. Let them know you believe in them, and they're more likely to engage with and own their jobs.
   - Make sure they understand the big picture, plan carefully, and give them the tools to achieve your joint vision.
   - Track your progress, and celebrate success when it comes.
   - Shoulder your share of the burden. Remember: the best team leader is also a team *member*.

2. **Creativity:** Unleash creativity and productivity on your team, using the ABCs of Motivation.

   - Use the ABCs of Motivation: Analyze, Balance, Communicate, Direct, Expect, and Facilitate. Use all these methods to stir your team and push them toward magnificence.
   - Set aside time for creativity. Businesses grow by innovating, so provide your team with creative time, if you can.
   - Encourage your crew members to study other disciplines, because that can allow for some interesting (and profitable) cross-fertilization of ideas.
   - Let your team innovate—and seriously consider any ideas they bring you that may increase productivity or fatten the bottom line.
   - Don't punish those who actively innovate, even if they fail, as long as failure doesn't hurt the organization.

3. **Loyalty.** Maximize loyalty, treating your teammates with respect, trust, and gratitude.

    - You can increase loyalty to gratifying levels if you treat your team with respect, strive for consistency, and do your best to fulfill your promises.
    - Above all, lead by example!
    - Harness the power of gratitude. A pat on the back or unexpected bonus to say "thanks" can boost loyalty, engagement, and productivity to remarkable levels.
    - Be genuine with your praise. Sometimes, intrinsic and inexpensive recognition of a job well done can be more effective than a raise or promotion.
    - Recognize milestones like anniversaries and birthdays as well as accomplishments.

In the modern workplace, where it's easier for employees to work outside a centralized location and be their own bosses, the key to high team performance is to form a partnership with your teammates. Invite them on a productive journey, and make it both enjoyable and fulfilling so they take it more seriously, engaging with and owning their jobs. Validate their value to the team, and you'll enjoy a level of cohesion that makes others teams jealous, wondering how you managed it.

Chapter 8. Growth: Emphasize Continuous Improvement

At the team level, cohesion depends on growing together as a team, until individual team members interlock smoothly into one efficient entity. A mature team develops features that naturally boost productivity. The effort starts with you. You can clarify these factors and avoid problems by using metacognition to learn not only how *you* think, but how your team members think as well. Among other things, a quality leader accepts both credit and blame when it's due. He or she also acts on constructive criticism without overreacting to the pain that accompanies it. Using your emotional intelligence while balancing your head and heart serves you well here.

You can encourage continuous improvement using the following means:

1. **Stretch:** Stretch your team's abilities.

   - Harness the power of metacognition. With a little self-reflection, you can understand *how* and *why* you think the way we do. When you know the "how" and the "why" of something, you can usually improve upon it.
   - Take advantage of metacognition not only to comprehend your own thought processes but also to understand how those around you think.
   - Instill effective habits in your team members. Work to make your people more efficient, more dependent on multiple skill sets, synergetic, and more accountable to themselves and others.
   - Experiment until you find your team's ideal synergy equation, in which the productive whole exceeds the sum of the parts.

2. **Accountability.** Emphasize accountability, encouraging teammates to take responsibility for their needs, shortcomings, and errors.

   - Make accountability your watchword. Accountability means following through on your promises and accepting the consequences when things go wrong.
   - Step up to the plate. Only losers and professional victims blame others when unforeseen circumstances trip them up.
   - Use *employer* thinking versus *employee* thinking. When you treat the business you work in as if it's your own (even if it isn't), you and your teammates are more likely to become engaged in your work and hold yourselves accountable for what you do and don't accomplish.
   - Invest your discretionary effort and correct your own deficiencies instead of complaining about how the world's against you.
   - Takes personal responsibility seriously, donning a can-do attitude like armor and fending for yourself.

3. **Conflict.** Overcome conflict while helping your teammates accept criticism.

- Face the pain without flinching. Growth hurts, especially when it drags you along faster than you like.
- Accept constructive criticism and learn from it. Listen more, talk less; ask for specifics; take corrective action; and follow up with your critics to see how you're doing.
- Even when you've fixed a problem, continue your improvement efforts. Eventually, you'll get so good at what you do you'll never need to worry about that particular topic again—as long as you commit to maintaining high standards of performance.
- Go on to the next thing you want to fix...because there will *always* be a next thing.

What fails to grow and change will stagnate or die. So commit yourself to team wide growth, and clear the way for your people to follow. You'll experience growing pains, an inevitable part of the process; but don't flinch or quit. The only way to improve is to keep trying until you've got something down so well it costs you no pain to move forward; but even then, you have to maintain a high level of performance. Accountability will keep you on the straight and narrow; without it, you sink into complacency, a pit you may never climb out of again.

PART III: TACTICAL WORK

Truly successful executives are those who can thoroughly mine the intersection of efficiency and effectiveness to maximize their value and that of their team's—whether that team is a small group or an entire division, department, or organization.

Recall that effectiveness is *doing the right things*; efficiency is *doing things right*. The ores from which you smelt the alloy of both, Doing the Right Things Right, are the tactics by which you get things done and achieve strategic execution at the right time in the right place.

As a rule, you don't simply stumble across productivity—and it doesn't strike you out of the blue like a gift from Heaven. Purposeful productivity of the type you need boils down to three keys: Excellence, Planning, and Effort—with a fourth component: quality.

Commitment to Excellence

To achieve your goals requires nothing less than an attitude to do incredible work. Think of attitude as leavening in a cake: without it, your team won't rise to the occasion. It's your responsibility to encourage team commitment to excellence in every way possible. Build an experienced, talented group, and then make each team member feel that visceral need to create a product or service that will carve out a large slice of the market share.

Typically, a commitment to excellence arises through factors such as these:

- Leadership by example
- Culture of mutual cooperation
- Motivation
- Employee empowerment
- Full engagement

Previous chapters have addressed most of these already; let's discuss the rest.

Intelligent Planning

Planning comprises the basic batter of your productivity cake, the body that gives the leavening something to act on. That means give your teammates enough time for their research, work, and strategic thinking. Look at what's going right (so you can continue it) and what's going wrong (so you can fix it). This leads to informed step-by-step planning, followed by goal setting and a point-by-point productivity plan. Do your

deep thinking, set your milestones for each piece of the project, and only execute once you have enough information to do so—not a moment sooner or later.

Focused Effort

Here's the heat that provides the energy and synergy that turns your goopy batter into a structured, final product. Your teammates will conduct the execution on the front lines; your primary job is to facilitate their progress and keep encouraging them. Clear away obstacles, elicit advice, tap the knowledge of those outside the project, insert necessary changes with minimal disruption, block distractions, and keep an eye on the competition. Arrange the environment so your people can sink safely into the task at hand, becoming so focused they lose touch with the rest of reality for a short time.

Inextricable Quality

Once you've carefully selected, thoroughly mixed, and baked your productivity ingredients, a delicious result is inevitable. But remember: the final quality depends on you and your careful, heartfelt guidance. Some say a cook is only as good as his or her ingredients; I say the cook is only as good as the person's sense of purposeful productivity.

Remember, the balance of your tactical ingredients will vary according to the type of work you do. As Steve Gangwish, VP of CSS Farms, points out in our interview,

> We don't talk about working hours... You just do whatever it takes to get the job done. When we do hire people from outside who don't know our culture, we're very open and honest about the time commitment of this job and what farming takes, and we definitely don't want to have any surprises there.

However you slice it, well-prepared tactical work guides, supports, and refines your final product: productivity. Like a catalyst in chemistry, it's not exactly a part of that product, but without it, the final result would not exist.

Chapter 9. Value: Focus on High-Dollar Activities

Your skill at time management determines how well you manage not only your own productivity, but also your team's. Most of us try to handle both in a manner both efficient and effective, but many leaders don't do this well enough. We often waste more time than we should by trying to multitask or by letting other people steal our attention a minute at a time. Limit your day-to-day activities to those that make best use of productivity at the team level.

Here's how you pump up your value, along with your team's.

1. **Impact**. Maximize your personal impact, valuing yourself and your time highly.

    *   Understand why your time matters as much as everyone else's, if not more, set an hourly value to it, and learn and how to conserve it in both personal and team ways.
    *   Promote the personal touch among your team members. Show them how to save time, and clear the way for them. The big goal is to save time for *everyone*.
    *   Think in terms of tradeoffs. Delegating low value tasks to those who can do them better and cheaper is just the beginning. Look at ways to save time and money within your team, from telecommuting to avoiding false economy. Consider whether time- and money-saving tips really work as advertised.

2. **Timewasters:** Clear timewasters for your team, making it easier for you and your team to be productive**.**

    *   Remove distractions, clarify priorities, establish a weekly interruption-free period, intercept red tape, and provide your teammates with higher levels of authority.
    *   CRACK the Whip on Timewasters: <u>C</u>larify goals. Show your teammates <u>R</u>ules matter and <u>A</u>ccountability is expected. Demonstrate that <u>C</u>ontrol is valued, and <u>K</u>eep a good example. You're in charge for a reason.
    *   Learn how to say NO to people who want to steal your time or your team's, and make it stick.

3. **Enablers:** Institute value enablers**,** such as policies against timewasting attitudes and activities.

    *   Know how NOT to pick your next task. Don't choose your next task according to what you feel like doing, order of appearance on your to-do list, what comes to mind next, who's screaming the loudest, or the order of your sticky notes.

- Refuse to allow discussions of politics or religion, denigration of any group of people, gossip, ducking responsibility, and defeatist thinking.
- Tweak your meetings. They're a necessary evil, but you can make them more tolerable by deciding whether the meeting is truly necessary, limiting participation, appointing a facilitator, and starting and ending on time.

Time is money, so value your time highly and focus on the high-value tasks only you can do. Determine how you can use your teammates more effectively, and make a sincere effort to eliminate as many timewasters as you can, in both your personal work life and your team's. Value enablers like knowing what NOT to do as well as what to do, and squeezing all the extra time out of your meetings, will help you push your team's performance through the roof.

Chapter 10. Technology: Master Data Handling and Workflow

Technology has been a double-edged blessing to business. On one hand, it's helped make modern workers more productive. Cloud computing alone has greatly simplified access to anywhere/anytime information. However, technology can be tyrannical. Not only do you risk a flood of new work triggered by a "timesaving" invention, new technology sometimes makes it easier for others to steal proprietary information. Worse, you can become so dependent on your technology you can't live without it.

Here's how to handle technology and data without letting it overpower you.

1. **Overload.** Deal effectively with information overload**,** setting goals to smooth workflow and efficiently handle information.

   - Instead of checking the Internet on your break, take walks, talk to people, and otherwise avoid "infobesity."
   - Adapt a triage mentality. If something better and more productive comes along, exchange the old for the new without regret.
   - Reduce your information intake, and check email only at specific times of the day.
   - Use the right communication methods when connecting with others.
   - Hone your research skills, and maximize your reading time. Otherwise, you'll never be able to handle all the reading you face.

2. **Pioneering:** Apply a pioneering approach to new technology**.**

   - Before adopting new technology, study it thoroughly. Determine how a new technology will affect your workplace, count the costs, and ask yourself whether it will generate more work than it saves.
   - Have an exit strategy in place, in case you need to roll it back.
   - Get your head into the clouds. Not only is storage free or cheap, you're no longer chained to one location or device, and it's a snap to back up everything on services like Google Drive, DropBox, Evernote, MS SkyDrive, or OneNote.

3. **Control:** Establish tight control over your technology.

   - Know when to tune out and turn off so you can spend time with family and friends.
   - Limit Internet usage at work.
   - If things get a little too demanding, take a technology sabbatical.
   - Put your phone on airplane mode when you're trying to focus.

- Slip the electronic lease. Technology is your tool, not the other way around.
- Beware social media landmines. Spending just 10 minutes a day on SM adds up to 43 hours a year.

Properly harnessing modern technology is crucial to maximizing work productivity. The keyword in that last sentence is *properly*. Over-eager adoption without proper study can result in wasted time, social media and Internet addiction, and drooping productivity. You have to maintain tight control over your technology, and cut what's outdated or just doesn't work. You'd kick anything else with a bad ROI to the curb, so do the same with your techno-tools.

Chapter 11. Agility: Maximize Speed and Flexibility

These days, strength flows from agility. That means responding to each change with speed and flexibility, whether it's a new client demand or a paradigm shifting without a clutch. Handling new challenges on the fly, swerving onto a new course, stopping suddenly and reversing direction—it's all in a day's work for the modern business professional. At the end of the day, all that really matters is results. No one can afford to just mark time. Nor can you let paralysis or procrastination slow you down, and you certainly you can't ignore Team ROI.

You can maximize speed and flexibility by following these steps:

1. **Improvement**: Stress improvement by focusing on genuine, quantifiable results.

    *   Measure everything. What you don't measure you can't change, and everything you do should contribute to something profitable.
    *   Clarify your goals with your team if they're confused about priorities, and take a close look at your team ROI on a regular basis. Have meetings been stealing too much of your time? Is your team proactive, or reactive?
    *   If possible, implement Modular Product Management. Break projects into manageable modules that different team members can handle simultaneously, then put all the modules back together at the end for a complete project.
    *   Build in backup, hire for redundancy, cross-train, document everything, and plan for the future.

2. **Speed**. Emphasize speed and flexibility while adapting to the need of the hour.

    *   Sometimes your team needs a manager; sometimes it needs a coach. Learn which one fits your current needs, and how to flip quickly between them.
    *   Emphasize your coaching role. A true leader is more than a manager driving the team's performance. He or she acts as a coach in the best sense of the word, laying out the general strategy with talented, trusted team members, who then run with the ball while the coach steps out of the way.

3. **Learning**. Use learning as a way to boost ROI while helping team members with their training.

    *   Boost ROI through learning. Encourage your team to leverage technology to increase their personal and team ROIs.
    *   Set and track efficiency goals.

- Brainstorm frequently to maximize your value. Remove your thought-filters, and let your ideas cross-fertilize to see what kinds of interesting hybrids result.
- Ask yourself: What would you love to do if it were possible? What's the closest you can come in the real world?
- Leverage the benefits of training. For your team members to be productively efficient *and* effective, they need the right tools – including consistent training, undertaken as often as necessary to stay ahead of the changes rolling through your field.

Maximizing agility more than pays for itself, not just financially but productively. You get work done faster, you're more flexible, and in general, things get easier when all the factors come together. Good, consistent training is especially important in terms of employee confidence, performance, productivity, reduced turnover, and dollars earned on the bottom line. Treat these as positive expenses—just as you would any initiative that promises to increase profits and benefit everyone all the way down the line.

Chapter 12. Balance: Sustain Your Physical and Mental Health

You might think that the need for a decent work/life balance would be obvious to anyone, but white-collar workers tend to be more driven than most. We forget that brainwork can be just as tiring as physical labor. Sometimes, this results in overwhelm, and ultimately a workflow breakdown you have to rebuild from. This takes time, so it's better not to go there in the first place. Don't work yourself to death. Make a priority of maintaining your health through the proper diet, hydration, exercise, sleep, and breaks. You especially have an obligation to take care of your mental health.

Here's how to find the balance that makes the work/life equation bearable.

1. **Self-care:** Take care of yourself and urge your team members to do the same.

   - Stop ignoring your physical and mental health. These days, many in the white-collar world are just plain exhausted, stumbling along from one crisis to another and never getting the R&R they need. If this describes you, stop and reconsider the value of self-care—then start implementing it.
   - Do a productivity reboot. Every second you're out of the race, you fall further behind. Accept that you're stuck, stop wallowing in frustration, and hit Restart. When everything's settled, flip the switch and put your head down for a few hours.
   - Learn from experience, pull whatever's useful from the wreckage, and rebuild something stronger. Remember: you never really fail until you give up.

2. **Health:** Maintain your personal health.

   - You can't do your best work when you feel bad.
   - Good health doesn't automatically produce productivity, but it prepares you for it.
   - Emphasize the Big Five. Good health arises from maintaining the big five health practices: good sleep, a healthy diet, hydration, exercise, and maintaining mental health. Make time for them even when you don't want to.

3. **Acuity**. Work to sharpen your mental acuity.

   - Learn to focus, exercise your memory and intellect with puzzles, learn something new and do it repeatedly, even take acting classes. Exercise those brain cells!
   - Don't forget the human touch. Spending time with family and friends can improve your mood and clear clogged mental pathways.
   - Talking things out with others can help you frame your thoughts and process data.

- Relax—that's when your subconscious mind takes over, grinding through problems and presenting solutions when you least expect them.
- Bring a little of the outdoors inside with plants, using better lighting, and surround yourself with things you enjoy.
- Cut back your to-do list. Less can sometimes be more.
- Take your breaks, disconnect, and have fun at work when you can.

My specialty as a productivity expert is showing people how to do more in less time. I practice what I preach and get a tremendous amount of work done. I'm an expert at work/life balance, because it's absolutely necessary. My life revolves around my loved ones, so I want to spend as much time with them as possible.

In a world where agility, flexibility, speed, and innovation have become watchwords, you can easily get overworked and overwhelmed. I believe doing too much causes you to *lose* your mental edge, *not* hone it. You aren't a robot. You can't work nonstop. You must take a little time to back up, breathe, take care of the fragile vessel of your human body—and give yourself a break. Literally. Then you can get to work anew.

Final Notes

Few scholars have contributed more to business theory than Peter F. Drucker, the Austrian-born management consultant who turned the eye of a social scientist onto America's favorite pastime—business. Business drives the engine of our progress, and has for more than a century.

With the publication of *The Effective Executive* in 1967, Drucker codified the basics of modern business productivity. He put into print the best of the strategies that businesses had invented over the 20th century to adapt to constantly shifting technological and social change.

The Effective Executive has remained in print and constant use since its publication almost 50 years ago, and rightly so. Few business references have served us half as well. But half a century is a geological era in business terms, and though Ducker updated his book through multiple editions, it's a bit dated these days. Among other things, women have entered the business field in unprecedented numbers, our world recently survived the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, and business technology has sprung far ahead of what even the most optimistic prophets predicted.

That's why I've put together this companion volume, expanding on Drucker's basic themes for the modern business arena. By no means do I intend to supplant Drucker or imitate his work in any way; just to supplement it. My chapters don't map one-to-one with Drucker's, and there are almost twice as many. But I've brought all of his themes up to speed for the modern business era, where flexibility, agility, and on-the-spot, in-the-moment execution rule. On the website associated with this book, as well as my ProductivityPro.com, I'll include book club and other educational resources to help you connect the dots.

These days, it's not enough for an executive to do the right things; he or she has to be superbly efficient, too. As executives, we must manage this intersection of efficiency and effectiveness carefully to ensure we do the right things *right*, wasting as little time as possible in the process.

We can no longer lock ourselves into a long-term plan of action; things change far too quickly for that to work. Even the most traditional corporations have set that concept aside in favor of dynamic, on-the-spot adaptation to the confusing modern business environment.

The Evolution Toward Common Ground

Perhaps the greatest change we've seen while boldly going deeper into the Information Era is the fact that the roles of management and worker have evolved toward each other. These roles are no longer as strictly defined on either side of the equation, and the continuum between them is just that—a continuum, a smooth change from pure worker on one end to pure leadership on the other.

This hasn't always been the case. Once upon a time, management was management, worker was worker, and never the twain shall meet. Leadership was about autocracy, and workers weren't paid to think. Sure, a few have stood on the rungs between (like foremen). But they remained workers, their roles well defined.

Today, an executive is anyone who executes strategy—from individual contributors through low-level management all the way to the C-Suite. The old roles have become blurry; one does what one has to, in the moment, to get things done. True managers lead these days by facilitating: that is, by making life easier for the rest of the team.

And leaders *are* team members, more so now than ever before. They're the ones who step up and clear the way for everyone else. While they may not often step in and do low-level tasks (it's not cost-efficient), they're still willing to roll up their sleeves and help when the team lacks the resources to achieve its tasks.

Today's leader also leads by example, develops talent, and acts as an arbitrator when personalities clash.

Into the Storm

Drucker's explication of the evolving role and value of knowledge workers, which he explored toward the end of career, has proven solid in the years since. While manufacturing will always comprise a significant part of our economy, the white-collar world is where productivity will climb as older technologies mature and new ones appear.

It's hard to say what the next paradigm change may be. Though radio phones have been in use since WW II, cell phones and related advances in telephony weren't even a gleam in the eye of the marketplace when Drucker wrote *The Effective Executive.* Yet their contribution to the growth of productivity has been undeniable—that is, when we can eliminate Schlimmbesserung and compulsive technology addiction from the equation.

Knowledge work is decentralizing. Already, we're evolving away from the hive mentality. With low-cost Internet connections becoming ubiquitous, a world of

outsourcing partners at our fingertips, and computer power doubling every 18 months, we no longer have to collect in one place to do our work. In fact, telecommuting often makes more sense—though some executives see it as a threat, perhaps because it limits real-time control of the workforce and shatters preconceptions about how we should organize business.

We know that honeybees congregate in hives to maximize their productivity. But few of us know about solitary mason bees, which are just as effective and efficient at pollinating plants, and may be the best honey producers. Before long, I suspect, knowledge work like ours will move away from the hive mentality to the mason bee model. We can still work in teams, and we can still be superbly productive both individually and collectively. But in time, we'll all become executives as the roles of manager and worker merge.

Corporate structures will simplify, and while still profitable and just as amenable to growth and development as ever, the component parts—the individual knowledge workers—will be more independent. This is a good thing. Like the distributed nature of Cloud networks, it ensures that shared culture and projects are spread out over so many components that nothing can easily destroy them—natural disasters, accidents, wars, or terrorist attacks.

My intentions for this book were to outline and update the practices forming the "Way of the Effective Executive," to fit the needs of the twenty-teens. I also hope I've helped define the starting point for the executive needs for the twenty-twenties and beyond.

We'll have to wait a few decades to see if my vision was 20/20 in its perception of how things continue to change. If nothing else, I feel that we all have to learn to be effective, efficient executives—because all knowledge workers will almost certainly need these skills going forward.

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I would welcome the opportunity to come to your organization to give a seminar or speak at an upcoming meeting! Please reach out to me anytime at Laura@TheProductivityPro.com.