Execution IS the Strategy **by Laura Stack**
Chapter 12 Tip Sheet

Eliminate Time Wasters

How much of the average worker's day is spent doing things that have nothing to do with furthering their work? It varies according to the person and job, but you know it happens. Time wasting—whether deliberate or not—may be the most pervasive obstacle to productivity in the white collar world. Just as you would smooth your team's way by removing procedural obstacles and providing methodologies and technologies that propel them forward, it's up to you to chop out the time wasters, too.

Here are some ways to help you and your team recapture your time.

1. **Root out procrastination**. This may be the worst time waster of all. We all procrastinate sometimes, whether because we feel overwhelmed, fear failure, dislike a task, don't want to run out of work—or know we'll be overwhelmed with work if we prove too efficient. Make it clear to your team that these are bogus excuses and help them move forward with productive work.

2. **Know what not to do.** It's important to quickly decide what to do next. But it's equally important to decide what *not* to do next. Choose the appropriate course of action by design, not by default, to maximize your productivity as a unit.

3. **Know what must come next.** Prioritize, prioritize, prioritize. Use a to-do list to formally define what to do each day and perform the most vital activities first or during your peak energy period. Allow lower-priority items to fall off the end of the list if you run out of time; practice purposeful abandonment when you must.

4. **Limit your meetings.** Set specific time-lengths for the meetings and stick to them. Don't let anyone go off on tangents or take more time than they need. Don't go to meetings without clear objectives, and limit the number of people you invite to yours. Otherwise, they'll proliferate and stifle productive momentum.

5. **Give your people time to be strategic enablers of business.** If your team is always running around from meeting to meeting, interrupting each other, and returning to an overflowing inbox, your team members won't have time to focus on high-value tasks. Workers need time to think without other people interrupting. They must balance the need to be available with the need to concentrate. It's a delicate balance, but one you can help them achieve by setting team protocols.

6. **Eliminate distractions.** Implement practices that help people focus on their work, not the noisy office: Provide cubicle doors, ban hallway discussions, turn all desks away from the doors, and allow the use of noise-canceling headsets.

7. **Embrace work/life balance.** Our predecessors chose eight hours as the ideal work day, because after eight hours, fatigue and stress cause productivity to decline. Working too long is hazardous to your health and relationships. If you want to maximize productivity, don't let people work too long or hard without going home or taking time off.

Open your mind, maintain your health (both mental and physical), limber up, and rededicate yourself to winning the productivity race. Push yourself to do what you must when you must, avoid what you must, and shave wasted time right out of your team's schedule.