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Cynthia Shannon
Publicity Manager
T: 415.743.6469
E: cshannon@bkpub.com

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What to Do When There's Too Much to Do

The Productivity Pro® Laura Stack Helps Workers Save 90 Minutes a Day By Doing Less and Achieving More

San Francisco, CA -- These days, many businesses have cut their staffs in an effort to save the bottom line. As a result, the truncated workforce must somehow do more with less, and they cannot even complain about it. Employees know they are lucky enough to have a job in this economy and are working longer hours just to stay employed.

Yet studies have repeatedly shown that sixty-hour workweeks result in a 25 percent decrease in productivity. The productivity numbers get worse as the work hours increase, because exhaustion steadily erodes judgment and performance. According to a government report released in August 2011, American productivity declined for two consecutive quarters for the first time since 2008.

WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S TOO MUCH TO DO (Berrett-Koehler, July 2012) is the first book that teaches readers how to actually do *less* and achieve *more*. For over 20 years, Laura Stack has been teaching professionals how to transform their ever-expanding to-do lists into a functional, workable system. In this book, she describes a comprehensive approach that organizes life around the tasks that really matter, and shows it's ok to let go of the ones that don't.

"Never confuse activity with productivity," says Stack. "Everyone has too much to do, and nobody really cares how many tasks you crossed off a to-do list if key projects keep falling through the cracks." Instead, Stack suggests splitting to-do lists into a Master List and a High Impact Tasks list, or "HIT List." While the Master lists tracks everything that needs to get done, the HIT list includes only a reasonable number of items that can be accomplished within a day. Stack introduces the concept of triage, derived from the medical field, to assign levels of urgency of each item:

P1: You will get fired if this isn't done today.
P2: A valuable long-term activity that should be done soon.
P3: Someone will be unhappy if this isn't done eventually.
P4: Human "pain-management" activities such as socializing or Facebook.

Reduce, reduce, reduce! **is Stack's mantra. Employees can't work any harder than they already are, so they must find ways to work smarter. Avoiding time-wasters, such as social media, gossiping, and arriving late to work; learning how to say no and not feel bad about it; and establishing routines to help ease the stress of decision making are just some of the additional tips that Stack explores in her book.**

WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S TOO MUCH TO DO is a timely and necessary book that will help readers find time to do what really matters, at work and home.

About the Author

Laura Stack is president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., and president of the National Speakers Association. Her client list includes Starbucks, Wal-Mart, IBM, GM, MillerCoors, Lockheed Martin, Wells Fargo, and Time Warner. For twenty years, she has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. Stack is the author of four other books, including Leave the Office Earlier (Random House, 2004)

What to Do When There's Too Much To Do
Reduce Tasks, Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day
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Additional Resources

Go to http://www.theproductivitypro.com/r_resources.htm to receive complimentary bonus material.

Extended Author Bio: Laura Stack

***What To Do When There's Too Much to Do* (Berrett-Koehler, July 2012)**

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, has consulted with Fortune 500 corporations for nearly 20 years in the field of personal productivity. She helps leaders create high-performance cultures in their teams and organizations and achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., a time management training firm specializing in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations. Since 1992, Laura has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. She is one of a handful of professional speakers whose business focuses solely on time management and productivity topics. Laura is a high-energy, high-content speaker, who educates, entertains, and motivates professionals to improve workplace productivity.

Laura is the bestselling author of four books, including *Super Competent: The Six Keys to Perform at Your Productive Best* (Wiley, 2010); *The Exhaustion Cure* (Broadway Books, 2008); *Find More Time* (Broadway Books, 2006); and the *bestselling Leave the Office Earlier* (Broadway Books, 2004), which was hailed as "the best of the bunch" by the *New York Times*. Her books have been published in seven countries and translated into five foreign languages, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Italian. She is also a contributor to two of the popular Chicken Soup for the Soul books. Laura's popular monthly electronic newsletter has subscribers in 38 countries. She is a Microsoft Certified Application Specialist in Outlook.

Widely regarded as one of the leading experts in the field of employee productivity and workplace issues, she has been featured nationally on the CBS Early Show, CNN, NPR, Bloomberg, NBC TV, WB News, the New York Times, USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, the WashingtonPost.com, the Chicago Tribune, O Magazine, Entrepreneur, Readers Digest, and Forbes magazine. Laura has been a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, Skillsoft, Office Depot, and Xerox, and she is the creator of The Productivity Pro® planner by Day-Timer. Her client list includes top Fortune 500 companies, including Starbucks, Wal-Mart, IBM, GM, MillerCoors, Lockheed Martin, Wells Fargo, and Time Warner, plus a multitude of associations and governmental agencies.

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

Laura lives with her husband and three children in Denver, Colorado.

What to Do When There's Too Much to Do (Berrett-Koehler, July 2012)

By Laura Stack

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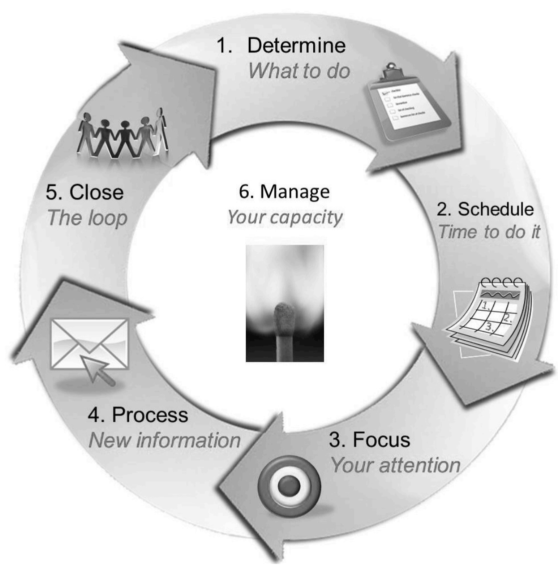
A Brand New Model: The Productivity Workflow Formula ™ (PWF)

The PWF breaks down into six primary steps:

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



The model is circular by design, which suggests continuity, as well as a process that can—and should—be repeated again and again. In other words, you get into a continuum and don't have to leave it; it becomes part of your life.

Creating a Not-To-Do List

Adapted from *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do* (Berrett-Koehler, 2012) by Laura Stack

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

A Not-to-Do list is a list of things you simply refuse to do. It needs not to be fancy - just start writing down the timewasting behaviors you want to avoid. Also include the misaligned tasks that end up on your plate because you're "being nice." Review the list periodically to make sure you don't slip into habits that damage your productivity. For example:

- **Don't let brushfires and crises suck up all your time.**
- **Don't spend all your time at work at expense of your family and friends.**
- **Don't deal with work issues during personal time -- and vice-versa.**
- **Don't procrastinate.**
- **Don't fall prey to perfectionism.**
- **Don't attend useless meetings.**
- **Don't multitask**
- **Don't check your email more than a few times per day.**
- **Don't micromanage.**
- **Don't wait until the last minute to do important things**
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You might think the key to productivity is getting more done each day. This is not true. You don't need a calendar full of unnecessary tasks to be productive and accomplish more.

Tips on How to Say No

Adapted from *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do* (Berrett-Koehler, 2012) by Laura Stack

Your feelings matter. If you want to say no, there's a reason behind it. Sometimes, you simply have to listen to your own gut. With that in mind, here are some additional tips for saying no.

All you need is love. Do your best to say no in an upbeat way. This sounds like a contradiction in terms, but there's a big difference between saying "Not just no, but hell no," and "I'd love to but just can't take that on right now!" A positive rejection can ensure no one gets hurt feelings, especially if you follow up with, "But please keep me in mind for any further projects!"

Don't make empty promises. If you can't do something (or just don't want to), come right out and say it. Don't make an empty promise and then let it come crashing down around you, leaving your requester in the lurch. If you turn them down flat, they have the opportunity to find someone else. If you find it uncomfortable to say no immediately, ask for a little time to think it over. This will put the person on notice you
might very well refuse them. Then return with your answer promptly and politely.

Don't apologize for or explain yourself. If you can't take on a new task, decline without making an issue out of it and offering a ton of explanations. A simple, "Sorry—I'd love to help out, but I don't have the bandwidth right now," is sufficient. They don't need to know more; in any case, you're not obliged to justify yourself, no matter how much you might disappoint the other party. Be polite but assertive. This, of course, applies to fellow coworkers. For the boss, you'll need to try negotiation.

Negotiate. If your boss presents you with a task you can't outright refuse, but your plate is undeniably full, don't hesitate to point this out. Openly discuss your current deadlines and workload, and communicate both honestly and clearly. For example, you might say, "I'm currently working on X, Y, and Z projects. As things stand, I believe this additional project is beyond my capacity at the moment, and I want to return quality work in a timely way. Would you like me to hand it off to someone else, hire a contractor, or would you prefer to reprioritize my existing project load for me?"

Meet someone halfway. Sometimes it's hard to say no to a request, especially when it's clear someone thinks enough of you to try to tap your expertise. You can arrange to meet people halfway. For example, you might admit you're already booked up, but make it clear you'll do all you can to help. Or, rather than being a committee member, you'll act in an advisory capacity. Inform the requester you can do the task then, and not now. This solution may satisfy you both if the task isn't time-critical.

Be persistent and consistent. Some people just won't take no for an answer and will keep bugging you to take on a task, no matter how many times you refuse them. In a case like this one, you'll have to respond to their persistence with persistence of your own. Some people will feel obliged to ask a second time later on; again, this is no big deal if you just say no again. Use this technique with the dysfunctional ones who demand to know why not (see the first tip) or ask over and over, as if they can't believe you refused them. Don't let them wear you down.

Be crystal clear. Be straightforward when turning someone down; say no when you mean no. Don't couch your rejection in obscure terms or beat around the bush; just say no in a direct way, so you don't have to repeat yourself because you confused someone.

Don't worry too much about their feelings. Some people take a turndown as a

blow to their self-esteem. This is not your problem. Your goal is to reduce your commitment level, not to help others reduce theirs—and that's exactly what they're attempting when they ask you to take on their tasks.

The 6-D Information Management System™

Adapted from *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do* (Berrett-Koehler, 2012) by Laura Stack

I've taught my 6-D Information Management System since the 1990s (lots of people have created takeoffs on this system). I call it the 6-D System because it's based on six decisions, all beginning with the letter "D." You can use the system to process and fine-tune *any* type of information. In this section, we'll first review the general meaning for each "D," and then we'll apply the decisions to the three most common media
in the modern workplace: paper, e-mail, and voicemail.

Six Basic Decisions

1. *Discard.* I've put this decision first, because whatever you don't get rid of, you'll have to work through your system. You'll benefit from getting rid of as much as possible at the outset. Don't think, "I might need this again someday." Instead, ask yourself, "Why should I keep this?" Have a good reason to keep something. Otherwise, take a deep
breath and toss it!

2. *Delegate.* If you can't throw something away, perhaps you can give it away to someone else. This doesn't always mean delegation in a formal sense, if the person doesn't work for you. In fact, you may actually be the one to whom work is delegated. So sometimes you could "Discuss" the issue (that might be another good "D" here), or you could "Distribute" it. The goal is to transfer it from your sphere of
control to someone else's.

3. *Do.* The item requires your personal action, and you can handle it right then.

4. *Date.* There's future action required, but you can't do it now. Some people have tried to use the words "Delay" or "Defer" in this instance, but I caution against doing so, because those terms don't specify how long you're delaying it. (This would be like having a giant folder called "Pending" or "Waiting on.") Instead of continually scanning
a list or pile over and over again, be specific with this step and assign a date you need to see, think about, or otherwise handle the item again.

5. *Drawer.* These items need to be filed in a drawer for future reference. No action is required, but you can't toss it either. You might want to access it again just in case, so

you should save it.

6. *Deter.* Stop the information from ever coming across your desk or landing in one of your inboxes again. You're not merely throwing it away; you're making sure you've eliminated the possibility it will come back to you. You may have to take some extra steps to make sure you stop these items in their tracks.