**Substance Over Style**

Tip Sheet #7 from *Doing the Right Things Right* by Laura Stack

Perception creates reality in most people's minds, but this ten­dency can lead you astray. You set the tone for your team, so make a commitment to putting substance over style. Refuse to lock your team into rigid ways of thinking and doing, in which the company line matters more than the bottom line. Within ethical, moral, and legal limits, do what benefits your organization most and gets you closer to its goals. To wit:

1. **Break Free from Bureaucracy.** Many organizations settle on what they consider "best practices" and stay there indefinitely. But "best" changes with technology and culture. Don't become so hardened that you refuse to take advantage of new "bests" as they become available and the old bests become outdated.
2. **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 those *first*, even if they take hours. If you and your team get only three items done in a day but earn the company $100,000, you've beaten the pants off the drones who rushed around doing thirty minor items and never managed to get to their most important tasks, thus earning nothing.
3. **Work *On* Your Business, Not *In* It.** You're an executive, so your actions should make your team's work easier, improve workflow, build profitable bridges with other teams and organizations, intercept red tape, and accomplish other substantial tasks. Leave the day-to-day tasks where they belong—with your team. It doesn't matter how busy you look. Trying to wear all the hats and working *in* your business, rather than working *on* it, gets nothing done that others couldn't accomplish at a lower salary.
4. **Stop Trying to Impress People with Your Personal Style,** whether that applies to your fashion sense or how you approach your job. Impress them instead with your acumen and productivity.
5. **Don't Let Style Blind You to Ability.** Make sure you aren't judging books by their covers when you size up your employees' abilities. Just because someone looks like an alpha geek doesn't mean he's your best choice as a programmer, any more than another person's odd working schedule automatically makes her a slacker.

**Beyond the Superficial**

It's human nature to accept that "what we see is what we get." That's a relic of the caveman days. But in the modern era, people usually have time to think before they react. So don't let what's on the surface blind you; look through it to see what lies beneath, acting on that instead.

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, CPAE, aka The Productivity Pro®, gives speeches and seminars on sales and leadership productivity. For over 25 years, she’s worked with Fortune 1000 clients to reduce inefficiencies, execute more quickly, improve output, and increase profitability. Laura is the author of seven books, including *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time*. See [www.3TLeadership.com](http://www.3TLeadership.com).