

## Increase Productivity without Working Harder

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How many of you wake up in the morning, smile, and say, "I wish I could spend more time at the office."?

That's exactly what is happening today. In our challenging business climate, companies have cut budgets and management expects us to work harder and longer. It's frustrating and stressful.

The key to increasing productivity while not working harder is to work on the right things.

People often confuse efficiency and effectiveness, two very different concepts. Efficiency commonly means doing a job quickly. Effectiveness means doing the right tasks and doing them in priority order. Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right things.

Which produces the best results? Peter Drucker said, "There is nothing more wasteful than becoming highly efficient at doing the wrong thing." Most people manage time by looking for more time. This is not possible. The only way to make more time is to manage what we do with the time we have.

The 80/20 principle is key to increased productivity. 80% of our results are typically achieved from 20% of our activities. These High Payoff Activities have the most impact on our success now and in the future. The other 20% of our results, our Low Payoff Activities, come from 80% of our work effort.

Many of us work in what I call "crisis management". We are always doing. We manage second and communicate third. If we have time, we may plan and set goals. What results does crisis management create? People don't work together. Tasks don't get accomplished on time. Quality may be compromised. People get stressed and harried. The list goes on.

What if we could work in "proactive management" where we plan and set goals first, where we communicate and schedule priorities then track and measure results? Our results would be very different. Tasks would be finished on time with less waste, turnover and better quality, creating a positive work environment.

What are some of the reasons we give that keep us from working on our HPA? Too much to do, too many urgent tasks, too many interruptions, among others.

We define urgent tasks as those which appear to demand our immediate attention. We define important tasks those which contribute to our success, our HPA. Some tasks are both urgent and important: Getting a RFQ to Fed Ex by the end of the day, for instance. These tasks act on us.

Many tasks only have the appearance of being urgent, such as interruptions from telephone, email and fax, unplanned visits, and unnecessary paperwork.

Important tasks by definition contribute to our success but they are often not urgent. Nothing bad happens if we don't get to them. We just don't generate the success we desire. At the end of the day, week, month, and year we are frustrated that we haven't acted on those HPA that hold the key to our future success. If we want success, we must act on the important but not urgent tasks.

HPA are those important but not urgent activities that increase our success. The key to improving our productivity without putting in more hours is to organize and execute our HPA and simplify, eliminate and delegate our LPA. Increase effectiveness by increasing the time you spend generating results from 20% to a higher number.

Focus on HPAs is a key trait of successful people. Lack of focus is a foundational mistake many people make. Focus is important because it affects our work effort, both tactically and strategically. How many of us know what our HPA are and have set measurable goals to meet them? How many of us have had discussions and agreement with our key people as to what their HPA and goals are?

Eliminating low payoff activities can be difficult. Habits are hard to break. Status quo is comfortable. Here are a couple of suggestions to get started.

We pride ourselves on our multi-tasking ability, often juggling blackberry, internet and phone connections simultaneously, performing several tasks at once rather than concentrating on one task at a time. By placing ourselves on call 24/7 we respond in real time and regularly interrupt ourselves.

We think our connectedness makes us faster and more efficient. In reality, as we flit from one task to another, we lose efficiency and more important we lose effectiveness.

When we are always connected, we allow others to continually interrupt us. Consequently we don't focus. Each important task takes longer to accomplish and we lose productivity. When tasks are low payoff interconnectivity is OK. When working on a HPA you must maintain focus.

Using technology cannot substitute for understanding how to be personally effective. One practical method you can use to minimize interruptions is what I call the "Conference Planner Technique."

In the planning system you use, enter the names of those you regularly interact with. As you are reminded of items you need to discuss with one of them, don't immediately make contact. Instead jot down ideas under their name. Ask your associates to do the same with items they want to discuss with you.

Schedule periodic conferences with each associate. Before the meeting order the items on your list by priority. Meet and have a focused discussion.

When you use this method, you control the timing of your communications. You are less likely to forget a topic and you can have a focused conversation. Most importantly you limit interruptions, allowing you to focus more effectively. Remember, you can always deal immediately with truly urgent matters.

For many of us the work environment has changed. Organizations are flatter and leaner. Most of us know the changes we need to make to become more effective without working longer and harder. We have just resisted. Now is the time to make a personal commitment to increase your productivity and effectiveness.

Become proactive. Define your High Payoff Activities. Set goals to reach them. Schedule your efforts and hold yourself accountable.

HPA drives focus. Focus drives performance. Performance drives results. Focus is key to developing success. Unified focus across an organization is one key to developing competitive advantage in your marketplace.