BX News

A publication of the Builders Exchange Network

APRIL 2014

HR SUCCESS IN 2014

- Annual Meeting Nashville Tennessee
- How to Write a Human Resource Manual
- All You Need to Know About Team Building!
- Mobile Marketing
- Spring Cleaning Your Database
- Three Keys to Nondues Revenue
- The "Work Less, More Success" Guide to Time Management!

BX News is published by the Builders Exchange Network as a service to members.

Our website is www.bx-net.org

Submissions, articles and other information for content is compiled from members of the organization.

Suggestions or submissions can be sent to:
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or 1-855-719-0733

BXNET Job Board

Powered by Job Target

The BXNET Job Board is a web-based career center that connects job seekers with prospective employers in the builders exchange industry. The Job Board, powered by career services leader Job Target, can be found at **www.bx-net.org**. To access the site simply click on the link at the top right of the website page.

Visit the Job Board today to search and post jobs, view and upload a resume, set up a personalized account and much more. Setting up an account is free for employers and job seekers.

Below are the recruitment options available on the BXNET Job Board. When making your purchase you have the option to pay online with a credit card or to be invoiced.

Single 30 Day Job Posting - $50.00

Single 30 Day Job Posting with exposure on the Construction Job Board Network - $400.00. This product bundle gets you a single job posting on this job site along with secondary exposure for your job posting on all sites in this Job Board Network!

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ANNUAL MEETING

JUNE 18-20 2014

OMNI HOTELS & RESORTS
250 FIFTH AVENUE SOUTH
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

22 Reasons You Should Visit Nashville Now

Nashville is, increasingly, the perfect blend of its historic country roots and its hipster and rock & roll present. It's a strange juxtaposition, certainly, that the land of Elvis and Dolly is now also the land of hipsters and foodies, but that's how it goes, it seems.

With that in mind, here are 22 reasons why you visit the blended old and new Music City not just this year but *right now.*

1 The hot chicken (a Nashville specialty) at Hattie B's. Add a side of pimento mac & cheese.

2 The piano at Studio B (an additional tour at kinda-gotta-see The Country Music Hall of Fame), where Elvis recorded more music than anywhere else.

FLICKR: TIMOTHY WILDEY

Hatch Show Print

KELLY AULETTA

3 With over 700 of them, there are more churches per capita in this town than any place else in the country. So there's that.

4 Little Richard, the man behind "Tutti Frutti," now calls Nashville home and that is just fine by us.

5 Hatch Show Print. An oldie--established in 1879--but a goodie for lovers of letterpress posters.

6 Honky tonks! Robert's Western sits amongst a plethora of options on lower Broadway.

KELLY AULETTA

7 Frist Center for the Visual Arts for the Norman Rockwell show (on through Feb. 9).

FLICKR: DEADLY TEDLY

8 The awesome bluegrass tunes at The Station Inn.

9 The guacamole and house margarita at Saint Anejo in the Gulch, one of the hipster neighborhoods that just popped out of nowhere.

M STREET ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

10 The full scale replica of the Parthenon.

11 Shopping at Nashvillian boutiques in places like Hillsboro Village (home of the famous Pancake Pantry) and 12 South (Below, 12South Tap Room, seen on warmer days).

NASHVILLE CVC

12 The burgers at Burger Up (be prepared to wait in line).

13 Franklin, a 20-minute drive south of town, for shopping and good eats.

DAVID McMULLAN

14 Goo Goo clusters!

NASHVILLE CVC

15 The beauty of the Ryman Auditorium, the "Mother Church of country music."

FLICKR: KWONG YEE CHENG

16 The knowledge that the band you're listening to at some random venue might just be the next big thing.

17 Parnassus Books, an independent store owned by author Ann Patchett.

18 The complete package experience of Pinewood Social: brunch, bowling and booze.

19 People are really friendly.

20 The ridiculous amounts of memorabilia at the new-ish Johnny Cash Museum.

21 Knowing that you *could* run into Taylor Swift at any moment.

22 Jack White's Third Man Records store.

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Builders Exchange Network

The BXNET's Mission, Vision and Strategic Goals

BUILDING OUR FUTURE

"Serving Construction Association and Builders Exchange Professionals"

MISSION

The Builders Exchange Network is a catalyst for the exchange of ideas and experiences amongst the membership to enhance the effectiveness of plan room and construction associations.

VISION

The BXNet is a representative organization of Construction Association professionals and their organizations, dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in Construction Association and Plan Room services through cooperation and participatory action.

STRATEGIC GOALS

Provide the education and access to expertise to help exchange professionals.

Maintain the strength of the industry and association through engaged membership.

Promote the organization, its programs and achievements to the industry.

Maintain the leadership and resources to advance the industry.

4 simple steps to HR success in 2014

1. Make sure Everyone has a Clear Job Description

Make sure everyone is aware of what their specific roles and duties are within the work place. People generally perform better when they know what is expected of them.

Having a clear role or job description allows your employees to be accountable for their work.

Having specific tasks for each employee allows staff to take pride in their work. Jobs may get overlooked if they are not assigned to one person as everyone will assume that someone else is doing it.

2. Be Clear when Communicating

Be careful to clarify directives. Miscommunication can lead to confusion and hostility in the workplace. Pay close attention to how your staff communicate with each other and take steps to improve communication where needed. This can save you time, money and give you a more harmonious workplace.

Ensure that all staff are aware of the importance of each members contribution and demonstrate how everyone's roles work together to achieve their goals.

Communication is the single most important factor in successful teamwork.

Annette Dixon is a Human Resources professional qualified at Deakin University, with over 12 years human resources management experience.

3. Have Clear Workplace Policies

Have clear policies in place that cover important issues such as:

- Bullying
- Sexual harassment
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Workplace behaviour
- Health and safety

Having clear policies in place allow staff to know what is acceptable in the workplace and what is not. Make sure your staff are aware of the consequences of straying from these policies.

Be fair and consistent when dealing with staff that have gone against company policies.

Having policies in place can make it more difficult for staff to bring claims against you.

Lawsuits fines and penalties affect the financial health of your business.

Create employee manuals that outline appropriate behaviour in the workplace.

4. Keep employee contracts up to date

Make sure that all your employees have a legally compliant contract of employment.

Signed contracts can avoid conflict regarding a person's employment status, wage and benefits.

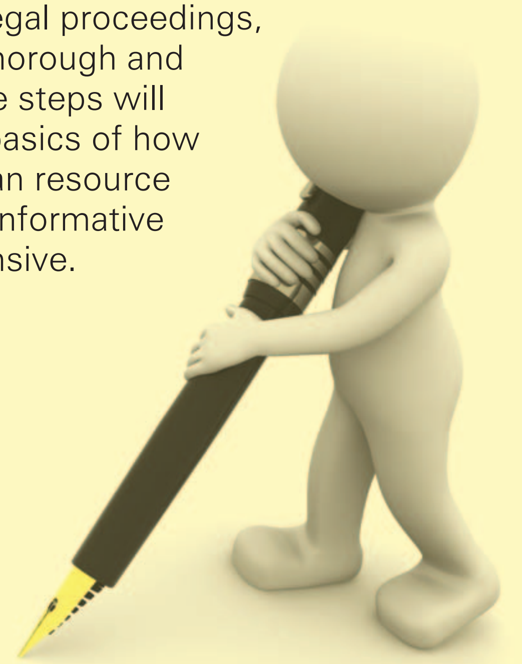
Small businesses usually create formal, written employment contracts that dictate the specific terms of their employment agreements.

An employment contract helps protect the long-term interests and well-being of both parties.
An employment contract provides a formal (and legal) record of both parties' expectations and agreements at the time of hire.

Employment contracts don't have to be overly long and complicated; in fact, the clearer and briefer the contract, the better. A standard contract can be created for all employees and customised for specific jobs.

How to Write a Human Resource Manual

A human resource manual is a document detailing an organization's policies regarding employee management and the relationship between managers and employees. Taking the form of either an employee handbook or an internal document used by management, it aims to describe workplace practices, hiring and termination procedures, and other pertinent information. Because these guides are essential for communicating an organization's workplace policy and because they are often referenced in legal proceedings, they must be thorough and accurate. These steps will teach you the basics of how to write a human resource manual that is informative and comprehensive.



1 Determine the audience of your manual. If you are writing an employee handbook, focus more on day-to-day workplace operations and general employee policies. If you are writing a document for management or a general policy statement, aim to be more thorough and exact than helpful.

2 Review all organizational policies regarding hiring, termination, compensation, promotions, dress code, complaint procedures, sick days, vacations, etc.

3 Begin your guide by dividing the document into several policy categories, for example "workplace behavior," "termination," "sexual harassment," etc.

4 Write an organizational policy for each category. State the position of your organization regarding the given topic, the proper procedures for management and employees to take in each situation, and the reasons why.

5 Include a section detailing the procedures for dealing with complaints or grievances, outlining specific methods employees should use to express problems with the workplace or management.

6 Include a section detailing policies for exceptional circumstances, such as workplace emergencies, family deaths, etc.

7 Add an introduction to your manual after you have already laid out all your policies. Describe your organization's approach to human resources in general and how the policies within the manual adhere to this philosophy.

8 Show a draft of your manual to any legal advisers and stakeholders in the organization. Solicit advice, corrections, and additions.

9 Edit your draft, publish a finished, dated version, and distribute.

10 Continue to tweak your manual as new circumstances arise and you are faced with new problems.

All You Need to Know About Team Building!

The two words '**TEAM BUILDING**' is used to describe a group problem-solving task that involves pre-structured participants' interactions, fun-oriented games and team building activities. The main aim of carrying out such activities is to bring together employees and build a strong team togetherness and perspective.

How do team building activities benefit the company?

A company that manages to invest some time in carrying out or enrolling for a team building activity will benefit as it offers the employees an increased self-esteem, efficiency, concept of looking at work in a different perspective as well as refreshing their minds enormously. Groups that successfully and wholeheartedly participate in such activities witness an increased willingness to share ideas with their teammates, reduced stress levels, an enhanced overall group functioning and all the more unity toward common goals and aspirations.

Some of the areas that benefit through team building:

1. Creativity: Always underestimated, though creativity is the essence of life; whether personal or professional. A company that possesses creative employees sees success and overcomes obstacles and barriers with optimal adaptation and approach. This is where such activities contribute a huge deal.

2. Time Management: An organization is a place where individuals work on a time span dealing with numerous professional activities on the go. Hence, leadership training and team building activities help employees manage their time better and allocate sufficient amounts of time in working around a more organized schedule. Setting priorities, working effectively and meeting deadlines are some of the benefits to reap from such a workshop.

3. Social skills: Working in a professional environment requires you to meet and greet other professionals from the field. One of the prerequisites is possessing soft social skills that help you develop a good relationship not only with your internal contacts but also external clients. An individual with impeccable social skills manages to create a greater impact on two criteria; job performance and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Understand the fact that such activities mainly focus on those companies that value personal as well as professional growth of their employees. They believe in equipping their employees with an empowering experience and positive outcomes that will not only benefit them at present but also in their future endeavors. Hence, a company that truly wishes well for their employees should consider enrolling their unfinished stones to develop into glistening diamonds.

Through a training workshop, you give your employees a platform to bond and share their ideas to optimize a company's profit. That's precisely what team building workshops will arm you with.

Mobile Marketing

What comes to mind when you hear the term mobile marketing? Some may immediately think that this is about SMS marketing or that you need to have your own app. Not so. Mobile marketing is marketing on or with a mobile device such as a cell phone or defined as 'the use of the mobile medium as a means of marketing communication.'

According to KPCB Internet Trends 2013, 15% of internet traffic comes from mobile devices. There is no doubt that this number will continue to grow with more consumers coming to your website from a mobile phone. As a business, are you ready?

Mobile phone marketing allows you to significantly increase your customer base by tapping into their small, smart, hand held devices... literally at a swipe of the screen. If you're feeling a bit overwhelmed by the thought of mobile marketing or wondering if mobile marketing will actually help your business, here is something for you to think about.

Consumers are using mobile devices in vast increasing numbers in Asia. Check out these relevant facts:

- **May 2013 - 32% of Japanese and 40% of Koreans own smart phones**
- **Chinese smartphone uses, at 240 million, outstrip USA users as 120 million**
- **Japan smartphone uses spend about $11.21 USD monthly to purchase via their phones**
- **In the last 3 years, mobile video traffic has increased 5,000% in the USA and a similar trend is reflected in Asia as well.**

So what does mobile phone market growth mean to your business? It means new opportunities to reach out, promote or advertise to existing and potential customers, such as discount coupons & promotional offers on goods and services. It is a convenient way for you to keep in touch with busy consumers at any time of day. This is also a great method of getting data to customers quickly in a non-intrusive way.

Bottom-line. Mobile phone usage will in no way decrease - its growth curve is on a one way trajectory. Up! It's time for you to get your business ready for this incoming wave of traffic to your website.

Start by making your website responsive. Utilitizing a responsive web design approach provides an optimal viewing experience from mobile phones, to tablets to desktop computers monitors. In other words, when a user switches from their laptop to iPad or mobile phone, the website should automatically switch to accommodated for resolution, image size and scripting abilities. In a nutshell, the website should have the technology to automatically respond to the user's preference. Simply put, a responsive design takes a website and automatically repackages content to fit the device viewing it.

Still not quite convinced that this is a wave you want to ride? If it meant having higher product sales conversions, would that convince you? According to a Google report shared by Hubspot, 67% of users are more like to purchase a product or service from a mobile-friendly site. This means that if your site is not optimized, you run the risk of losing a large percentage of people who leave because it is not optimized for their consumption experience. Google has also said that it will rank sites optimized for mobile higher in mobile searches.

Here's the last bit of good news for you. If you're a small business that might be using a Word Press or Joomla website, you don't need to redo your entire website to be responsive. Ask your webmaster about finding a suitable plug-in for Word Press or component for Joomla. There are a few free options available to you. It's just a matter of doing your research to find what works best for you.

Now that should give you several great reasons to catch the next wave. What are you waiting for? Get ahead of the competition and convert those consumers who are already surfing their way to your business.

Spring Cleaning Your Database

By Bo Crader

Bad data is bad business, and there's a cost to it: Inaccurate reporting, inefficient business process, and wasted time. Inevitably frustrating staff, inhibiting effective-decision making, slowing down your organization, and ultimately negatively impacting donors.

On the flip side, there's quantifiable value in good data. Supporters are the lifeblood of every non-profit, and information systems represent a very real and tangible asset to organizations that rely on private contributions as they provide the only systematic way to maintain, preserve, and understand relationships with supporters.

And, yet, I find that most organizations have come to tolerate bad data, often only for lack of time and focus to address the issue, other times to a sense of futility. While purging duplicates, clearing up data-entry errors, and sorting through years of stagnant development information isn't exactly fun, a little attention and focus on the integrity of data pays dividends in the quality of donor services, success rate of solicitations, and the effectiveness of management reporting.

Here are some thoughts on cleaning up your data. I've found with a little effort and potentially collaboration from different areas of the business, it is relatively straightforward to build a business case for resources to clean up the database.

BACKUP. The first step in your database cleanup – or any other major change to your system – is to back up your system and test the archive file. It goes without saying that backing up your database on a regular basis will spare you data-loss headaches and embarrassment over the long run.

ANALYZE. Eyeball your most important constituent information: The records for board and committee members, staff, solicitors, major donors, high-priority prospects and other key individuals. If necessary, solicit new or updated information on these individuals to ensure your organization stays on top of important details.

ANALYZE. Run a search for duplicate records in your database and merge any redundant records. Having surplus records for the same constituent wastes money on postage and materials, clutters reporting, and complicates data-entry processes by spreading information out among multiple records.

LET GO. Go ahead and write off long-overdue pledges and delete unused queries, outdated reports and anything else data-entry packrats have kept around "just in case." Purging this stagnant information — including unwanted clutter from prior conversions and legacy systems — will simplify daily operations and can improve system performance.

ARCHIVE OLD STUFF. Donors who haven't given, gifts from the 60 s, deceased donors… there isn't really a "right" answer, but think about what your organization can archive. Archive the records for inactive and deceased constituents so they won't show up in reports, mailings and other queries. Save these records for historical purposes, but segregate them from active records to streamline your data, simplify reporting and provide a more accurate picture of your current development base.

DOCUMENT. Do you rely on staff to interpret your data and make sense of even simple reports? If so, this is a significant continuity risk: What happens when your oracle wins the lottery or moves on in their career?

GET HELP. Walk through the various departments in your organization, and see where rogue systems and spreadsheets have proliferated. Where possible, migrate these shadow sources into your system of record. Where not possible, take steps to ensure these systems are practicing proper data hygiene and not introducing data integrity issues into the organization.

GET HELP. Got a few million records? Not sure how many of them are duplicates? Want to "start fresh" with addresses you know are good? Look into a data service, such as an append, National Change of Address (NCOA), de-dupe, or similar service. For large-scale donor files these services often pay for themselves.

GO TO THE SOURCE. If your database has an inordinate amount of duplicate records, outdated information or other errors, try to figure out why. These problems may indicate deeper issues within your organization that need to be addressed. That automated import that no one quite understands? Vendor file with wonky data? Volunteer data entry staff?

TRAIN. Would extra training for the end-users improve the quality of your data? Could a policies and procedures manual help to reduce these problems in the future? Are there steps you can take to reduce turnover among data-entry personnel?

COMMIT. Build business processes for managing data. Automate where possible, but keep in mind that often decisions must (and should) be made about data and standards (e.g. are these two records the same, or different; should we keep this historic detail, or delete?) Consider a consultant to design and document processes – both day-to-day operations, as well as regular data maintenance tasks – so they are standardized and can be managed or even improved moving forward. I've found that documenting business processes often makes the process of delegating tasks to new or otherwise technically challenged staff a bit easier (Power Users: hint, hint).

Details like this may seem small but will make a big difference in reducing future clutter, simplifying day-to-day activities, improving the accuracy of reporting and increasing your fundraising capabilities. While few things in life are guaranteed, it is safe to say that not addressing data quality issues this year's means you'll be facing the same issues next year, likely on a larger scale.

Three Keys to Nondues Revenue

By: Andrew S. Lang, FASAE
Leverage Staff

Employees are the best single source for identifying new sources of revenue.

Unfortunately, few associations have a system in place to encourage staff to share these ideas, and many staff members are (often correctly) afraid that an idea they share will become their responsibility. And many associations are so siloed that an idea that might involve another department won't take off.

The solution? Create opportunities for staff from a mix of departments to share ideas. Include newcomers; longtime staffers will be more fixed in their thinking. Ask everybody to bring at least three ideas in writing to the meeting. To encourage free discussion, the highest-level staff should probably not be present.

The ideas you generate will tend to fall into two categories: low-hanging fruit and projects that will require time and/or a notable financial investment. The latter need to be sifted for midterm and long-term consideration: Taking on more than one or two major new revenue projects at a time likely will overtax an already burdened staff. Analyze the ideas the CEO thinks are best from the perspectives of member need, mission, and ROI. Create a business plan for whatever survives that cut to make sure the investment makes sense.

Monitor Pricing

Inflation takes a toll, so every association should have a system to regularly update its pricing. Maintain an annual calendar indicating when departments should review prices. Items that sell well should be sold at the highest price a member or customer would be willing to pay. Items that don't can be bundled, reduced in price, or unloaded. Be aware of products' full cost; in almost all associations the major cost is personnel.

Check if the market offers something similar to your product or meeting. If yours is of higher value, you can set your price higher, but it must be set with the market in mind. Unique products or services can carry the highest markup.

Meet Member Needs

One theme I kept returning to in this column was a simple one: The most successful products fulfill a definite member need. Knowing what members need to succeed and providing it is the surest path to success.

Your board, unfortunately, is not the best source for this information. Train staff who have regular contact with members to ask what they need. Surveys, particularly phone surveys, can also help. Ask often: The world your members face is changing quickly.

Along with the convenience of only having one card and supplier, fleet fuel cards implement and develop controls with the fleet fuel industry in mind!

MOMENTUM GROUPS

Improved Level III Data

You can now access data such as: odometer reading, card number, PIN or driver ID number, driver name, number of gallons, etc.

Further Control

Fleet fuel cards now offer limits on: number of transactions, times of day, days of week, transaction's dollar amount, product codes, etc.

Functionality as Expense Management Tool

With a fleet fuel card, the days of paper expense reports for employee reimbursements are gone!

Offered Discounts

Detailed monitoring helps to maintain a fleet's fuel economy by curbing expenditures and reducing time spent with paperwork.

Security

It will be nearly impossible for unauthorized persons to use the cards or for the cards to be used on a non-company vehicle.

TOP 5 REASONS TO HAVE FLEET FUEL CARD:

Momentum Groups wants you to know the advantages of using a fleet fuel card. While the reasons are endless, we have narrowed it into five categories: Improved Level III Data, Further Control, Functionality as an Expense Management Tool, Offered Discounts, and Security. **Improved Level III Data**: You can now access data such as odometer reading, unit number, card number, PIN or driver ID number, driver name, number of gallons, cost per gallon, fuel grade, time of day, and day of week. **Further Control**: Fleet fuel cards now offer limits on number of transactions, times of day, days of week, transaction's dollar amounts, and product codes. **Expense Management Tool**: With a fleet fuel card, the days of paper expense reports for employee reimbursements are gone! **Offered Discounts**: Using one comprehensive report, fleet managers can track fuel purchase types, times, and amounts. **Security**: Fuel card providers are developing systems for authorization prompts, making it nearly impossible for unauthorized persons to use the card or for the card to be used on a non-company vehicle. These improvements give fleet fuel cards an industry-specific advantage that corporate purchasing cards cannot rival.

The "Work Less, More Success" Guide to Time Management!

by Laura Stack

Since 1992, I've dedicated my career to teaching people how to do *less* while achieving *more*. American workers need this relief now more than ever. In the past decade, we've worked harder and done more with less than at any time since the Great Depression. Unfortunately, the pay hasn't kept pace with our efforts, and we often excel at the expense of our health, relationships, and free time. People are tired of "do more with less" and want to "do less and achieve more"! Overwork may be slowly killing you, emotionally, physically, and/or spiritually.

But it doesn't have to.

Often, overwork stems from taking the wrong approach to structuring one's schedule. I have a solution to offer—one that will significantly reduce your task load and help you rebalance your work/life ratio in your favor. In my new book, *What to Do When There's Too Much To Do: Reduce Tasks, Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day,* which hits bookstores on June 26, 2012, I introduce my breakthrough Productivity Workflow Formula™ (PWF). The PWF's core message is simple: reduce, reduce, reduce! It's always better to do less, not more, so you can do better, more focused work.

In this article, I'll give you a sneak preview of the six steps of the PWF.

STEP 1: DETERMINE WHAT TO DO: REDUCE YOUR TO-DO LIST

Too often, we overwork ourselves by doing what doesn't matter much or what someone else could do. You can remedy this by studying your work requirements closely and then zeroing in on what truly matters. Use the medical concept of triage to reduce your to-do list to manageable proportions. The emergency room doesn't treat patients in the order they walk in the door; you shouldn't work in the order tasks arrive in your inbox or by who screams the loudest. Remain flexible at all times, realizing priorities can shift on the fly, with new high-priority tasks muscling their way into the workflow and pushing aside less-important items.

Quit thinking of your To Do list as a *Must* Do list, and in general, stop doing things that lack long-term consequences for your job. Delegate out low-profit or low-priority items. Take what remains and sort them into a Master "someday" list, where you track important but non-urgent tasks, and a High Impact Task (HIT) list of items you need to work on right away.

Master List tasks might include things like long-term strategies, hiring a new assistant, and reviewing basic French terms before you visit the Paris office. Your HIT List should consist of the items that keep workflow humming along: new and ongoing projects, milestones and deadlines, and critical items you need to accomplish every day. Your Master List flows to your HIT list on a dynamic, daily basis.

Just as important as your To Do list is your *Not* To Do list. Spell out the things you refuse to waste your time on, such as multitasking, most meetings, handling brushfires, and procrastination. Finally, get rid of general timewasters like arriving late, excessive Facebook time, and superfluous socializing.

STEP 2: SCHEDULE TIME TO DO IT: REDUCE YOUR OBLIGATIONS

Once you've identified your key tasks, make the time to do them. Remember, time management *really* boils down to self-management: the willingness to stop misusing time and practice self-discipline. While you're not going to waste time during the workday, you're not trying to do it all. Block out time for your critical HIT lists tasks right on your calendar.

Work to reduce your obligations by adopting the computer science concept of "caching." This involves developing the ability to add, drop, and refuse new data on the fly, in order to streamline your workload. I call this "availability caching." When you find yourself at or near maximum capacity, it helps make your decisions about who and what to give your time to more automatic, objective, and logical.

Speaking of refusing data: learn to say "no" in a polite yet firm way. Don't let your co-workers talk you into accepting tasks that either belong to them or you lack time to handle. Ask your boss to prioritize projects when he or she tries to overload you. Meanwhile, keep a firm hand on your own tendency to wander. Don't derail yourself between tasks; exercise clarity, discernment, and vision to make the right choices "in the moment," because even tiny time intervals count.

STEP 3: FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION: REDUCE YOUR DISTRACTIONS

In this step, you reduce distractions so you can hone your focus to razor sharpness. Once you know exactly what you should be doing and have captured time to do it, you must focus on completing that important task. Distractions represent some of the worst productivity hurdles; even if they drag your attention away for just a few seconds at a time, they can cause you to lose your train of thought and fall out of the productive focus in which you accomplish your best work.

Take steps to ease external distractions like people chatting in the hallway, interruptions from co-workers, or traffic past your office or cubicle. If nothing else, you can close your door (assuming you have one), or take your laptop into an empty conference room, or establish signals to let your co-workers know when you'd prefer they not disturb you. To keep your electronics from repeatedly shattering your focus, turn off email alarms and instant messaging and let your calls roll over to voicemail.

Internal distractions often prove more dangerous than external ones, because they represent hurdles we put up ourselves. We don't intend to waste time but inevitably do it with gossiping, socializing, procrastinating, and constantly checking email. Ironically, some of the worst internal distractions come from efforts to *increase* personal productivity. Perfectionism, for example, often backfires, because trying to predict everything that could possibly go wrong means you never get started—and when you do get to work, you have a hard time letting go.

But few internal distractions hurt productivity as much as multitasking. Trying to do too much at once divides your attention, and one task actually gets in the way of the next. You lose track because you switch between tasks too often. Single-tasking works better: instead of juggling several tasks, focus on one until you've reached a natural stopping point (or you've completed it), and then move on to the next.

STEP 4: PROCESS NEW INFORMATION: REDUCE PROCESSING TIME

Streamline your information flow, and you'll inevitably cut back on your time expenditures. Make setting up an efficient filing system one of your first tasks. Develop a simple, noun-based labeling scheme, and apply it rigorously to your electronic and paper files. No document should ever take you more than a minute or so to find.

You'll also need a reliable personal time management system—some variety of organizer, whether paper, electronic, or hybrid, where you can keep track of all your schedules and contacts. Just make sure it meets the HUG criteria: it must be Handy, Usable, and Garbage-free.

Involuntary data inflow, especially email and phone calls, will likely represent a bigger problem. You can cut back on their influence by limiting your exposure to just a few times per day and processing your inboxes down to zero each time you do check, triaging on the fly. Because most work arrives via email, you should follow some foundational principles to reduce processing time:

- The Superglue Rule
- The Decisiveness Rule
- The Start-to-Finish Rule
- The Three-Minute Rule
- The Empty Inbox Rule
- The Discipline Rule

When you use these rules in conjunction with my original 6-D Information Processing System™, you can reduce the time you spend handling your inflowing information to a much more manageable level.

STEP 5: CLOSE THE LOOP: REDUCE INEFFIENCIES

Next, reduce your inefficiencies by determining what does and doesn't work for you. Constantly refine your workflow processes, reworking or replacing components if they break down or just don't seem as efficient as they might be.

Other people may present your most difficult barriers to closing the loop. Since you can't control the actions of your co-workers, try to make your interactions with them easier. Start with precision communication that cuts down on unproductive "noise" like hedging and passive language. Get right to the point and ask for acknowledgement on everything. If you don't completely understand what someone asks of you, keep asking questions until you do. Don't give up if they get impatient—it's better than doing the wrong thing or over-delivering—both a waste of time and energy.

Micromanagers represent a special case. No amount of productivity training and time management finesse can save you from a micromanager's ego trip if you don't take the bully by the horns ASAP. If they hinder your workflow, confront them about it; they may back off. Otherwise, find ways to work around them—or find a job elsewhere.

Whether a blockage is human, process-oriented, or mechanical, never hesitate to step in and try to fix it. If you can't find a way to do so, then go around it and move on to things you *can* fix. Teamwork is crucial here. Do your best to ease the way for everyone involved. In addition to helping the team develop work plans, set and achieve milestones, and reach deadlines, ensure stability by establishing contingency plans to handle crises and other emergencies, such as unexpected absences.

STEP 6: MANAGE YOUR CAPACITY: REDUCE ENERGY EXPENDITURES

The best-laid workflow plan will fall apart if you don't have the energy to sustain it. Therefore, Step 6 focuses on keeping yourself physically and mentally fit, through a combination of good sleep, diet, exercise, and preservation of personal happiness. Taken together, these form the hub that links and strengthens the other PWF steps.

Begin by recognizing the limits of your personal "battery." You can only go so far before you run out of energy, so know when to slow down and recharge. Don't skip your scheduled breaks—stretch breaks, meals, personal time, weekends, and vacations—or fatigue may eventually overwhelm you.

You can't stay productive if you don't get good, restorative sleep every night. Like it or not, your muscles require rest, your body chemistry needs time to reset, and your subconscious mind has to process new information. Do your best to encourage sleep on a regular schedule by establishing a peaceful environment, and avoid using your bedroom as an office.

Excess weight will also drag you down, so keep an eye on your diet, focusing on portion control and energy-boosting foods. Pair that with regular exercise. This can include anything from "subversive" activities you can engage in while going about your normal workday (like taking the stairs rather than the elevator), to working out at the gym twice a week.

Don't forget your mental health. If you can't maintain a high level of enthusiasm for your work, you can't stay at your productive best. Seek out happiness by making empowered choices, surrounding yourself with fun things, spending time with your family, doing nice things for people, cherishing yourself, and finding ways to laugh at adversity. All this will help you maintain a fresh, can-do attitude.

STAYING ON TOP OF YOUR LIFE

There's no doubt your career is important: you spend more than half of your waking life either working or preparing to. But you can't let it override everything else. For the sake of your mental and physical health—not to mention your friends and family—you've got to curb your workaholic tendencies.

Yes, working 70-hour weeks can make you fantastically productive...in the short term. But over time, you'll wear down to a ghost of your former self. Eventually something will break, and suddenly, your productivity will drop to nil. Like an overpowered light bulb, you'll produce a lot of heat and light for a while, but suddenly you'll burn out, much sooner than you should. Even if that doesn't happen, don't fool yourself: no matter how hard you work today, you can't guarantee corporate leadership will remember your sacrifice tomorrow. You might end up with a pink slip anyway.

Rather than grow old and break down before your time, implement my Productivity Workflow Formula in your career. These six steps are logical, straightforward, and can

help you reduce your workload to a reasonable level, resulting in a work/life balance you can live with over the long haul. Sure, hard work may be good for the soul—but moderation will keep you healthy.

You can get the full details on all six steps in *What To Do When There's Too Much To Do,* my brand new handbook for maximizing workplace productivity without running yourself into the ground. Reserve your copy today at , , or ! Email your receipt to for special bonuses by author friends of Laura Stack. Visit for complete details.

© 2012 Laura Stack. Laura Stack 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. Her books include SuperCompetent (Wiley, 2010); The Exhaustion Cure (Broadway Books, 2008); Find More Time (2006); and Leave the Office Earlier (2004). Her newest book, What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks, Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day (Berrett-Koehler), hits bookstores in May 2012. To have Laura speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401. Visit to sign up for her free monthly productivity newsletter.

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