

Get a Life—At the Office

By Dianna Booher

Will your career advance or stagnate? If you want to add new vigor to your professional life, then take a long look at those everyday habits that are depriving you of precious productivity. Consider the following suggestions from Dianna Booher's *Get a Life Without Sacrificing Your Career* to improve your efficiency and demonstrate competency.

Create Craters for True Crisis Crunches

When you're surprised with a crisis like an unreasonable demand by a key customer with a short deadline—cut yourself some mental room to think. Take in a deep breath and acknowledge the crisis. Then remind yourself that you've handled similar crises before and that you can handle them again. Admit the fact that you will need to accomplish the near impossible and that you could easily panic if you gave in to the impulse. Instead of collapsing mentally, carve out emotional room to let the crisis overflow into your psyche. Make room to deal with it emotionally.

Avoid Letting Your Staff Sabotage You

When you get the feeling that you are working your schedule and your projects around the timeframes and tasks set for you by your own staff, try these responses:

- "You have my confidence. Please go ahead with the project."
- "I need the project completed in final form and ready to send the client by November 30. If you run into problems, keep me informed and let me know how you plan to handle them."
- "I'll consider the X situation when it becomes a higher priority for me. Now, I'm focused on Y."
- "I need you to manage the project. Here's the goal.... Here's the result we're trying to achieve.... Here's how I'll measure your success or failure on the project. The budget is X. If you run into snags, call on Y and Z as resources. I'd like for you to check back with me if A or B happens. Unless I hear from you otherwise, I'll assume everything is on target and as planned."

Delegate at Work, Home, and Play

You may do things faster and better one time, but over the long-haul the payoff for delegating far exceeds the hassle.

- Give the job to the person most capable to do it.
- Train and develop your staff.

- Make sure you give all vital information as you delegate: The goal. The result (measure of success or failure). The procedure. The deadline. The resources (budget, people). The worry factors.
- Follow up.
- Give credit when they do a good job.
- Allow them to make decisions and mistakes.
- Give constructive feedback when they make mistakes.

Drop Perfectionism As a Habit

Perfectionism reduces productivity. Where are you tempted to waste time doing a perfect job when only a mediocre one will do? Redrafting documents? Cleaning out your desk? Making dinner from "scratch"? Refusing to chart the performance of one mutual fund until you have time to graph them all? Waiting to clean out the hall closet until you have time to advertise and hold a garage sale? Refusing to delegate a project to someone who won't do a task as well as you would do it yourself? Failing to buy someone a gift because you couldn't decide on the perfect gift?

If you find yourself without choice in such matters, then perfectionism has become a compulsion. Cut loose.

Drop Professional Organizations That Are *Shoulds*

Drop professional organizations that are "obligatory" but not truly profitable.

Sure, they have some benefit to your career—if nothing more than your picking up a new idea from the luncheon speaker or networking with a specific colleague who tells you where to find a good printer. But the question should be: What specific benefits can you trace to that membership? Has membership ever gotten you a better job assignment? Has membership ever been instrumental in getting you a raise? Has membership ever brought business through your door? Is membership actually making you a better meeting leader, engineer, or financial planner?

Make Faster Decisions When the Decisions are Irrevocable

We drag our feet with decisions because we're afraid of making the wrong one and reaping the consequences.

Assess the relevant facts about a situation. Gather information that's available. Develop alternatives. Identify and evaluate negative consequences. Decide. Take action. If the decision is the wrong one, it will become apparent soon enough, and appropriate measures can be taken to make it the right decision.

Few decisions in life are completely irrevocable.

Don't Meet Without a Reason—A GOOD One

Will any of these substitutes do the trick? A letter or memo giving the same information? A written request for suggestions and other input? A teleconference? An electronic meeting?

If you must have a live meeting in real time, consider these suggestions for making your meetings productive and short:

- Schedule meetings for the last thirty minutes of the day so everyone is conscious of time.
- Schedule meetings for odd times (9:20) so people know you're serious about the start time.
- Prepare an agenda and send it out ahead of time so people come with ideas and relevant information at hand.
- Have a competent meeting leader or facilitator to keep the meeting moving.
- Bring another project with you to work on in case the meeting starts late.

Avoid Work-and-Wait Patterns

Waiting for approvals, opinions, information, equipment, or resources is a major timewaster. Here are some tactics that can minimize, if not prevent, slow-downs:

- Get other people's buy-in on the due dates before you schedule tasks.
- Call people and explain your priorities and urgency.
- Offer to help people do the work or collect the information you need.
- Let people know you don't have to have the information "in formal/final form."
- Let people know you'll take incomplete information until the total information is available.
- Ask people who they can refer you to for further help/information.
- Escalate the problem to your own supervisor to negotiate the information at a higher level.
- Remind everyone involved that you need the information as soon as it's available.

Rid Yourself of Performance Jitters; Become Employable for a Lifetime

To reduce the remaining stress, you have to undergird your security by knowing you're employable for a lifetime. Take every opportunity you can to attend training classes and fine-tune your skills so that you have an arsenal of skills at your disposal for new jobs with your current employer—or skills that will make you attractive to a new employer.

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*Dianna Booher works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.*

For more tips on conflict resolution, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.