

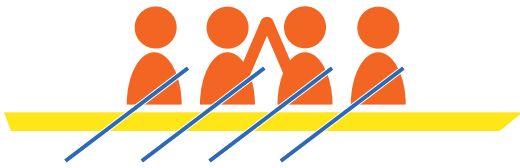


# WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT MANAGEMENT

*How to Take Back Your Workday*



iDoneThis



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*How to Take Back Your Workday*



**iDoneThis**

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# HELLO!

People often believe that good things come to those that wait, but there's another saying that describes success much more precisely: "The grass is greener where you water it."<sup>1</sup>

Success doesn't follow from waiting around or luck — or even from getting a lot done. It grows from cultivation and care, where and how you are watering. The risk in hanging back and giving into inertia at work is that you cede control over where the grass gets greener.

On one hand, nobody can care how awesome you are at your job as much as you, because everyone is dealing with their own goals and concerns. Ultimately, your success doesn't rest in the hands of your bosses or the fickle fates. On the other hand, work isn't something that happens by yourself. Your success relies on relationships — with your coworkers and managers, clients and stakeholders — and even yourself.

So what can you do to work smarter?

Consider the context in which your hard work happens. You'll realize that even when you're not technically a manager, it's part of your job to manage all around you.

So whether you're at your first job, learning how to be a boss, or just plain feeling stuck at work — in every chapter, you'll find ways to manage across the board. With our book, we hope you can start cultivating your work life and environment to better nurture your success.

# MANAGE YOUR OWN SUCCESS

Success is not a straight line. While patience and great work are essential, they don't pave the way forward in a logical progression.

Consider how some people who are terrible at their jobs still have them — even get promotions — while others who are great get stuck, plateau, or quit because they're blocked from advancing. There are many other forces at play. Your achievements don't line up all orderly and dutifully so you can collect your rewards.

It's easy to chalk up other people's success to luck because you usually don't see the winding path of effort that brings them to that point. Create your own luck and opportunities by remembering there's more to moving forward than finishing tasks.

## Do Things, Tell People

Good work doesn't necessarily speak for itself. Somebody has to speak up for it, and it makes the most sense for it to be you. "Do things, tell people" is one pithy formula to success, according to Carl Lange.<sup>2</sup> What's so often overlooked, of course, is the "tell people" element.

Just as artists and authors hire managers and agents to get their work in front of the right people, you can do this for yourself. According to Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor at Stanford's Graduate School of Business, visibility is the vital key to becoming the kind of person who gets promotions, raises, and access to opportunities.

As he shares in his book, *Power: Why Some People Have it and Others Don't*, research confirms that there's a real disconnect between your performance and your job outcome. The "effect of your accomplishments on those ubiquitous performance evaluations and even on your job tenure and promotion prospects" is much smaller than you'd expect.<sup>3</sup> As annoying and unfair as it can be, perception often becomes reality in the workplace.

We miss out when we wrongly assume that other people will know about our great work without having to tell them. Believing that pointing to your achievements is overly self-promotional and that good work should be enough on its own is, ironically, selfish thinking. You're almost always on your mind — but that goes for everyone else too. Most everyone is busy with their own concerns, problems, and lives.

The upshot is a harsh reality. That means people, including your boss, usually have little sense of what you're accomplishing and what you're doing with your time. If you aren't proactive about reporting your accomplishments, you'll never get recognized for your good work. Even great managers who proactively care about your development can have a lot on their plates, and it's helpful to make relevant information visible for them.

***Do Things, Tell People.  
These are the only things  
you need to do to be  
successful. — Carl Lange***

If you're too busy keeping your head down, nose to the grindstone, it's harder to see you. Part of managing yourself and your trajectory means making it easier for people and opportunities to find you. Getting coy or bashful about your accomplishments does both yourself and your work a disservice — and may unintentionally make the job of managing you harder.

Assume that people don't know what you're working on. Gain some sense of control of how you're appearing on others' radars, and to do so, you have to send out a signal.



## The Other Half of Your Job

Even smart, talented individuals require corralling to work well together as a team. Having to work with others on problems that are complex, time-constrained, and flat-out hard can be enough to break down an individual's creativity and productivity. That's why every successful company where people are both productive and happy feels a little magical. A harried, stressful environment or disengaged, sullen office are sadly both far more common.

Tom Sachs is a contemporary artist famous for his sculptures, which are elaborate DIY recreations of modern engineering and design masterpieces, and he has a surprising take on how to work together productively.

In his studio, if you've merely just done your work, you've only done half of your job:

'[S]ent does not mean received' is a profound thing. Half of your job in this studio is doing your work, the other half of your job is communicating that it's been done. Because if you do it, and I don't hear about it, how do I know what's going on? I'm not trying to control everything, but in an intimate work environment, where we're really trying to develop something complex, a nod, saying, 'I got it,' helps move things along.<sup>4</sup>

What Sachs says about artists rings true for anyone involved in knowledge work. Productive people often respond to the frustration of not getting enough done by going into heads-down mode, but disregarding the fact that you work with other people just exacerbates the problem.

Plus, focusing too hard on getting stuff done just produces more that needs to get done, and that's a trap. Making meaningful progress relies on communicating about what got done.

*Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.*

— **Robert Bresson**

## Send 1 Simple Email

Getting ahead, however you define it, requires people to notice your work. The most direct way to do that is to tell them, and be a good advocate for your efforts. Nobody is a mind-reader. The tricky part can be *how* to tell people so that you feel authentic to who you are. For many of you, the thought of being more proactive about sharing accomplishments at work can be daunting and a real turnoff.

Eric Barker at his blog, *Barking Up the Wrong Tree*, provides an elegant solution to this problem that takes minimal effort and doesn't require you to turn into a loudmouth braggart.<sup>5</sup>

His recommendation: Every week, send one simple email to your boss.

Take a few minutes on a Friday and jot down a simple description of what you accomplished that week. Your boss will be able to see the progress you're making and appreciate not being left in the dark wondering whether you're doing your job.

What makes Eric's one email idea so powerful is that it turns what could come off as a loaded act of self-promotion into an ordinary, informative update that perpetually builds up your credibility with your boss. While others scramble to ramp up their lobbying for promotions during performance review-time, you'll already be top-of-mind, without having to gather and tout your accomplishments in the strained atmosphere of a formal review.

Every Friday is just a suggestion. Feel weird about sending something every week? Do it every two weeks or every month. Deliver something in your boss's language, at whatever frequency and style she or he will understand.

Alternatively, start keeping a record for yourself. It's so easy to get swept away with the daily grind that you forget what you get done, and progress and achievements slip away

from your mind. Capture your accomplishments by keeping a running record. You'll have information at your fingertips when it comes to review time or when you're thinking about next steps. This light tracking also helps you keep what you get done at the front of your mind, making it easier to figure out where you want to go and how to get there.

Here are three more tactics to increase your visibility:

## **1. Don't end the week with nothing.**

Entrepreneur Patrick McKenzie's excellent advice is to work on more visible projects. He writes:

Prefer to work on things you can show. Prefer to work where people can see you. Prefer to work on things you can own. Why? Because when your work is in public, you can show it to people. That's often the best way to demonstrate that you're capable of doing work like it.<sup>6</sup>

To sum up: "optimize for impact and visibility."

The nature of knowledge work makes it inherently difficult to see the fruits of your labor. Can you choose the more impactful project? Can you work on some aspect that is customer-facing? Can you turn what you learn about management, customer service, or selling into a presentation or guide?

## **2. Ask for help and feedback.**

People are often afraid to ask for help, for fear that it makes them look less competent. Yet asking for help is part of getting better at your job and shows that you care enough to be proactive about learning and fixing problems.

Managers and co-workers would much prefer you reach out for help and feedback rather than be kept in the dark because you've placed yourself in a cone of insecurity. It's much easier, even instinctive, to go find a corner to mope, brood, or hide in when you're stuck — but working out loud and asking for input is what increases the likelihood that you'll be able to climb outside the rut.

Many people — the good ones, anyway — enjoy helping others, and being asked can be flattering to boot. Instead of committing the work sin of radio silence, reach out for support and feedback, and then also ask how you can help others.

### **3. Work Where People Can See You**

Gaining visibility might require going outside your office. Maybe you have a side project, or maybe your work culture isn't a healthy environment to pursue visibility.

Promoting yourself doesn't have to be on someone else's terms. Write a book, start a blog, make a side-project, collaborate with people outside of work, speak at panels and conferences. Tell people about what you've done, what you're doing, why it's important, and how you did it. Give talks, teach others, raise your hand for new projects.

Whether you're an entrepreneur, an employee, a boss, or looking for work, when you "do things, tell people," you open doors because people know where to knock and why. Those people may be customers, potential partners, or powerful leaders who can act as sponsor and mentors. You hold the magic power to make the invisible visible — to help yourself and your work create more impact and opportunity.

## **TIPS & TAKEAWAYS:**

### **ASSESS THE DISCONNECT.**

Do you feel there's a gap between perception and reality when it comes to your performance? Pause and take stock of your visibility and how you are managing key work relationships.

### **FOLLOW UP.**

Sent does not mean received. Your work often involves other people, so make sure you're communicating well and your messages are hitting home. After finishing a task or project, consider whether it's helpful to yourself and others to tell about it.

### **SEND 1 EMAIL.**

Send a regular email to your boss, informally jotting down what you've accomplished.

### **DON'T END THE WEEK WITH NOTHING.**

Work on projects you can show, whether it's for your job or a side project, your workplace or an outside audience. Share knowledge with people.

### **SEEK HELP AND FEEDBACK.**

Instead of brooding or hiding when you run into obstacles, ask for help so you can keep making progress. Don't pass up the opportunity to learn something new, strengthen a connection, and raise the feeling of self-efficacy in others.

# WORK IN THE SAME BOAT

For the many hours we spend working, you'd think we'd invest more in our coworker relationships. Yet, the default is to treat the social aspects of work as a given instead of managing them in any significant way.

Team-building goes way beyond trust falls. Successful people recognize the importance of establishing and cultivating meaningful connections.

## The Downsides of Detachment

The general state of connectedness, at least in the American workplace, is a sad one. According to a 2012 Gallup poll, 70% of workers are disengaged. Specifically:

- 52% are disengaged (feeling less connected, doing stuff to get by)
- 18% are actively disengaged (at odds with the organizations and managers)
- 30% are engaged (committed and connected)

With 70% of your crew checked out, not rowing and pulling their weight, with some of them even actively holding you back — how do you move forward? How does that environment impact you at work every day?

Teamwork isn't just a bunch of individuals doing their own thing, snapped together snugly like Lego pieces. When you're a member of a productive crew that's going places, you feel you're building towards something and doing it together.

Teamwork is about the shared purpose, trust, and support of camaraderie. As Christine M. Riordan writes:

Studies have shown that soldiers form strong bonds during missions in part because they believe in the purpose of the mission, rely on each other, and share the good and the bad as a team. In short, camaraderie promotes a group loyalty that results in a shared commitment to and discipline toward the work.<sup>8</sup>

We often treat motivation as if it exists in an individual bubble, a personal puzzle to crack. Yet many other factors — especially other people — influence our drive throughout the day. In their rigorously-researched book, *The Progress Principle*, Harvard Business School professor Teresa Amabile and psychologist Steven Kramer identify one vital ingredient in the recipe to fulfillment and thriving at work — the nourishing element of human connection. The reason is basic: “As humans, we want others to respect, recognize, care for, and enjoy us. When they do, we revel in the positive emotions of joy, pride, and even love. And we are motivated to contribute something wonderful.”<sup>9</sup>

Recognition, gratitude, encouragement, emotional support, and camaraderie are all nourishers — and these are all things that anyone can contribute, not only to create happier workplaces but to improve your chances of success.

An analysis of over 5 million Gallup interviews revealed that close work friendships can increase employee satisfaction by 50%.<sup>10</sup> And in his research, Shawn Achor found that people who proactively developed work relationships by providing social support and initiating interactions — “people who picked up slack for others, invited coworkers to lunch, and organized office activities” for example — were 40% more likely to be promoted and 10 times more likely to be engaged at work.<sup>11</sup>

Feeling isolated at work leads to demoralization, detachment, and even depression. In the first study to empirically analyze the effect of loneliness on work performance, Sigal Barsade and Hakan Ozcelik confirmed how loneliness leads to withdrawal from work as well as weakened productivity, motivation, and performance.

Notably, they found that “co-workers can recognize this loneliness and see it hindering team member effectiveness.”<sup>12</sup> Since this downward spiral is noticeable, it’s an important opportunity not to leave your teammate in the lurch. Loneliness is a personal emotion, but isolation and detachment aren’t private concerns. These effects reverberate, becoming a concern that impacts the group, organization, and community.

## How to Strengthen Connections and Camaraderie

Though bosses and cultural inertia can pose difficult challenges in transforming collective detachment to engagement, there are still leverage points you can use to improve camaraderie. Instead of relying on change to come from the top, consider what you can do to manage your peers across the cubicle or the hall.

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity,” French philosopher Simone Weil once wrote, and in what seems to be our increasingly head-down, busily streaming lives, that seems a harder truth than ever. Wholehearted attention is how you connect to others and to the world around you.

People work better when they feel a sense of togetherness or cohesion, which provides a basis of mutual accountability to each other. Here are a few simple ways to create and strengthen that foundation:

### 1. Put on your own oxygen mask first.

First, be kind and attentive to yourself. Poorer quality connections can be corrosive, eroding energy and ramping up stress, anxiety, and fear — feelings that we shouldn’t merely tune out. Often we put our heads down to get work done or feel like we just have to get through the day, forgoing the chance to listen to ourselves, much less other people.

Then consider the nourishment factor — acts of generosity, giving your attention to others, expressing gratitude, and providing support — to do small things that can ultimately strengthen teams, making them more resilient and enduring, and collectively thrive.

Examining the state of your connectedness may even prompt you to assess whether it’s time to leave your job, especially if you’re dealing with an unhealthy work environment, unchecked workplace bullying or harassment, or simple disengagement.

### 2. Find common ground.

At Buffer, sharing has become almost as natural as breathing, so that their take on “do things, tell people” goes deep.

Radical transparency is a major company value, and the swiftly growing team shares a broad range of information — from the nitty-gritty such as salary and equity details to what they’re getting done every day to self-improvement goals.<sup>13</sup> So whether you’re trying to stick to a fitness regime, stuck on a particular work problem, or had a great one-on-one, sharing paves the way for filling people in, receiving help, and keeping motivated.

By creating an open and supportive environment, Buffer transforms the inherently vulnerable act of sharing personal and work details into an opportunity to connect, spark richer conversations, show support, serve as a sounding board, and learn from each other — and that’s turned out to be a major competitive advantage for the company. It’s one important way the company can focus on progress, aiming higher, and getting better.

Your team can bake this kind of interaction into some of the processes and tools you use. The weekly Snippets system first adopted at Google, for example, takes the “send 1 email to your boss” idea from Chapter 1 and scales it across an organization, providing a window into what everyone is up to in the company.<sup>14</sup> Here’s how it works: you get a weekly email asking what you did last week and what you plan to do in the upcoming week. Everyone’s replies get compiled in a public space and distributed automatically the following day by email.

In any case, taking time to talk, listen, and share about interests, work, and goals doesn’t require formal meetings or tools to happen. Camaraderie is built from common ground — and you can’t discover common ground until you have conversations with whom you spend a significant part of your day.

### 3. The Power of a Simple Thank You

A simple thanks to indicate your appreciation of your coworkers’ efforts isn’t just motivating, it’s the right thing to do. The workplace is actually the worst place to find gratitude, according to a 2012 survey by the John Templeton Foundation. 60% of people reported that they never expressed gratitude, or at most “perhaps once a year.”<sup>15</sup>

The implication is depressing: day after day, people’s effort and hard work get taken for granted — and feeling like you’re toiling away without appreciation makes it easier to stop trying.

Gratitude is a powerful motivator. As Adam Grant and Francesca Gino found in their research, when people received recognition, they helped others for longer — without even

*What we yearn for as human beings is  
to be able to be visible to each other.  
— Jacqueline Novogratz*

being asked to do so.<sup>16</sup> In one of their studies, a group of fundraisers, with the usually thankless job of asking alumni for donations, received a visit from a director of annual giving, who told them, “I am very grateful for your hard work. We sincerely appreciate your contributions to the university.”

That simple expression of thanks resulted in more than a 50% increase in the number of calls in a single week. Gratitude, Grant and Gino explain, increases our feeling of efficacy and self-worth, which sets us up to continue contributing.

Take five minutes to give a shout-out to someone, even if it’s once a week. Turn Eric’s one weekly status email idea into a gratitude email and make it a positive way to interact with your coworkers. Make saying thanks or recognizing someone for their efforts, from friends and family to coworkers, part of a good day’s work.



#### **4. Increase the visibility of other people’s work.**

“You should always highlight what your coworkers are up to if they’re doing good work,” encourages Melody Kramer, digital strategist at NPR. “If you’re speaking to one of your managers and you highlight somebody else’s work, that could be very good for them. I really like the idea of building everyone up at the same time.”

Melody created a daily internal newsletter, circulated among 450 people across NPR, to do just that, strengthening the organization by passing on information about staffers’ social media and digital experiments. Now the newsletter contents are shared on a Tumblr site, distributing helpful information to the general public.<sup>17</sup>

The new platform also provides an approachable way to share and recognize each others’ wins, especially for people who hesitate to show off work they’re proud of. “I can completely understand that it’s very hard,” Melody notes. “You don’t want to be constantly waving around things that you did because that’s not a personality trait that people necessarily like. But there is value in sharing success stories, and if you have a platform for doing that, then people feel much more comfortable.”

#### **5. Just do something nice.**

When you give, it boosts *your* happiness — increasing flow, connectedness, and intrinsic motivation.

In a four-week study at a large Madrid company, Sonja Lyubomirsky and Joe Chancellor told designated givers to carry out acts of kindness for a randomly assigned colleague.<sup>18</sup> Not only did recipients benefit, after a month givers also reported more long-term positive impacts like improved flow, happiness, and life satisfaction. Plus, the acts of kindness kickstarted a ripple effect of paying it forward, improving collective spirits.

Small, authentic gestures can make a fortifying difference to protect against the emotional and motivational paper cuts we accumulate as the workday goes by. It's about quality, not quantity, and small moments of true attention, support, encouragement, and fun can charge people up with a much-needed spark.

In fact, people mistake the strength of small acts of kindness, according to research by Stanford University's Melanie Rudd and Jennifer Aaker and Harvard Business School's Michael Norton.<sup>19</sup> Small actions with simple, concrete goals (like making someone smile) instead of intimidating, fuzzy goals (like making someone happy) makes them much more doable and likely to happen. Again, Rudd and her colleagues found that not only do these small acts of kindness improve the well-being of the action's recipients, they're even *more* effective in boosting the giver's happiness.

Managing your work relationships can take gumption and thought because you're figuring out ways to connect with people who aren't necessarily your friends but more than acquaintances. But you can always start small. Here are a few simple suggestions to get you started:

- buy someone a coffee
- cheer up someone who's having a bad day
- include someone who tends to be left out in group activities
- express encouragement to someone struggling with a problem or a new skill
- recognize something great a coworker did
- lend a hand beyond your normal job duties
- learn something new about a person
- get away from the desk and take a walk together
- invite people out for lunch, ice cream, or happy hour.

## **TIPS & TAKEAWAYS:**

### **CHECK IN WITH YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.**

Pay attention to yourself and how you're thriving so you can better reflect on how to manage. Which relationships nourish and which are energy vampires? Where can you cultivate with more care or find ways to spend less attention?

### **SHARE MORE.**

Increase transparency around what you're doing, not to boast or play politics but with the intention of increasing knowledge and improving the team as a whole. Take time to find and build common ground.

### **GIVE A SHOUT OUT OR SAY THANKS.**

Take a few minutes to say thanks to a colleague or share with others — including higher-ups — about their work. You could even substitute one of your coffee breaks to compliment someone for a job well done — turns out this is one effective way to boost your energy!<sup>20</sup>

### **STEP UP.**

Be the one to initiate activities with invitations and suggestions. Ask people out to lunch or coffee. Brainstorm and help organize social outings that are actually fun rather than leaving it to painfully artificial team-building activities. Pick up the slack for people having a tough day. Use a lunch roulette system to gather varied groups of people together.<sup>21</sup>

### **DO SOMETHING NICE.**

Small acts of kindness can have a surprisingly strong impact. Make someone smile while improving your own feeling of connectedness and motivation.

# THE UNFAMILIAR KEY TO MANAGING PEOPLE

One of the biggest misconceptions of management is about what really drives people. In a survey of hundreds of managers by Amabile and Kramer, 95% failed to correctly identify the best motivator at work.<sup>22</sup> This has huge consequences.

The most powerful motivator isn't monetary incentives or even beneficial management techniques such as providing recognition or interpersonal support. The best motivator is simply making progress on meaningful work.

As a manager, understanding that you can have a large impact on people's sense of progress can transform and clarify your focus on how your team gets stuff done. Your job isn't so much to manage the tasks themselves or be "inspiring" or dictate turn-by-turn directions on what to do. Your job is to manage people and facilitate *their* progress by providing support, tools, resources, and feedback.

## The Manager's Oath

Understanding the power of progress is especially crucial, considering the negative impact of encountering setbacks. When Professor Amabile and Kramer analyzed nearly 12,000 employee diary entries for accounts of progress and setbacks, tracking accompanying emotional levels of happiness and frustration, they found an alarming trend.

Setbacks have more than three times as powerful an effect on motivation than the positive power of progress.

What follows should be embarrassing to managers but not surprising: the frustration, deflated sense of accomplishment, and diminished happiness that result from setbacks and obstacles often came straight from managers themselves. Stories like Lucas's are all too common:

During our new product review meeting, the MT basically told us what our top priorities were [for] new product development. [ ... ] It was discouraging that our “freedom” to choose our direction / priorities was taken away from us as a team and we were given our direction, rather than being allowed to make more decisions on our own. [Lucas, 6/30]<sup>23</sup>

When you consider just how vital employee autonomy is to happiness at work, “First, do no harm” — a fundamental principle of medical ethics — should also be the manager's mantra.

“First, do no harm” is a constant reminder to every medical professional to consider potential harms. Intervention carries risks that may ultimately cause more harm than not doing something or even doing nothing. The principle is easy to forget for doctors, because they view themselves as healers and are capable of tremendous good. But it's essential to check the behavioral tendency that Abraham Kaplan called the law of the instrument: “Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding.”

What's important is the health of the patient, not the dilemma between intervention and inaction. Tina Fey has a similar point when she writes in *Bossypants*: “In most cases being a good boss means hiring talented people and then getting out of their way.”<sup>24</sup>

Getting out of the way — and making sure there aren't other obstacles in your talented people's way — is no small task. Doing no harm as a manager requires awareness that the people you work with are human, with lives, feelings, concerns, and depth.

In his book *How Will You Measure Your Life?*, Clayton Christensen describes an epiphany he had on what makes us tick. In observing Diana, a scientist in his lab, with her family at a company picnic, he started to see her in fuller perspective, with a life outside of — but connected to — work. Her mood, happiness, sense of self-worth would impact all the corners of her life, so experiencing a bad day at work — feeling “underappreciated, frustrated, and demeaned” or learning little — had larger ramifications.

Christensen imagined a sunnier possibility, where feeling engaged and having a good work day would start a positive feedback loop:

On that day, I saw her driving home with greater self-esteem — feeling that she had learned a lot, having been recognized in a positive way for achieving valuable things, and played a significant role in the success of some important initiatives for several scientists and for the company. I felt like I could see her go into her home at the end of that day with a replenished reservoir of esteem that profoundly affected her interaction with her husband and those two lovely children. And I also knew how she'd feel going into work the next day — motivated and energized.<sup>25</sup>

When you take that fleshed out, three-dimensional perspective of your colleagues' lives, the imperative behind the manager's oath is simple but profound: we're human beings whose mood, happiness, and self-esteem is hugely affected by what happens at work. So first, and above all, do no harm.

*In most cases being a good boss means hiring talented people and then getting out of their way. — Tina Fey*

## Understanding Who Your People Are

Having a fuller sense of the people you manage and what makes them tick can only help you do your job.

For Jason Stirman, Head of People Operations at Medium, this means putting aside work problems altogether. When he headed an engineering team at Twitter, Jason tried all sorts of stereotypical management advice like not getting too friendly with his reports and asking them what was blocking their progress — but nothing resonated. So he decided to focus on people first instead of work first by spending time with them one-on-one, taking them out to lunch and coffee.

To Jason's surprise, he found that asking questions like "What's going on in your life?" was more effective than "What's blocking you at work?" to resolve many work difficulties. "Whenever problems popped up, I'd totally ignore them and pay attention to the people who had them. Suddenly all these issues were just dissolving. I swear it was like a Jedi mind trick."<sup>26</sup>

Jason also extended this technique to managing relationships within teams. If he had two people who weren't getting along, he got them to talk about everything besides work:

[W]e got some casual conversation going, they discovered some similarities, and by the end of the hour they were talking about how to solve their issues. This was a conflict that literally kept me up at night, and as soon as there was space for them to connect as people, it was fixed. I thought, holy crap, this is a super power.

You carry your whole life around with you, no matter how much you might pretend to have a work self apart from your self-self. When you get some sense of your team's whole selves — without prying or pressuring — you'll be a better manager.

Use opportunities, such as one-on-one meetings, or create them like Jason did to get to know your people. As Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar and President of Walt Disney and Pixar Studios emphasizes: “[I]t is the focus on people — their work habits, their talents, their values — that is absolutely central to any creative venture.”<sup>28</sup>

Understand how you can best help your team make headway by trying some of these techniques:

## **Ask about goals and motivations.**

Don't try to read minds and guess what motivates your team. Ask people about their goals. Where would they like to go in their current job? What might help them work better? What career aspirations do they have? What skills would they like to develop?

They may or may not have clear answers for you at first, but this is a meaningful opportunity for both managed and manager to spur growth, learning, and progress. So many managers don't take the time to ask their team members where they want to head. You have the power and expertise to help them find and navigate their path.



## **Heart Tree Star**

Heart-Tree-Star is one structured way to think through and communicate about what moves you and where you want to go.

As a manager at Microsoft who ran training and development for senior executives, Barbara Grant developed this illuminating three-part model that goes through three lines of discussion around current passion and enthusiasm, growth and skill development,

and personal definitions of progress and achievement:

**HEART:** What do you love doing? What are you good at?

**TREE:** What do you want to develop? How do you want to grow? Where do you want to end up in the future?

**STAR:** How do you feel rewarded?

People are different. Their relationship to progress and goals may differ, and what works in one managerial relationship may not work in another.

## Provide a Boss Blueprint

Help your team get to know you better and faster. Just as getting a glimpse into the inner workings of your team helps you manage them, providing a window into what makes *you* tick and your own goals is mutually beneficial.

Luc Levesque, founder of TravelPod and General Manager at TripAdvisor, even provides his employees with a concise boss blueprint that outlines his particular values, dislikes, and quirks to prime them for great performance in short order.

Addressing protracted information asymmetry at work — including details about how you work and your goals — allows everyone to sidestep misunderstandings and stress as well as build more effective relationships.



## Find the Goldilocks Zone of Proximal Development

Help your team become superstars by challenging them enough to boost growth but not so much as to overwhelm and crush their confidence.

In the classroom, aiming to teach in something called the zone of proximal development — a level just beyond students' current abilities — results in a higher level of performance. In *Drive*, Daniel Pink writes about a corresponding concept in the workplace, ascribing the standout productivity and innovation of companies like thatgamecompany and Green Cargo to their employees taking on “Goldilocks tasks’ — challenges that are not too hot and not too cold, neither overly difficult nor overly simple.”<sup>29</sup>

Managing in that “just right” sweet spot is surprisingly uncommon, given the competitive advantage it can yield. In a survey by Lee Hecht Harrison, 62% of workers said they often feel underutilized in their jobs, while 24% said that they sometimes feel underutilized.<sup>30</sup> That’s 86% of people who aren’t fully engaged and whose skills aren’t being fully harnessed. To contrast: consider how engaged employees find their peak experiences of learning and interestingness during the workweek rather than the weekend.<sup>31</sup>

In order to find your team’s Goldilocks zone, you have to know them and believe not just in their current abilities but that they can grow. Again, learn about their skills, interests, and goals. Have conversations about how people feel about their work responsibilities and whether they feel underutilized or underappreciated.

Finally, back up your greater expectations. Don’t leave your team hanging when they’re dealing with new or challenging projects. Provide the resources, support, and decision-making power to meet these challenges.



### 3D Development

At most companies, the concept of professional advancement involves climbing a ladder — getting a more senior title and moving up in the organizational chart. But this approach takes a limited view of development. When you consider career development as multidimensional, you grow both employee and company.

At Spotify, for example, development is defined with far more breadth and possibility, which removes the emphasis from power plays and focuses more on broadening employees’ horizons and skillset.

This involves structured learning opportunities such as attending or leading trainings, courses, and workshops. Or you can move within the organization for a new position or perspective. The company’s “add-on” option allows you to work on new skills outside your job role, including learning how to mentor, write, and coach. A public speaker add-on, for example, would provide training to prepare you to speak at conferences and give talks.

People often leave their jobs, not to leave the company but to leave their manager. When you take care to listen to people, recognize their abilities, and help them grow — even if it’s to a different team within your company — you get to keep on a great employee.

## TIPS & TAKEAWAYS:

### **ENABLE PROGRESS.**

Whether you're the CEO or the lowest person on the totem pole at work, understanding Amabile and Kramer's "progress principle" unlocks better ways to manage the people around you (and be managed). Check in regularly to make sure you're not the obstacle standing in someone else's way.

### **GET TO KNOW YOUR TEAM.**

Learn what makes people tick, their goals and preferences. Ask about what's going on in their life. Use frameworks like heart-tree-star to jump-start a discussion but have frequent, organic conversations rather than relying on artificial, isolated processes.

### **SHARE BLUEPRINTS.**

Communicate your own goals and information about how best to work with you. [Click to find Luc's boss blueprint template.](#) Flip the process and ask your team for their own "How I Work" blueprints — it's also a useful individual exercise to reflect on and crystallize understanding about how you work best.

### **RETHINK JOB AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT.**

Find your team's Goldilocks zone of proximal development so that they are fully engaged and developing their skills. Remember there are ways to advance and grow beyond an inflexible career ladder.

# QUIETER FREQUENCIES

While teamwork is exciting and camaraderie a wonderful source of intrinsic motivation and purpose, getting stuff done also isn't a matter of adding more people to the tasks at hand. In fact, collaboration can be too noisy.

What with all the open offices, unwelcome chit-chatters, dreadful meetings — not to mention the digital inundation of a never-ending stream of information — it can be near impossible to hear yourself think.

Ultimately, productivity requires producing, creativity creating — and while interaction is a key part of these processes, it isn't everything. If you don't actively think and process, if you don't actually turn input and inspiration into something, if you don't take time to reflect and analyze, then you're shortchanging yourself.

It sounds so simple and obvious, but it's easy to forget these days that we need time for solitude and quiet.

## The Need for Solitude

Everyone needs quiet time to think. Solitude is necessary to pay attention to yourself, to tune into what psychiatrist T. Byram Karasu calls your internal rhythm or music. Tuning in allows “time for previously unrelated thoughts and feelings to interact, to regroup themselves into new formations and combinations.”<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, the late psychologist Ester Buchholz explains:

Solitude is required for the unconscious to process and unravel problems. Others inspire us, information feeds us, practice improves our performance, but we need quiet time to figure things out, to emerge with new discoveries, to unearth original answers.... The natural creativity in all of us—the sudden and slow insights, bursts and gentle bubbles of imagination—is found as a result of alonetime. Passion evolves in aloneness. Both creativity and curiosity are bred through contemplation.<sup>33</sup>

Apple’s Steve Wozniak, too, champions alonetime for the sake of the creative process:

Most inventors and engineers I’ve met are like me — they’re shy and they live in their heads. They’re almost like artists....And artists work best alone — best outside corporate environments, best where they can control an invention’s design without a lot of other people designing it for marketing or some other committee.<sup>34</sup>

We need more of what Paul Graham has identified as maker’s time (versus manager’s time).<sup>35</sup> Makers need uninterrupted blocks of time to create and make progress in their work and live in their heads sometimes. This kind of schedule resists carving out units of time for discrete tasks, while managers require much more frequent interaction which can fit into scheduled slots. For a maker, a meeting can disrupt and even derail a whole day’s work.

Still, Woz’s observation isn’t just relevant to artists, inventors, and engineers — nor is it correct to say so broadly that the only and best way is to work alone. Instead, the point is how privacy, solitude, and autonomy are needed to hear what’s in your head and let your own thoughts network.

## Escaping the Digital Din

Among the noisiest culprits is, of course, all our gadgets and computers. Even today’s business software, while intended to make getting work done easier, can be quite disruptive. Digital connectivity empowers collaboration but not necessarily with regard

to *when*. Collaboration is important but not at the continuous expense of being able to think and be productive.

Real-time activity feeds mirror the addictive (and time-sucking) features of Facebook and Twitter. Email never ends. When managed poorly, these feel like an endless stream of reactive work and time given to others. They demand the kind of drip-by-drip time and attention that are antithetical to the maker's schedule and make it difficult to tune into yourself.

Merely pointing out the problem of how noisy information and work culture creates an attention wasteland is insufficient — nor does it make sense to get off the grid altogether. Instead, let's tune into quieter channels that support the reflection and contemplation that enables us to better create.

At iDoneThis, we're guided by a philosophy of slow web, because we want to encourage reflection and emphasize doing, to enrich rather than detract from attention, and to help people gain insight. Slow web, as Jack Cheng has so insightfully written, is about:

Timeliness. Rhythm. Moderation. These things dovetail into what I consider the biggest difference between Slow Web and Fast Web. Fast Web is about information. Slow Web is about knowledge. Information passes through you; knowledge dissolves into you. And timeliness, rhythm, and moderation are all essential for memory and learning.<sup>37</sup>

While fast web is more about unfiltered consumption and real-time updates, slow web allows space and autonomy on how and when to engage, with timely interactions that “happen as you need them to happen.” Consider, create, and take advantage of quieter frequencies for non-urgent communication at work.

*A man is not idle because he is absorbed in thought. There is visible labor and there is invisible labor. — Victor Hugo*

## Reconsider the Open Office

The open floor plan office has become a staple of startup culture, reflecting a rejection of hierarchy and embrace of agility, collaboration and creativity. More established organizations implement open floor plans for cost savings and the supposed facilitation of interaction. Startups and organizations hoping to cultivate and project these interactive, creative characteristics miss how the setup is a main offender in the struggle for solitude and ultimate productivity.

More and more research confirms the trouble with the open plan layout, with growing evidence of reduced productivity as well as impaired attention spans, focus, motivation, and creative thinking.

According to Jungsoo Kim and Richard de Dear at the University of Sydney, the simplistic conclusion that open layouts mean easier communication, collaboration, and productivity has little empirical proof. They found that people in open offices were no more satisfied with the ability to interact with coworkers than people in private offices. Overall, their findings “categorically contradict the industry-accepted wisdom that open-plan layout enhances communication between colleagues and improves occupants’ overall work environmental satisfaction.”<sup>38</sup>

Noise is one of the open office’s biggest productivity killers. In fact, according to Finland’s Institute of Occupational Health, ambient conversations and noise contribute to “a decline of 5 percent to 10 percent on the performance of cognitive tasks requiring efficient use of short-term memory, like reading, writing and other forms of creative work.”<sup>39</sup> Since the brain can understand and process intelligible speech, it’s one of the most distracting sounds.

Kim and de Dear also explain, “The loss of productivity due to noise distraction ... was doubled in open-place offices compared to private offices, and the tasks requiring complex verbal process were more likely to be disturbed than relatively simple or routine tasks.” In today’s age of knowledge work, these cognitive hits are damaging. One solution is to use pink noise generators, which mask the sound of speech by making it less distinguishable, reducing those cognitive breakdowns.

For all the talk about principles like openness and lack of hierarchy, open-plan offices actually reduce workers’ autonomy. You get much less control over timing and how you work. It’s the physical working equivalent of fast web. You’re always susceptible to the random notification of the shoulder tap and a work mode of interruption-driven multi-tasking.

According to the journal, *Organization Studies*, face-to-face interruptions are even more disruptive in total than email or phone calls, accounting for one-thirds more interruptions every day because they are harder to ignore.<sup>40</sup>

- *average interruptions from communication tools a day: 9.1*
- *average face-to-face interruptions from colleagues a day: 12.4*
- *total average of external interruptions a day: 21.5*

With research from Gloria Mark of the University of California finding that it can take an average of 23 minutes to recover from an interruption on your original task — and something like 22 interruptions a day — the maker's schedule starts making a lot of sense.

Shopify is one startup that is reconsidering and riffing off of the standard open floor plan. In building their fourth office in their sixth year of existence, Shopify applied lessons on what they didn't like about open floor plans to ensure its engineers have the solitude they need to get in the zone, without regressing from the promise of the open floor plan for serendipity, collaboration, and work happiness.

Now, they work in pods, which are rooms of the six to eight people you work closely with on a daily basis. The pods make up the outside of a central hallway loop, and on the inside are small private meeting and conference rooms. Connected to the office core is a big open space called the Annex where they hold their weekly all-hands meeting and host community events. Daily free lunch and a big, central kitchen with free drinks and snacks facilitate collaboration and serendipity, but it's when people open themselves up to it rather than a constant onslaught.

The configuration shows the value Shopify puts in quiet, distraction-free coding, getting in a state of flow yourself while being close by your core collaborators. There's plenty of fun to be had in the office, but those areas weren't in places that would create distractions for others trying to work. Concentrated work happens in the work areas, hanging out in the lounge areas. This reflects an organizational value of work-life segmentation. When the iDoneThis team worked out of Shopify's office for a week, we were shocked to see engineers come in at 9 and leave by 5 on a daily basis.

In Silicon Valley, work and play is all mixed up together so it sometimes feels like you're expected to work and play all at the same time, all the time.

## Finding Joyful Flow, Even at Work

The shift from what Dan Pink describes as the Information Age to the Conceptual Age tracks the shift in qualifications required these days. The supposed “right-brain” skills of creativity and synthesis are increasingly required in today’s professional landscape.

“In a world upended by outsourcing, deluged with data, and choked with choices,” Pink writes, “the abilities that matter most are now closer in spirit to the specialties of the right hemisphere — artistry, empathy, seeing the big picture, and pursuing the transcendent.”<sup>42</sup>

At Qualtrics, the research software company, CEO Ryan Smith puts it this way: “Nowadays, you’re hiring individuals to think.”<sup>43</sup> That fact guides the company’s core value of extreme transparency so that its employees have all the information they need to do their jobs with focus — from visibility into the company, individual objectives, and weekly emails about what everyone got done last week and will do this week. “We can’t control the way they think,” Smith fortunately says. “All we can control or have an effect on is the environment around them.”

When the greater part of people’s job is to think, you should protect that brain space. Otherwise you not only jeopardize productivity and creativity, you risk the relevance and skills you’ll need to stay competitive. What’s more, in this data-deluged, thought-choking environment, we also compromise our capability to become lost and absorbed in our work. We mess with our flow, that “in the zone” state of being in which your mental energy and attention snap into focus, and you even experience joy.

## How to Find Quieter Frequencies

### Keep a work diary.

Professor Amabile and Kramer recommend carving out five to ten minutes a day to keep a work diary to cultivate a practice of reflection.<sup>44</sup> Pausing to collect, coalesce, and record your thoughts about the day has a positive impact on creativity, productivity, and motivation. What’s more, keeping a record can show you patterns of noisy, disruptive productivity problems that you can avoid or address for the future. (Amabile and Kramer also provide a [helpful personal work diary worksheet](#).)

## Take a hike.

Getting away from your desk and taking a walk is one of the best ways to think, let your mind wander, or puzzle over a problem. This is a great tactic especially for those stuck in open offices with limited options of escape to quieter work spaces.

For Colin Ross, a developer at Buffer, thinking is so integral to his job that he calls programming a “part-time job.” As part of Buffer’s distributed team, Colin works out of a number of quiet pubs during the day. He switches locations every 90 minutes and takes a 15-minute stroll to the next spot, enough to gain some perspective and think.

Try it—get out of your seat once an hour or so, take a quick stroll, do something completely different. Clean a whiteboard. Put out some rubbish. Do some laundry. Make a coffee. Anything to get away from that keyboard. The keyboard is the problem—it entices you into believing you are productive, where the reality is that the keyboard is stealing your productivity by preventing your mind from working at its full potential.<sup>45</sup>

## Schedule time with yourself.

LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner schedules blocks of time with no description on his calendar, in 30 to 90 minute chunks every single day. This system of scheduling “nothing,” as he calls it, safeguards his time to think proactively and strategically. It’s a calculated system he developed “in response to a schedule that was becoming so jammed with back-to-back meetings that I had little time left to process what was going on around me or just think.”

## Embrace slow web style.

Just as apps running in the background of your phone drains the battery, juggling windows, tabs, app, email, and calendars all while trying to get something else done drains your attention and energy.

Ask yourself, your team, and your managers what you can do to escape the stream of interruptions from taps on the shoulder to emails. Maybe you can agree on no-meeting days or team-wide scheduled blocks of quiet time. Turn off non-urgent notifications, and find processes and tools that allow interaction as it’s needed, rather than always being dictated by others.

## The Cost of Disruptions



AVERAGE OF EXTERNAL  
INTERRUPTIONS A DAY:<sup>1</sup>

**21.5**

**9.1**

Average interruptions  
from communication  
tools a day



AVERAGE RECOVERY TIME  
FROM INTERRUPTIONS:<sup>2</sup>

**23 min**

**12.4**

Average face-to-face  
interruptions from  
colleagues a day



### HOW TO ESCAPE THE DIN

#### KEEP A WORK JOURNAL

Take just 5 to 10 minutes to reflect on your day.

#### TAKE MORE WALKS AND SCREEN BREAKS

Let your mind wander while taking a stroll, making some coffee, or running an errand.

#### SCHEDULE MEETINGS WITH YOURSELF

Instead of defaulting to reactive work, safeguard some time for proactive and strategic thinking.

#### PRACTICE SLOW WEB

Manage how you interact with the internet (and people) instead of letting it all happen to you.

#### CLAIM A QUIET SPACE

Find a spot of solitude to work in. Set a schedule of interruption-free hours or meeting-free days.

<sup>1</sup>Judy Wajcman and Emily Rose, "Constant Connectivity: Rethinking Interruptions at Work," *Organization Studies* 23 (2011): 941-61 (studying a major Australian telecommunications company with open-plan offices). <sup>2</sup>Gloria Mark, Victor M. Gonzalez, and Justin Harris, "No Task Left Behind? Examining the Nature of Fragmented Work," *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2005, 321-330, available at <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~gmark/CHI2005.pdf>

# BREAKING BAD MEETING HABITS

Why do we continue to have bad meetings? They cost precious brainpower, time, energy, and productivity.

Just take a look at these numbers:

11 million meetings take place every day in the United States. That means 4 billion a year. Over 50% of people say that half the meetings they attend are unproductive. That's 2 billion ineffective meetings a year!<sup>47</sup>

Most meetings, two-thirds of them to be precise, end before decisions are reached.<sup>48</sup>

So why do we keep repeating this unhealthy, unproductive behavior? Harvard Business School professor Nancy Koehn explains the simple reason why even the smartest among us carry on holding fruitless meetings: habit.

Bad habits are beyond reason, ingrained behavior we often don't even notice happening. But people overcome bad habits all the time by consistently trying to improve rather than repeat them, and it's irresponsible to continue practices that doesn't actually move your organization or your people forward.

Changing our bad meeting habits means thinking critically about their purpose. Meetings aren't for discussing information that can be documented like status updates, spreadsheets, or bug reports. They're for discussing, as Michael Lopp puts it, "what's important, what you care about this week, this month and this year. What's working and what isn't and what's going to be fixed."<sup>49</sup>

Meetings, when done well, are a helpful tool to have constructive conversations, work through problems, and make plans and decisions — and do so face to face. There are some common solutions to fixing the bad meeting habit, such as sticking to stated starting and ending times, agendas, and plans; going into meetings with specific goals; and limiting who is in the room.

These three lesser known approaches help increase the quality rather than quantity of your meetings:

## Set a Meetings Cadence

An over-reliance on meetings results from treating them like an unlimited, free resource even though they cost time, brainpower, energy, and focus. Part of their pervasiveness is due to how easy it is to thoughtlessly call a meeting. When scheduled indiscriminately, meetings can be supremely disruptive and damaging to your productivity and flow.

So consider some constraints: limit their scheduling. Designate specific days as no-meeting or meeting days. When you set constraints around meeting frequency, people's attention can click into focus.

Take Twitter and Square co-founder Jack Dorsey, who points to the stress that comes from the unexpected. Setting a cadence in your schedule keeps some of that tension at bay. He sets aside Mondays for meetings.<sup>50</sup> So too does Jon Steinberg, president and COO of BuzzFeed, who was inspired by Dorsey to set a meeting cadence.<sup>51</sup> He considers Mondays his "internal meeting day" in addition to deliberately scheduling Tuesdays and Thursdays as "no meeting" days.

Take that company-wide. Asana, for example, has No Meeting Wednesdays.<sup>52</sup> Co-founder Dustin Moskovitz explains that everyone needs some structure and cadence to their time to enable focus. "[W]e generally want our managers to be makers some of the time as well, so they need a structure that ensures they get some flow time too."

## Write Stuff Down and Scrap Presentations

Amazon's Jeff Bezos starts his senior executive meetings with absolutely no talking. Before any conversation or discussion begins, everyone sits for 30 minutes in total silence, carefully reading six-page printed memos. Reading together in the meeting guarantees everyone's undivided attention to the issues at hand, as material sent out in advance is rarely read in advance.

The real magic happens before the meeting ever starts, when the author is writing the memo. Writing forces memo authors to actually reason through what they want to present, spend time puzzling through tough questions, and formulate clear if not persuasive arguments. It's no surprise that Bezos also banned Powerpoint presentations in meetings, which does away with simplistic and fuzzy bullet-point logic.

As Bezos explains: "Full sentences are harder to write . . . They have verbs. The paragraphs have topic sentences. There is no way to write a six-page, narratively structured memo and not have clear thinking."<sup>53</sup> The imposition of writing as a medium turns self-discipline and personal reflection into a distributed process. It makes sense that Amazon executives call these six-page memos "narratives." There's a story: a conflict to resolve and conclusion of solutions, innovation, and happy customers to reach — providing the meeting with direction.

Specifically, the narrative has four main elements, as described by Pete Abilla, who worked at Amazon in 2003:

[The six-page narratives are structured] like a dissertation defense:

1. The context or question.
2. Approaches to answer the question - by whom, by which method, and their conclusions
3. How is your attempt at answering the question different or the same from previous approaches
4. Now what? - that is, what's in it for the customer, the company, and how does the answer to the question enable innovation on behalf of the customer?<sup>54</sup>

Even with time set off to read materials, the meeting can then focus on generating valuable discourse: providing shared context, diving deeper on particularly cogent data and insights, and perhaps most importantly, having a meaningful debate.

## Start With Wins

While the conventional wisdom to improve meetings is to make them shorter, LinkedIn's Jeff Weiner spends time starting his weekly staff meetings with a novel move. Before getting down to focused business talk, Weiner requires every person in the room to share their “wins” — “one personal victory and one professional achievement” — from the past week.<sup>55</sup>

This unconventional technique harnesses the progress principle. Sharing wins is a powerful way to start your meeting, focusing people by putting them into a positive frame of mind to tackle issues and talk constructively without turning meetings into an unproductive, repetitious “round robin of complaints.” Negativity and setbacks are overwhelming on the mind, not only interrupting and detracting from feelings of progress but tending to stick around much longer.<sup>56</sup> It's no wonder why meetings can devolve into grumbling sessions.

Everyone needs a good vent about work sometimes, but a meeting isn't usually the place to do it. Celebrating your wins combats that negativity bias by establishing a tone of positivity and injects useful energy in the room to fuel everyone to delve into issues and solve problems with a positive frame of mind.

## MORE MEETING TIPS

Here are a few more quick tips to have better and fewer meetings:

### **Articulate purpose.**

Make sure each meeting has a clear purpose, an agenda, and action steps to follow through as a result. Put this in writing.

### **Don't default to meetings.**

Avoid them altogether if your intent is just to circulate information. For example, you can move status updates from standup meetings to asynchronous communication tools. Save meetings for when discussion, interaction, and conversation are needed.

**Do a meetings audit.**

Measure how much time is spent on information, updates, logistics, and admin that can be accomplished with other methods and tools versus how much time is actually spent solving problems, collaborative planning, and brainstorming. Does your audience have to be there for the purpose to be fulfilled?

**Stick to the agenda by making the process visible.**

Facebook's Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg keeps a spiral notebook with discussion points and action items and crosses them out as they're discussed. This display of the process is a shield against tangents or rambling.

**Set time limits.**

Parkinson's law that "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion" holds true for meetings as well, so limiting that time available will prevent the kind of meeting creep that takes over your schedule. Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, for example, has 10-minute meeting windows available to book.<sup>57</sup>

**Limit distractions**

— including comfort. Check smartphones at the door or hold your meeting standing up to secure people's attention and focus. Try setups that prevent a kind of classroom environment in which you're sitting at your desk, checked out and not paying attention to the teacher.

*The least productive people are usually the ones who are most in favor of holding meetings.*

*— Thomas Sowell*

# STEPS FOR SMARTER MANAGEMENT

The way to improve your worklife isn't to do more work. Instead, get smarter about how you manage your psyche, your visibility, and your relationships.

To get you started, we decided to ask eighteen experts, experienced managers, and entrepreneurs for one actionable recommendation that will make a happy impact on how you manage.

## Manage Yourself

### Create a To-Don't List

Take a page from the great Tom Peters and create a “To Don't” list. We all know that certain things in our work lives divert our attention, sap our energy, and suck the very life out of us. List those things and treat that “To Don't” list with the same reverence we have for our To-Do List.

— [Daniel Pink](#), author of *To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others*

## Manage your work according to your energy.

Manage your energy, not your time. Ask yourself: what do you have the energy to do right now? Sometimes it's "answer my email" and sometimes it's "write the five-year plan." It makes a big difference in your productivity. I also subscribe to the idea of limiting email, chat, and social media exposure to a few, pre-scheduled times during the day. If you do just that, you'll find you have a lot more time than you thought you did.

— Caterina Fake, CEO & Founder of [Findery](#)

## Keep a "Waiting For" List

Keep a list of projects that you've handed off to someone else (David Allen calls this the "waiting for" list). Even the most responsible people are foiled when they send an email to someone or make a request and simply assume it will be completed. You've done your part, but if the other person lets it slip, the entire project (including your all effort) is derailed. Instead, bake in a process so that you always follow up until you know every aspect of the project is complete.

— [Dorie Clark](#), author of *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future*

## Manage your expectations of how much you can get done.

Instead of assuming that you need to or can get done everything that everyone suggests you do (managers, colleagues, clients, etc), evaluate how requests align with your time budget.

Typically there is far more to do than you can actually get done in the time that you have. That means you need to look at the time available in your calendar (i.e., not committed to meetings or recurring tasks), estimate out the requests, and then work with your manager on setting priorities. This helps you to know what you should work on first and how much time you should allocate to different activities.

— [Elizabeth Grace Saunders](#), author of *The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment*

## Don't wait to set your own goals.

Setting reasonable goals is the most important thing, whether you're managing or being managed. I think it's even more important for managees — too many people wait to be told "what to do" when they should take the opportunity and the initiative and set goals for themselves.

I'm always happier and more productive when I set daily, weekly, and monthly goals. If I do that, the long-term goals take care of themselves!

— **Erin McKean**, lexicographer and founder of [Reverb](#)

## Manage Up and Across

### Take the reins of your growth and advancement.

The best thing you can do for yourself is realize that your manager isn't going to teach you everything. You don't need to be "officially" tasked with learning. Sit down and figure out what skills you want to learn — or what skills you'd need to do the job you really want to be doing. It's not just about where you want to go.

For example, if you want a promotion—why? What extra responsibilities would you have? Don't forget about wanting a promotion, but figure out what you could learn that would help get you there.

Don't forget your manager isn't the only person who can teach you. Once you figure it out, start meeting other people to learn from them. You'll be able to be more open than you might be with your manager and potentially meet people who will refer you to jobs in the future!

— [Ellen Chisa](#), former product manager at Kickstarter

### Don't wait for your manager to read your mind.

Take a chance and trust your manager with the truth. Whether that's something that needs fixed in the company, feedback for them, or something you personally need to be happier and more successful on the job, tell them!

That doesn't mean you shouldn't say it in a polite and constructive way, but your manager can't help you or change anything if you don't tell them. The best time for such discussions are in 1-on-1s, so if you aren't having them, this is a big reason why you should.

— **Jason Evanish**, founder of [Get Lighthouse](#)

## **Devote a few minutes every day to check-in communication.**

Ongoing communication is hard — which is why the people who take the time to do it really stand out as leaders. When you communicate regularly with the right people, aligning goals and building trust, you'll have a career trajectory most people can't match.

Check in often with team priorities by asking yourself and others how you can align your work to make the biggest impact. If you can also help the people around you on the same page with goals and work, you'll stand out as a leader on your team even if you're not a manager.

Success depends on other people, and the only way people can really work together is when everyone knows what's going on. This means everything from making personal connections with your peers to sending weekly status emails to your manager.

— **Kate Stull**, cofounder of [Popforms](#)

## **Enable Progress as a Manager**

### **Management requires resolution.**

Part of your job is to resolve. This is 50/50 direct mediation and guidance. Every project has hard moments that, once in awhile, escalate into voiced frustration. The two types I've typically seen (even in myself) are either people having trouble communicating, or people just not communicating at all. In each instance, there's a fine line between someone just needing an ear and some guidance, and a situation needing a manager's direct involvement.

When things get tough, it's on you as a manager to make sure there's light at the end of the tunnel.<sup>58</sup>

— [Cap Watkins](#), Senior Design Manager at Etsy

## Support job-crafting.

If managers want to improve work life, one powerful step is to support job crafting. As defined by experts Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton, job crafting involves changing tasks and relationships to align with skills, interests, and values. When managers encourage this type of customization, team members are able to achieve greater meaning, enjoyment, engagement, and effectiveness.

— [Adam Grant](#), author of *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*

## Develop your people without moving them to management.

Create a path for individual contributors to grow (their careers, salaries, influence ) without needing to move into management.

If you love getting stuff done and doing a great job at it, you should be an IC. If you love empowering others, and helping them grow and succeed (and you're great at it), you should be a people wrangler.<sup>59</sup>

— [Rand Fishkin](#), co-founder of Moz and Inbound.org

## Show everyone's work.

The most important thing you can do is establish a shared place that you track what people are working on. You can use a whiteboard, post-it notes, a Google doc, or a Trello board, it really doesn't matter. Once you have that shared space, it creates a context for conversations about how the pieces all fit together and where you're going. Without it, everyone's just relying on remembering what other people said. Once you're in the habit of using a tool like that you can start to see the patterns — stuck projects, overcommitments, the works — and work on getting everybody into a state of better flow.

— Peter van Hardenberg, [Heroku](#)

## Make sure you communicate purpose to align your people.

It's critical for every leader to get clear on what they are trying to accomplish and why. Then communicate that clearly to everyone who will listen. By communicating what you want and why you want it, you attract people who share your passion. They can independently make the best decisions on how to achieve the shared purpose. That's the most foundational thing you can do as a leader.

It's also important to ask people to leave who are not contributing to that shared purposes. You can't "set and forget" shared purposes. You've got to continually check in on it and seek commitment. If the commitment isn't there, have the courage to say "I don't think we're heading in the same direction anymore. That doesn't work for me. We need to go our separate ways so that we can both pursue our different visions with people who share our ideals."

— Sarah Bird, CEO of [Moz](#)

## Your Role as a Leader

### Don't bench yourself out of the leadership game.

Leadership is a skill that is all bound up with our primate origins. Status, charisma, being well-liked, wielding power — all this is bound up with leadership. Most of us have ceded the game to the people who get rewards from playing it. If you stay out of the game, it only gets more toxic.

Be okay with being a leader (or a manager), then get in the game, and if you lose to someone who plays the political game better than you, leave. You'll know you're leaving a place where politics rules the roost. You'll enter your next job with more experience in the leadership/management realm.

— Rich Armstrong, General Manager at [Fog Creek](#)

### Take responsibility for the state of your team.

Take responsibility for the dysfunction on your team and in your company.

How much more often than "why can't people just get things done?" should we be thinking "I take responsibility for this. How might I make this better? How might I be better?"

We can always be better. As a manager, my responsibility is to ensure my team has the infrastructure, resources, and support to do brilliant work. And then get out of their way.

— [Stacy-Marie Ishmael](#), VP of Communities at *Financial Times*

## **Foster your people's visibility.**

Help her accomplish the sorts of things that will gain her visibility and make for great resumé bullet-points. This means projects she can highlight, special coverage areas she can take the lead on, new skills she can boast about.

People leave jobs when they don't feel like they're evolving anymore. A good boss makes you feel like you're always adding to your skill set, always growing. She'll stay in the job longer, which is good because she's probably super competent by this point. You want her around.<sup>60</sup>

— [Ann Friedman](#), writer, editor, and co-creator of *Tomorrow*

## **Focus on what you can do best.**

Be reflective about your own strengths and weaknesses so that you find the best opportunities for individual growth. Continually divide up ownership and responsibilities as you grow so that everyone can focus on what they do best. This makes work more fun and decreases the difference between work and play.

— **Chris Savage**, co-founder & CEO of [Wistia](#)

## **Hire based on relationships, not rockstars.**

People are not the most important asset in a company. Their relationships are.

Businesses idolize “rockstars”, “ninjas,” and “heroes.” Rockstar Theory tells us that all you have to do is get talented people in a room together and magic happens. But reality tells us that it's not the level of talent, it's the health of the group's relationships. A team of ten people that can't work together will do less than a tight-knit team of two.

Think about the math of your team. If you work on a team with ten people, it represents 45 unique interpersonal connections. So think twice before you hire a “rockstar” and the ego that can come with it. Look instead for people who know how to foster healthy and beneficial relationships — people who are kind, generous, and know how to listen.

You're not just hiring one person, you're betting on every relationship they'll make at your company. The work we do is nothing compared to the work we enable in others. And nowhere is this more true, and more vital, than the role of a manager.

— **Jon Bell**, designer and founder of [UX Launchpad](#)

# THANKS!

*If opportunity doesn't knock,  
build a door. — Milton Berle*

You have a lot to deal with during the course of a workday, juggling your priorities against a multitude of other people's. Everyone manages, no matter what your job title is. By improving your understanding of what you need to make progress, however you define it, you'll be better able to manage yourself, your work, and others.

The first step to working smarter and happier is taking time to be more reflective and mindful not just about what you do but how you do it. We all operate in a world of limited time, energy, and attention — and, oftentimes, meager training, coaching, and professional development. Taking these extra measures will help increase your influence, engagement, and effectiveness and ensure your hard work is going to make an impact.

## **Thank you so much for reading our book!**

Have any thoughts, questions, or stories on how to manage and get the most out of your workday? Feel free to email Janet at [janet@idonethis.com](mailto:janet@idonethis.com), and she'll personally reply.

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# NOTES

Special thanks to Professor Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, whose book *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work* continues to inspire how we think about work and management every day. Head to [progressprinciple.com](http://progressprinciple.com) for more information.

<sup>1</sup>Quote: Attributed to Neil Barringham

<sup>2</sup>Carl Flax, “Do things, tell people,” [carl.flax.ie/dothingstellpeople](http://carl.flax.ie/dothingstellpeople)

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