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Business & Economics

What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks, Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day

Laura Stack
Berrett-Koehler
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Much has been written about increasing productivity in the workplace, but Laura Stack's book addresses a different sort of challenge: How to do less and achieve more. The reality is that economic conditions have pushed employers to operate their businesses with a lean-and-mean mentality, so the average worker is often stretched to the limit. That's why Laura Stack's premise, "to help you achieve more impactful results, not necessarily more results," will resonate with workers.

As with most business books, this one offers a specific plan of action. The "Productivity Workflow Formula" is a six-step process developed by the author to help any worker achieve greater efficiency: (1) Determine what to do. (2) Schedule time to do it. (3) Focus your attention. (4) Process new information. (5) Close the loop. (6) Manage your capacity. Stack says that, by following this formula, a worker should be able to save about ninety minutes a day, based on her experience with clients of her consulting firm, The Productivity Pro.

Chapters delve deeper into each of the six steps. Stack includes plenty of examples, helpful productivity tips highlighted with a clock icon, and a summary at the end of each chapter. The author has the ability to zero in on key time-wasters and make recommendations for overcoming them. For example, in the chapter entitled "Focus Your Attention," Stack pointedly discusses how best to control and eliminate both external and internal distractions. She also offers insightful advice about multitasking, procrastination, perfectionism, negative self-talk, socializing, and "slipping the electronic leash" (how to avoid becoming a slave to email, cell phones, and other electronic technology).

Throughout the book, the author maintains a positive outlook, encouraging the reader to employ "ruthless task reduction" in order to cut out extraneous work and focus only on what is most important. She is an accomplished writer whose authoritative yet informal style should

have a calming effect on the frazzled worker.

Stack offers the reader complementary material, including tip sheets, group discussion worksheets, and a self-assessment tool, all available online. She ends the book with a call to action of sorts: “You’re not a machine, so don’t try to be one. A decent work-life balance and plenty of rest are required for any human being to thrive productively.” Ultimately, this seems to be sage advice for employer and employee alike.

Barry Silverstein