

SUPERCOMPETENT KEY 2: AVAILABILITY

Availability is driven by Activity.

Just as setting valid priorities and goals is important, so is accepting your responsibility in carrying them out. You have to structure your schedule very carefully to ensure that things get done – because if you don't, other people will be perfectly happy to structure your schedule for you.

Think about it: how many times have you attended a meeting and asked yourself, "Why am I here?" Often, it's because someone decided you should be – without bothering to consider if that was best for you and your productivity goals.

You have to be willing to protect your time from everyone who wants a piece of it. Among other things, you must learn to say no when appropriate, to delegate, to cancel unnecessary meetings, to let some tasks go, and to eliminate bottlenecks – whatever's necessary to take back your time and use it the way *you* need to.

More importantly, you must learn how to leverage technological productivity tools that can lighten your scheduling load. Webinars, teleconferencing, and services like Jott or GoToMeeting can accelerate productivity and streamline your schedule. So can the effective use of organizers and other paper-based methods. The trick is finding which one works best for you, and that takes some experimentation.

Try these tips to hone your Availability toward SuperCompetence:

1. **Refuse requests when appropriate.** Learn how to say no graciously. Because you're good at what you do, you'll always be fielding requests for help and input. It's human nature to want to please others, but you can't do it all. There's no need to be rude, but there are polite ways to avoid being overworked.
2. **Set appropriate boundaries.** Learn how to protect your time from others. You're always going to face what I call the six D's of Interruptions: Deadlines, Disruptions, Dependencies, Discrepancies, Distractions, and Drop-Ins. You can't let others use any of these to slow down your productivity.
3. **Push a task down to the lowest level of responsibility.** Trust others to do their jobs; "delegation" is a popular business buzzword for a reason. Don't waste your time and productivity on tasks other people can do more cheaply. Hand them off to someone else, and let them do their jobs without micromanagement.



4. **Schedule your day realistically according to *your* key activities.** While it's normal to make an effort to accommodate other people's needs, your own should come first. Learn to manage your time properly, and take control of your own schedule. Don't let other people do it for you.
5. **Weigh the results of attending any meeting against the results you could produce instead.** Meetings can take up your entire day if you let them. Instead of dropping everything to attend a meeting, see if you can send a proxy, attend by phone, or just cancel it altogether.

Availability is a loaded word, at least in business terms. It means so much more than just being there – any decent worker can and should be there for their employers, subordinates, and co-workers when they're needed.

SuperCompetent people, on the other hand, need to be keenly aware of time-management. After all, time isn't like money, office supplies, or Brussels sprouts: we've each got a very limited amount of it, and we're not going to get any more. You can't give everyone who wants it a sliver of your time; therefore, you must fully commit to making the changes necessary to take control of your life.

Stand up, step up, and take back your time!

© 2010 Laura Stack. Laura Stack is a personal productivity expert, author, and professional speaker whose mission is to build high-performance productivity cultures in organizations by creating Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., a time management training firm specializing in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations and the 2011-2012 President of the National Speakers Association. Since 1992, Laura has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. She is the bestselling author of four books: *SUPERCOMPETENT*; *The Exhaustion Cure*; *Find More Time*; and *Leave the Office Earlier*. Laura has been a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, Xerox, and Office Depot. She is the creator of The Productivity Pro® planner by Day-Timer and has been featured on the CBS Early Show, CNN, and the *New York Times*. Her clients include Starbucks, Cisco Systems, Wal-Mart, and Bank of America. To have Laura speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401 or visit www.TheProductivityPro.com to sign up for her free monthly productivity newsletter.