

SUPERCOMPETENT KEY 3: ATTENTION

Attention is the ability to concentrate.

SuperCompetent workers are always tightly focused: on getting the job done, on their department's success, on their company's success, on the success of their own careers. They home in like a bloodhound on the task at hand, rather than flitting from one thing to another.

Distractions are ignored or shunted aside. They avoid negative chat and whining, and are proud of what they've accomplished at the end of the day.

When fine-tuning your ability to pay Attention, it's especially important to avoid an overdependence on business technology. You must school yourself to ignore the Internet, except where it's necessary to do your job. Don't take a few minutes to check your eBay auctions or web comics when you should be working, and for heaven's sake, don't let your email rule your life.

Modern technology can be a phenomenal productivity tool, but *it will eat your day alive* if you let it. So don't. Learn to turn off Outlook, block out those distractions any way you can, and get to work. You don't have to be a social pariah, but don't let your social interactions (online or in real life) take over your workday, either.

To achieve a *SuperCompetent* Attention level, you have to constantly work on these five factors:

1. **Stay focused consistently on your work.** Don't get distracted. No, do *not* open Outlook, and turn off all your email alerts. Sure, it may only take a few seconds to check your mail or go for a cup of coffee; but any interruption breaks your concentration, wasting valuable minutes as you refocus on your task.
2. **Leave the distractions for your downtime.** Most people lack the ability to refuse attractive distractions, and this costs Corporate America billions of dollars per year. When you're supposed to be working, work. Wait for lunch or break time to check YouTube or your social media sites.
3. **Limit your multi-tasking in order to maximize your productivity.** Despite our technological achievements, it's difficult for the human mind to focus on more than one or two things at a time. Rather than achieving more, you end up slowing down because your perceptual channels get jammed. Prune your task list.



4. **Don't allow socializing to overwhelm your productivity.** Human beings are social creatures, so of course you'll need to interact with the people around you – but don't let it get out of hand. This is especially a problem now that it's so easy to go online and lose yourself in social media of all kinds.
5. **Don't let your productivity technology take over your life.** Realize that your handheld, cell phone, laptop, and other forms of business technology are just tools to help you become more productive – end of story. You need to be able to turn all these things off at the end of the day; how else can you ever be off work?

Let's face it, folks. There's a time for work and a time for fun, and you can't do both effectively at the same time – not and accomplish anything worthwhile. Focus, focus, focus. You'll be amazed at what you can get done – and how good that will make you feel.

For the working professional, social media, handheld devices, email, and the like are tools. You need to learn to use these tools for what they're intended, instead of letting their expanded purposes of entertainment get out of hand in the workplace.

That said, you shouldn't let their utility trick you into trying to do too much at once, either. Just because it's easy to communicate via email and social media and to get more work through your contacts, don't get sucked into the multi-tasking trap. You're only human; you can only do so much. Never forget that.

© 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.