

SUPER COMPETENT



The Six Keys
to Perform at
Your Productive Best

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The Productivity Pro®

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INTRODUCTION

My husband John and I have three children: Meagan, 15; Johnny, 10; and James, 8. Lately, we've been trying to teach James the importance of competition and hard work. We've tried to stress to him—with the prices of college tuition, food, gas (just about everything) skyrocketing—that schools and employers will only select and keep the best and hardest workers. So you have to do your part and work hard at school to learn. Easy enough, right?

Well, apparently he'd overheard John and me talking about this book and had gotten a little confused. As I was packing to leave for the airport one evening he said, "Mommy, I'm sorry I haven't been doing my chores and working as hard as I should. I can do better!" I said, "My goodness honey, what a grown up thing to say! That sounds wonderful to me," as I kissed the top of his head. He started to walk out of the room when he turned and quickly added, "Mommy, if I work harder, will you and Daddy not get mad at me?"

I said, "What in heaven's name are you talking about, honey?!"

"Well," he said, "Daddy said you were going to talk to some people about being good so you don't get fired. And I don't want to be the one who has to go!" After I explained I was talking about businesses and not families and reassured him with hugs and kisses, John and I had a good chuckle over it.

I am unusually excited about this book, because what I have to share with you today may indeed save your job *and* help you achieve your greatest potential.

I've been counseling CEOs, managers, professionals, and entrepreneurs since 1992, and I have to tell you it has been a long time since I've seen C-suite executives straining under the kinds of stresses we're seeing right now. I know I don't have to tell you about it; you know firsthand. The pressure is peaking at all-time highs. It seems everything that should be going up is going down, and everything that should be going down is going up. Hiring freezes, budget cuts, productivity quotas, globalization's heavy footsteps hot on your heels . . . it all points in a single direction:

Success will come to those who can accomplish more in less time and consistently perform at their productive best. The people who achieve their fullest potential are not *simply* competent; they're *SuperCompetent*.

After all, competence is simply expected and the minimum standard to stay in the game nowadays. You want to be one of the High Potentials identified by your organization as someone positioned to move up. Are you ready?

Consider this: If you gave notice you were leaving the organization, would leadership fight to keep you? If this doesn't describe you, does it apply to someone with whom you work? Why do some people succeed at every challenge they undertake? Are they superhuman? No, they're not perfect; however, they are skilled and capable enough to master almost any task. Are they natural leaders? No again. Competence isn't the same as leadership; in fact, in my opinion, it's something much greater. We've all seen people in positions of leadership who fell short the moment they were faced with unfamiliar conditions. So, are the SuperCompetent exceptionally brilliant? Again, no! You can be a raving genius and yet not be nearly as capable as the person seated in the next cubicle.

A dictionary defines *competence* as "having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, or experience for some purpose; properly qualified; adequate but not exceptional."

Blah. Doesn't that sound a bit . . . boring? Although it's good and necessary to be competent, it's no longer enough to be *only* competent. After all, you probably wouldn't be impressed by someone who is simply "a competent professional." Simply competent people don't stand out in the current environment, where the difference between merely having ability and being exceptional may be the difference between keeping your job and losing it. SuperCompetent people take it to another level: They possess a consistent, all-encompassing ability to be good at everything they do, no matter how general or specific. Scientists actually apply this same principle to the study of what they call competent and SuperCompetent cells. Competence is the ability of a cell to take up DNA; SuperCompetent cells do it far more efficiently.

I've written *SuperCompetent* for two primary groups of people:

1. Those who are *already* SuperCompetent. These people are generally seen as High Potentials in their organization and have been identified in Leadership Development Programs or formal succession planning as someone to watch. This book will help them achieve peak performance and work at their productive best. Because they are typically Type-A personalities who tend to work incredibly hard, they often put in long hours. Organizations need to retain these individuals and help them accomplish more in less time so they can better balance work and life.
2. Those professionals who want to *become* SuperCompetent and fill in the blanks on their skills. These people are perhaps competent in their current situation, but know they could be SuperCompetent if they received the right coaching. This book will help them learn to *think* like a SuperCompetent, so they can grow and eventually be seen as a High Potential in their organization. Fortunately, being SuperCompetent in life isn't a matter of DNA. Anyone can master the six keys to becoming SuperCompetent.

Your job reading this book is to learn all you can to reach your full potential; my job writing this book is to inspire you to grow and give you the skills to succeed.

Each chapter concludes with a summary and worksheets to use in book clubs or Leadership Development Programs. You'll also receive a web site address to obtain a bonus MP3, the SuperCompetent key assessment questions, a summary, and the action-planning worksheet in Microsoft Word format. To start a book club, visit www.theproductivitypro.com/SCBookClub to purchase discussion guides.

Consider a woman I met recently at an event where I was the keynote speaker. She sat at my luncheon table and regaled me with stories of her eight-month-old baby. She admitted that at 40 years old, she was probably a less-energetic mother than she would have been at 20, and yet she said she wouldn't change a thing. She explained she'd waited to have a baby because she had a successful career in the financial services industry and later in pharmaceutical sales. She had spent years criss-crossing the country to visit her clients. Her baby's arrival prompted her to take a job in the travel industry where she could handle corporate travel accounts from home. I instantly knew she would succeed at that, too; I had a pretty good idea she'd already turned out to be a SuperMom. In fact, I told this woman—named Caroline—that I believed she could succeed at anything she set her mind to. Although she was flattered, that wasn't my intention in telling her.

As a corporate consultant for the last 18 years, I can identify the performer I would hire in any position. I can tell when a person would do a fine job, even without much experience. How? All these professionals have mastered the six universal traits Caroline clearly possessed: the keys to becoming SuperCompetent. If you want to achieve success in any area of life and across any area of work, you'll need to master them too. Luckily for your memory skills, they all begin with the letter *A*—for *A+* performance, of course! (Okay, it's a little hokey, but hey, it's *memorable*.)

SuperCompetent people are better in the following areas than everyone else:

KEY 1: ACTIVITY SuperCompetent people are driven by intense focus on priorities and have a clear sense of direction.

Value determines priority; priority determines goals; and goals determine activities.

KEY 2: AVAILABILITY SuperCompetent people control their schedules, so they can make time for important activities. They know they can't be available to everyone every day, so they learn how to control their time and protect it.

KEY 3: ATTENTION SuperCompetent people are masters of focus and concentration. They develop the ability to pay attention to the task at hand and tune out distractions that aren't related to their work.

KEY 4: ACCESSIBILITY SuperCompetent people are well organized. They have systems in place to find what they want when they want it and can quickly locate the information needed to support their activities.

KEY 5: ACCOUNTABILITY SuperCompetent people possess self-discipline and self-control. They eliminate time wasters, strive for constant improvement, and don't blame other people when things go wrong.

KEY 6: ATTITUDE SuperCompetent people get the requisite skills and training when they lack ability. They have the motivation, drive, and can-do positivity to make things happen. They're proactive, decisive, and fast.

These principles are fundamental to the study of productivity and are evergreen, regardless of the technologies and changes in the workplace. In a nutshell:

You'll always have to:

1. Determine what you should be working on.
2. Make time for it.
3. Focus on those tasks.
4. Organize the information needed to complete it.
5. Be responsible for your results.
6. Never give up.

These traits are interconnected, so I'll dissect each and describe how to attain each in the following sections of this book. The good news, as I stated before, is that SuperCompetence isn't a genetic

quality; rather, it's something you can learn. Transforming yourself into a SuperCompetent isn't about mantras, but mind-sets. Looking at your actions is an important part of understanding your capabilities, but it's just one part of understanding how to unlock your potential. The most important part is transforming the way you *think*.

Your mind has a tremendous capacity to change your life; the way you think determines your next actions. Because you can choose your mind-set, you can also choose to change it, which is what SuperCompetents do to make themselves the best they can be. In this book, I'll show you how to do what they've done, working on each of the Six Keys to transform the way you think.

This book contrasts the zero thinking of the simply competent with the hero thinking of the SuperCompetent professional. It describes how each thinks when faced with similar situations. When learning how to be SuperCompetent, you'll consider how you need to think to achieve the best results. Often, you'll have to dispense with your old mind-set and adopt a new one—maybe even faking it a bit until this new way of thinking becomes second nature. By repeatedly, purposefully acting in a different manner, over time, you'll change your mind-set right down to its core. Old thinking will evaporate, altered thinking will materialize, and new, SuperCompetent behavior will follow.

So, what *is* the mind-set of the SuperCompetent person, and what if you don't have it yet? Placing yourself in a new frame of mind requires stepping back, soul-searching, rethinking priorities, possibly defeating old personal roadblocks, and developing entirely new thought processes you can apply in all sorts of situations. This is what will add up to the fully fleshed out, newly SuperCompetent mind-set. You can use this book to help yourself, your company, and even those around you—not just momentarily—but all the time.

Implicit in this is the idea that even people who don't intuitively possess the Six Keys can learn them. My goal is for this book to help any decently capable but perfectly ordinary person achieve SuperCompetence without becoming a superhero. In fact, we're all endowed with an amazing capacity for mastery. It's a shame some of us realize this potential while many more of us fall short. The traits that so often cause people to squander their competence actually aren't traits at all—just bad learning or thought processes that can be unlearned once they know how.

Bottom line: We can *all* learn to be SuperCompetent!

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT

How close are you to being SuperCompetent already? Take the following quiz, and you'll figure out exactly what you need to work on. You don't have to read this book from beginning to end; you can jump right to the section you need most and start your program there.

NOTE TO READERS: Leaders and HR managers may want to use this book to identify traits of potential Super-Competents within the organization or as a coaching aid for High Potentials.

Scoring

- 1 = to no extent
- 2 = to a little extent
- 3 = to some extent
- 4 = to a considerable extent
- 5 = to a great extent

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT*ACTIVITY demonstrates value and reflects importance.*

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I know exactly why I work hard and what I'm trying to achieve. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | I know what to do, when to do it, and why. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | I create systems to perform tasks more efficiently so that I can leave the office on time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | I regularly rest and recharge my batteries in order to be productive and creative when I return to work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | I accomplish the day's most profitable and valuable tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 1–5:

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT*AVAILABILITY is driven by Activity.*

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | I refuse requests when appropriate and know how to say no graciously. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | I set appropriate boundaries and protect my time from others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I push tasks down to the lowest level of responsibility, trusting others to do their jobs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | I schedule my day realistically according to my key activities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I weigh the results of attending each meeting against the alternative results I could produce instead. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 6–10:

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT*ATTENTION is the capacity to concentrate.*

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. | I do not live in my e-mail inbox; I remain focused on my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I leave distractions for my downtime. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | I know I can only focus on a few items at a time, so I limit my multitasking in order to maximize my productivity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | I don't allow socializing—whether online or in real life—to overwhelm my productivity. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | I know technology and my handhelds are tools to help me be more productive—no addiction here. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 11–15:

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT*ACCESSIBILITY is the ability to organize the inputs and outputs in your life.*

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. | I've created the perfect time-management system for my personality, job environment, and work situation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | I know exactly where I'm supposed to be and exactly what I should be working on at all times. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | My e-mail is organized, and my inbox is regularly emptied. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | I keep careful track of my contacts and my communications with them; I can tell you what was said in a meeting a year ago. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | I don't waste time while traveling; I'm efficient and get a lot accomplished. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 16–20:

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT**ACCOUNTABILITY** *recognizes the buck stops here.*

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21. | I take personal responsibility for handling my time and productivity; I never lay the blame on anyone else. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | When I see an unusually lengthy and inefficient process, I do what I can to make it easier for everyone. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. | Rather than waste even small amounts of time, I get right to work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | When I have all the information I need to proceed, I make decisions quickly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | I understand that the difference between being busy and being productive is results. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 21–25:

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT**ATTITUDE** *is your motivation, drive, and proactiveness.*

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26. | I keep an eye on my stress level and realize that it is a mistake to ignore my emotional health. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. | Even when a task is monumental, I keep working at it until I whittle it down to size. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. | I am creative and open to change; I always seek better solutions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. | I adjust my approach with difficult work and time styles; I work well with all different personalities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. | I am a positive person, even in negative circumstances. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 26–30:

SCORING

COPY YOUR SUBTOTALS:

KEY	SUBTOTAL
1. ACTIVITY 1–5	_____
2. AVAILABILITY 6–10	_____
3. ATTENTION 11–15	_____
4. ACCESSIBILITY 16–20	_____
5. ACCOUNTABILITY 21–25	_____
6. ATTITUDE 26–30	_____
GRAND TOTAL =	_____
SUPERCOMPETENT (SC) SCORE:	

To make your score meaningful, visit www.TheProductivityPro.com/SCscoring and enter your data.

Based on an initial sample of 250 survey responses, if you have a score of —

123–150: *You're already SuperCompetent.* Congratulations! All you need to do is fine-tune a bit. Keep it up and help others raise their SuperCompetence whenever you can.

112–122: *You need a few tweaks here and there.* You're on the right track! Strive to improve wherever you made less than a 5 on your assessment. Give yourself credit for what you do well and acknowledge where you need to improve.

88–111: *Average.* You're middle of the road, which is a bit boring. You're not the worst employee ever; you're not exceptional, either. Who wants to be average? Work on kicking it up a notch!

67–87: *Major overhaul required.* SuperCompetence isn't out of your grasp, but you'll need to get serious if you want to reach it. Select one item on this list every two to three weeks and work on systematically improving your competence level.

30–66: *Danger!* Your competence level is flatlining, you need a jumpstart, stat! Both your health and your job depend upon it, so start working hard *right now*.

Get additional resources, audios, videos, and more at www.SuperCompetentBook.com.

PART 1

SuperCompetent

Key 1: Activity

SuperCompetent people are driven by an intense focus on their priorities.

ACTIVITY demonstrates value and reflects importance.

This key gives you a sense of direction throughout the day.

We've all been there. It's the end of the day. Your schedule was jam-packed. You crossed 27 things off of your to-do list. Yet you still have a nagging feeling that the whole day slipped by before you got the chance to accomplish anything of much value.

Being busy is one thing. Being productive is something else. On the surface, it can be hard to tell the difference, which is why it's often easy and tempting to fall into the "busy" trap. As much as we supposedly revere productivity in today's workplace, busy is a false badge of honor. Stacks of papers covering a desk, a frazzled dash to the coffee machine, and all those blue streaks of Outlook (un)availability (wow, you're important!). It's easy to show how busy you are, but productivity is something much more personal—and much more significant.

At the end of the day, productivity is the only thing that matters. Everyone knows that a person who works an eight-hour day can be more productive than someone who works twelve. You need to be sure your time is not only accounted for, but has real value. Nobody cares how many things you crossed off your list or how busy you were last week if key projects are falling through the cracks. Only results matter. So think about how you can get the most value out of every day.

CHAPTER 1

What's It All About, Alfie?

SUPERCOMPETENT Hero Thinking:	I know exactly why I work hard and what I'm trying to achieve.
SIMPLY COMPETENT Zero Thinking:	I'm working hard trying to accomplish "it," but I don't know what "it" is.

Michael Cane starred in the classic 1966 film *Alfie*, where he played a handsome, British womanizer who lives a very hedonistic lifestyle. The line, "What's it all about, Alfie?" is a highly poignant moment in the film, when Alfie pauses on a bridge overlooking the River Thames in London and reflects on his life. He realizes that despite all of his activities in life, he has achieved very little. He asks himself, "What have I got, really? Some money in my pocket? Some decent clothes? A fancy car at my disposal. And I'm single. Unattached. Free as a bird. My life is my own." Then, he pauses and says, "But I don't have peace of mind. And if you don't have that, you've got nothing. So, what's the answer, that's what I keep asking myself. What's it all about?"

Like Alfie, you occasionally need to stop and reflect upon your life and whether you are making the most out of it. Perhaps, like Alfie, your days are just spent passing time or drifting along. Do you know what you're aiming for in life? You may work so hard and are so busy that you have lost track of your dreams.

You can't be productive if you don't know what you're working toward, which is why the word *empowerment* is a popular buzzword in business circles. People who know what they're working for are more likely to buy into the productivity goals of their teammates, superiors, and everyone else in the organization. If you're self-employed, you might say, "I *am* the organization. Of course I know what I'm working hard for."

But is that true? Do you have a set goal in mind, or are you just ambling along, marking time? It is admittedly more likely that a sole proprietor is going to be more aware, in general, of his or her ultimate goals than a worker bee in a big corporation. You need to get clear quickly. You might want to be a successful full-time freelance writer or the best plumber in town, but you can work so hard on the day-to-day operations of your business that you lose track of your dreams.

In this chapter, I'm going to offer a few simple suggestions to help you get back onto your goal-oriented track.

Know What Makes You Tick

I started my speaking and training business in 1992 by teaching professionals and organizations how to achieve their goals through increased productivity. Random House published my first book, *Leave the Office Earlier*, in 2004. Many things have changed in my life and in business during the 18 years I've been a professional speaker. One thing that has not changed is my passion for personal productivity and peak performance. It was then, and continues to be, my professional mission in life: to build high-performance productivity cultures in organizations by creating Maximum Results in Minimum Time[®] with greater profits.

We all have a special purpose in life and a particular calling. People sometimes ask me why I'm so fanatical about helping people energize their lives and hone their time-management skills. There's no doubt that helping people boost their productivity and maximize their profits brings me professional satisfaction. However, the truth is, as a wife and a mother of three young children, I do what I do because I know how special and fleeting time truly is. At the end of your life, you won't regret having attended one less meeting or taken one less call from a client, but you *will* miss the

memories you never took time to make with your family. The best thing you can spend on the people you love is *time*, which is why productivity is so important to me.

Why is productivity important to you? There's no one-size-fits-all answer. My "why" is likely different than yours, and one of the keys to productivity is *finding* your "why." For most people, an external reason like "My boss expects more of me" isn't always the most motivating factor. You must get to the heart of *why* you do what you do to be truly motivated. Is the need to be more productive exciting to you, or does it exhaust you just to think about it? If the latter is true for you, perhaps you haven't gotten clear on why being productive is important.

It all comes down to your personal goals and what you want the picture of your life to look like. Sure, you may need to be more productive at work to make your boss happy or boost company revenues. But how can you turn it around and make it important to you personally? If you're motivated by extra time with your family, then make your priority getting things done at work so you can enjoy your weekend free from work stress. If making more money is what drives you, give yourself achievable daily or even hourly goals of what you need to accomplish to make those extra sales. Figure out what truly motivates you, then try to relate each task to a goal you have set for yourself—not one that someone else has set for you. For example, if you're in sales, your organization sets a sales goal for you. While you should absolutely do your best to achieve it, make it about *you* at the same time. How many sales are required to earn the commissions you need for a family vacation, buy the fabulous pair of shoes you want, or get the country-club golf membership?

It's only human to be motivated by what feels good, so use that. What makes you feel good? Each task you accomplish—however difficult or dull—gets you closer to that great feeling. If you can figure out how productivity relates to your personal goals, then the quest for it becomes exciting, rather than overwhelming.

Luke, It's Your Destiny

Just like Luke Skywalker, you have to acknowledge and accept that you're the only person responsible for your life. Stop blaming others for the outcomes of situations that you actually control. It's vital to

own your own destiny and set your own priorities. What ideas are worthy of your time? What *must* get done? When you outline your priorities, your goals become clearer. Then you can limit your workload by mastering what's important and tossing what isn't.

Stay Focused on Your Mission

I was at a wedding reception recently and had a profound conversation with an old family friend. I asked about his flight, knowing he'd run into a few snafus along the way. He smiled and said, "The flight was fine. I'm delighted to be here." I replied, "I heard about the rain and the flight delay. That must have been frustrating." I proceeded to regale him with stories of other friends who got stuck in Denver over Christmas during a recent blizzard.

His wise response: "Oh, it didn't bother me. *I had a mission, not an agenda.*" He shared that he had adopted this motto as a rule for living. Having a mission keeps him from getting lost in the minutia. By not trying to live by other people's agendas, he's not focused on ego, but rather on his mission. As he was talking, I could just picture him waiting in Zenlike tranquility for the long-overdue airplane to arrive, while his flying companions were standing in line, flailing and fuming at the ground crew.

It was exactly what I needed to hear: "I have a mission, not an agenda." So often when launching a new endeavor, we get caught up in the agenda of the day—or worse—someone *else's* agenda for us. We lose sight of our purpose. My friend's words served as an important reminder to all leaders to not get distracted by the details, but rather stay the course and focus on the mission—*your* mission! Circumstances must never trump contentment.

How Do You Know When You're Being Productive?

Do you stay productive while you're working toward your mission, or are you just busy? Watch out for this one, because it's an easy trap to fall into. Everybody likes to look busy. Some workers make a career out of it, while actually accomplishing very little in an average day. People zoom around the office, guzzling coffee and

stomping back and forth to the copier; they scatter paper across every inch of their desks and furiously clack away at their keyboards while they talk on the phone. Busy, busy, busy!

But motion isn't momentum; velocity doesn't equate to value; activity doesn't equal accomplishment; and rushing doesn't mean results. We all know what it's like to have a busy day but still feel like we accomplished little.

So be realistic. Set and achieve attainable goals. Everyday interruptions and the inevitable fires will still sidetrack you, but you'll be able to douse them. Having a plan will help you get back on track.

Do You Plan Your Day?

This means more than simply keeping track of your meetings and jotting down deadlines. Planning your time is about organizing your projects and long-term goals and managing your priorities. If you never look beyond your daily to-do list, it's easy to spend your day reacting to low-priority tasks without even realizing it. Sure, you'll probably go to each of your meetings and cross off a few items on your list; however, this is no guarantee that you're maximizing your productivity and making sure your daily activities are contributing toward your long-term objectives.

Take a few minutes each day to invest in longer-term planning. Double-check to make sure every meeting you attend advances your goals. Knock out your top priorities first and then chunk away at future projects.

It's easy to decide to spend time on a low-priority task in the heat of the moment. Let's face it: Fun, easy, low-stress tasks are tempting because they allow you to cross an item off of your list right away; we *all* know how good that feels. But resist this temptation. If you do the most unattractive but highest value task on your list first, you'll build momentum for the rest of your day.

Do You Have Written Goals?

And are you moving toward them? Your biggest professional and personal goals become your obsession and the object of your focus. They represent your career ambitions, your dreams for your family, or those for yourself. If somebody asked you about them, you'd

probably agree your big goals in life are your highest priorities. So why is it so easy to neglect them?

Our next promotion, our relationships with our kids, our physical fitness—whatever matters most—often gets pushed to the back burner. It's too easy for unimportant work to steal family time, for office frustrations to make you lose sight of career ambitions, or for exercise to be the entry on the list that always becomes secondary.

Grab a piece of paper and write down your goals for the next month, six months, and year. Then post this list where you can see it on a regular basis—near your computer monitor at work or on your bathroom mirror at home—so that it can act as a constant reminder of your true priorities. Make sure your goals are clearly written and post them with pride.

Productivity is about reaching high-value goals in every area of your life, often in the shortest amount of time (but not always—such as spending time with loved ones). It isn't about striking lines across a to-do list. Time-management techniques, electronic/paper planners, and other productivity aides are just *tools*, and they're only as useful as what they help you accomplish. Make sure your biggest, most important goals create the context for the other things you do throughout the days, weeks, and months.

Grab Your Dreams by the Horns and Get Going!

I wanted to use the first chapter to shake you up and remind you of why you're trying so hard in the first place. You have to know what makes you tick. What propels you toward your dreams and goals in the first place? Are you striving as hard as you should? Or have you gotten bogged down in day-to-day minutiae? This is a common problem with people who'd like to be more productive.

Your next step is to take responsibility for your life. If you're stuck in a particular situation, don't blame others for it. Step back and take a look at what you can change. Control your destiny and determine whether some of the things you're doing are keeping you from achieving your goals and dreams—and get rid of them if you can. Once you've done that, focus on your goals in laserlike fashion.