

# People Focus

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## Editor's Message

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Aurora Executive Solutions

In March this year we distributed an html version of this newsletter to some of our subscribers for comment. Most of the feedback has been good. This month, we are sending out another html version for further feedback. Please tell us what you think. Those of you who are only receiving the pdf version and would like to view the html version can email me. Now, coming back to this month's issue ...

We often find ourselves caught up with work, feeling stressed out and working long hours. Some of us even bring work home! Our friends and families may call us workaholics. Do you find yourself unproductive at work? Do you think you might be a workaholic? Why do you feel stressed?

In this issue of the **People Focus** newsletter, we share some insights into increasing productivity and some tips to minimize interruptions and stress.

The **People Focus** newsletter aims to provide informative articles and resources to organisations to help improve workplace performance and to individuals to develop their personal effectiveness in their career and life goals.

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## Increasing Personal Productivity

*The efficiency of technology only increases the pressure we feel to do even more than ever before.*

Often it seems we're so busy putting out daily fires that we don't ever get to accomplish anything of real significance - those things that would make us happiest in the long run. Life becomes something to "get through" instead of an exciting path to greater fulfillment.

The efficiency of technology only increases the pressure we feel to do even more than ever before. All of it leaves us feeling too busy and robbed of a sense of accomplishment. So what can we do to increase personal productivity? Below are some tips to help you to get more done in less time - and do what you really want to be doing.

### Mission Possible

Often busy-ness is a cover for not really knowing what's the best thing to be doing. To get around this, you have to know what your priorities are in the moment. To determine this you need know what your larger life priorities are.

Stephen R. Covey, best-selling author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, suggests writing a personal or organizational mission statement, a statement that summarizes your higher purpose and goals in life. Here's an example:

To create a balanced, healthy and value-driven life by creating nurturing relationships and guiding others to see their full potential through my work as a therapist.

Without a mission, you won't be able to say no to tasks. You can only know what to say no to when you know what to say yes to first.

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### Self-Motivate

We can learn all the self-management tricks in the book, but none of them will be worth a dime if we don't follow through and use them. That's where self-discipline comes in. There's no easy, painless way to enforce self-discipline, but if we don't utilize it, we will be left forever unfulfilled.

Brian Tracy, one of the world's top business speakers and author of 35 books on business and personal productivity, offers some very simple advice: Simply start *doing* what you know you need to do. Stop pushing it off for later. Once you start seeing the results active self-discipline yields, the desire for the payoff begins to become greater than your resistance to taking action.

To more easily promote successful self-discipline, Covey and Tracy suggest breaking down tasks into smaller chunks and then simply focusing on taking the first steps. This way, all your tasks and goals won't feel so overwhelming, which makes it easier to take action.

### Clean Up The Loose Ends

David Allen, author of *Ready for Anything*, points out how crises typically arise because secondary priorities have been neglected. He suggests working on unfinished tasks to open up your creativity. It's more difficult to focus on the bigger, more urgent tasks when you're painfully aware of ongoing but necessary projects that you never seem to start, such as reorganizing your files, catching up with your accounting, or updating your phone book.

So set aside some time - even if it's just an hour or two a week - to work on these longer term, but less urgent projects. Just don't let these tasks become distractions from working on the bigger picture goals.

### Shattering The Creativity/Organization Myth

Allen talks about how many people believe that if they're organized they can't be as creative. As if having too much structure limits one's artistic expression. But every form of art needs structure.

A painting or a photograph needs composition. Each individual scene in a screenplay needs to work with each other as a whole. The truth is your creative capacity actually expands when you give it structure. That's because when you're organized, you actually know what to do and how to do it - as opposed to having

all these wonderful, but unrealized, ideas bumping around in your head.

### Balancing Stress And Recovery

Top athletes around the world know the value of alternating periods of intense activity and focus with periods of rest. Balancing stress and recovery is also critical in managing personal energy - and thus, productivity - in all areas of our lives.

"Too much energy expenditure without sufficient recovery eventually leads to burnout and breakdown," write Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz in their book, *The Power of Full Engagement*. "Too much recovery without sufficient stress leads to atrophy and weakness. ... Full engagement requires cultivating a dynamic balance between the expenditure of energy (stress) and the renewal of energy (recovery) in all dimensions."

### Work When You're Supposed To Be Working!

If you want to maximize your productivity at work and balance it into the larger scheme of your life, focus is crucial. Tracy says the reason people's lives get out of balance is not because they have too much work to do, but because they do too little work. And he means they waste too much time when they're supposed to be working.

If you have to, turn off the phone and shut down your email. You'll find the more work you do get done, the better you feel - which motivates you to keep doing more of the same.

### And Some Quick Tips ...

- Write out your goals.
- Break down your goals into actions.
- Break down these actions into bite-sized chunks.
- Schedule these chunks into your planner.
- Follow through with action.
- NEVER give into the temptation to do the small things first just because they're small.
- Intersperse periods of intense work with periods of recovery, even if brief. ■

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## Protect Yourself From Interruptions

**Quick - without thinking about it for more than a few seconds, name your biggest time-management problem.**

Let me guess: Could it be continual interruptions? If so, you have lots of company. To assist you with this ongoing challenge, here are several techniques for controlling interruptions at work.

### Telephone

- Immediately after greeting a caller, ask, "What can I do for you?" (Not "How are you?"). After caller states his/her purpose, silently set a limit for the conversation and write this on a note you can see as you're talking.
- If a call you are making is answered by a machine, leave your entire message instead of only a request for a callback. Get callers used to specific callback hours with a message such as "Please call me back between 4 and 5.30 p.m. any day of the week."

### Office Visits

- Close your door part way. This is a very effective visit-deterrent that still communicates, "I'm available if needed."
- Before visitors sit down, stand up (to shake their hand, adjust blinds, etc), and then remain standing while you chat.
- Have a clock clearly visible.
- If practical, institute a closed-door policy for a maximum of two hours a day, preferably during your prime productivity period.

### Subordinate/Support Staff

- Ask subordinates who often interrupt to make lists of questions. When they have five or more, suggest that they leave them in your in-tray or on voice mail.
- Always give clear and complete instructions, together with this request: "I'd prefer you to take notes, because I find it cuts down on any questions later."
- Communicate positive expectations by saying things such as, "I know I can count on you to figure out how to do this with a minimum of direction from me." When subordinates go through a day or a project without interrupting you, comment

appreciatively.

### General

- When someone asks (in person or on the phone), "Got a minute?" You answer, "Just about that," or "I can give you five now or twenty later this afternoon." That way, you alert your interrupter at the start that you're on a tight schedule.
- Have your top goals for the week and month in plain view every day, to help you remember that indulging interrupters steals time from moving towards your goals.
- Create a reputation as someone who highly values time management and productivity. When people know you're time-conscious, they'll interrupt less.
- Ask for co-operation in keeping calls and meetings short.
- Don't be a frequent interrupter yourself. Many people will treat you the way you treat them. ■

## Do You Have Workaholic Habits?

***Workaholism is an addiction and like all addictions, it blocks creative energy.***

There is a clear difference between enthusiastic, energetic work toward a highly valued goal, and workaholism. That difference lies primarily in the emotional quality of the hours spent.

Workaholism has a treadmill, joyless quality, not the bouncy, fun energy of a trampoline. And while working long, hard hours may help you accomplish a primary work goal, it likely will leave other areas of your life - family, friendship, intellectual stimulation, etc. - in shambles.

"Workaholism is an addiction," Julia Cameron says in her book, *The Artist's Way*, "and like all addictions, it blocks creative energy." Take the following quiz, adapted from Cameron's book, to help you figure out if you have workaholic habits. Even better, ask a few members of your family, or a few friends, to answer these questions for you. You may be surprised by what you discover.

1. I work beyond normal office hours.
2. I cancel dates with friends or family members to do more work.
3. I postpone outings until my deadline project is done.
4. I take work with me on vacations.

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5. I take my laptop with me on vacations.
6. I take work home with me on weekends.
7. I rarely or never take vacations.
8. My family and/or friends complain that I always work.
9. I seldom allow myself free time between projects.
10. It's a challenge for me to finish tasks.
11. Procrastination often keeps me working longer.
12. I set out to do one job and start on three more at the same time.
13. I work in the evenings during family time or time I could be reading for pleasure.
14. I allow calls and email to interrupt - and lengthen - my workday.
15. I don't make time for creative work/play a priority in my day.
16. Work always comes before my creative dreams.
17. I always take calls on my cell phone; it is never off.
18. I rarely allow myself down time to do nothing.
19. I use the word "deadline" to describe and rationalize my workload.
20. I often take a notebook or my work numbers with me when I go somewhere, even to dinner.

If you answered more true than false, you may benefit from exploring your attachment to work. For people with workaholic tendencies, work is often synonymous with worth, so the more the better. Work can also be a way to avoid looking at issues in your life - "Who's got the time?" the workaholic asks. ■

## Top Ten Sources Of Stress

Ask people why they're stressed, and they're likely to say that it's these infernal deadlines or too much work and too little staff, or perhaps the family's overpacked schedules. And while these can certainly add to a pressure-cooker atmosphere, they're not really the greatest cause. At fault more than anything is the tremendous internal pressure and anxiety that we create for ourselves through the following:

- 1. Self-criticism.** Tame your inner critic, focus on your strengths and forgive yourself.
- 2. Powerlessness.** We are all powerful beyond measure. Open your eyes and see all the choices available to you.
- 3. Perfectionism.** Do your best, but let the elusive "perfect" go.
- 4. Worry.** Faith and action are the best antidotes to worry, especially about situations we cannot control.
- 5. Unrealistic expectations.** Life can never be problem-free. Our outlook can.
- 6. Insecurity.** What we need to be emotionally secure is inside each one of us. Stop looking to others to provide it.
- 7. Hurrying.** Try walking slower, chewing slower and working at a steady, but not frantic pace. You might be surprised to find yourself performing better.
- 8. Comparing to others.** The question should be whether you have met your own standard.
- 9. Pessimism.** When we expect the best from life, life has a way of handing it to us (even when it may first look like the worst).
- 10. Competition.** Try turning every encounter into a win-win situation rather than a win-lose one. ■

## About Us



**Lionel L Lim** is the founder of Aurora Executive Solutions (AES), a Human Talent Management and Development Solutions firm. He is a US-certified EQ trainer, a career and life coach, a People's Association approved trainer, and a licensed facilitator of the Profiles occupational assessments. Lionel is also an experienced facilitator of the EQ Map, the Emotional Intelligence Style Inventory, MBTI tools and the INSIGHT Inventory.

Lionel is a graduate of the University of South Australia with a BA in Communication and Media Management. He also holds a Diploma in Training and a Certificate in Counselling Skills. Lionel has a varied experience in executive search, communication, leadership, training, coaching and mentoring, as well as the effective management of teams in both local and overseas assignments.

Lionel is a professional member of the Asian Association of Career Management Professionals, the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Network, the Career Planning and Adult Development Network, the National Resume Writers' Association and the International Association of Coaches.

## Our Programmes

- **Hiring, Executive Selection & 360 Feedback Tools**
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- **Emotional Intelligence Development**
- **Career Coaching**
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