

## 7 Musts for Busy Executives

### 1. Measure results not activities



Sometimes we confuse the number of hours we work, affectionately called face time, with results. The problem is that *activity* becomes the focus not the *results*. Activity is also the usual excuse for not getting results, as in, “I was just too busy!” One Silicon Valley company I worked with had a culture of expecting employees to work long days and most weekends. Employees made the point of telling their boss, associates and anyone else who would listen how long it had been since they had seen their children awake. (I couldn’t make this stuff up.) That worked as long as stock options created the expectation of substantial wealth in the first few years of vesting. When the stock market tumbled, employees at all levels made a mass exodus. The company had confused results with how it was achieved. Success is always built on results, not activity.

*How many hours is the norm for your job?*

### 2. Manage your time and priorities

Ask yourself frequently, “Is this the best use of my time right now?” Since you are focused on what end results you want to achieve, it will help you to rethink the nice-to-do items that burn daylight. When others make requests, learn to say, “Let me check my schedule. When do you need to know?” It will give you time to evaluate how it fits with *your* goals and objectives. If it doesn’t, graciously say no.

A second key is to schedule your whole day and your whole life in *one* place. Put ordering a birthday cake right next to developing your strategic plan. When you schedule your personal commitments next to your business commitments, you can more easily keep them by telling others, “I already have an appointment.”



You don’t have to tell them this is time you have scheduled for yourself. One newly promoted VP told me, “After two months in the job, I realized others were running my schedule. So I made sure I scheduled what I wanted before my calendar was opened up to others.” A VP from Asia Pacific said, “I schedule my U.S. customer visits around concerts and events in their area. I feel energized to combine both business and pleasure.”

*What's the best use of your time, right now?*

### 3. Complete your communications

It is rare for anyone to be a totally gifted communicator. We simply assume others can fill in the gaps of what we have left unsaid. There are three questions that must be answered in all our communications.



- *The What*
- *The So What*
- *The Now What*

*The What* is communicating the subject. The *So What* is the impact of what you are discussing and why it is important. The *Now What* are the next steps or what actions you are expecting. Here's how I coached one executive to handle an employee performance issue using these guidelines:

- *The What*: "This meeting is to discuss concerns about your recent job performance."
- *The So What*: "There have been a number of errors in your work. One error required the client to recalculate their depreciation three times. The information you gave them was wrong which increased their work load and it has also created doubt about the other work you have done for them. As a senior accountant you are expected to have or find the technical expertise to provide accurate information to clients."
- *The Now What*: "My focus is to help you be successful. We are going to reassign you to a different account with smaller projects that can be more easily monitored. You will be accountable for the accuracy of your work. If you need assistance or are unsure about anything, then you need to tell me and we will work it out, OK? Now, what questions do you have?"

*What questions have you left unanswered?*

### 4. Nail down your resources



Don't take on responsibility without the authority to make it happen. Be clear that you have the resources and authority to actually do what you just said "yes" to. We do want to show our full range of skills and capability and agreeing to additional responsibility is a great way to do it. But too many of us take on responsibility after responsibility without added resources of budget, assistance or formal recognition of our new role. Along with your "yes" add, "I assume I will have a budget increase and the OK to hire a

temp. I would also appreciate it if you will tell the director that this is now my project.”

*What do you need to get the job done? Did you ask for it?*

## 5. Refuse to accept poor performance or attitudes

There is an interesting theory in criminology called the “Broken Window Theory”. It states that crime is the result of disorder. If a window is broken and left unrepaired, others walking by will conclude that no one cares and that no one is in charge. Soon more windows are broken sending signals to the street that anything goes. In cities, relatively small problems like graffiti, aggressive panhandling and public disorder become like broken windows inviting more serious crime. The same thing happens in a work environment. When you tolerate bad job performance or behavior you are telling other employees, “This is who we are, what our company stands for.” Your talented employees will not tolerate poor performance or attitudes from their peers. They have the choice to go somewhere else.



*Where are your broken windows?*

## 6. Create a support and feedback group



It is lonely at the top. Once we reach a certain rung on the corporate ladder few, if any, are willing to tell us that we have lost our minds or an idea needs a lot more work. Without honest feedback it is very easy to do stupid things and damage your career unknowingly. Gather others to you that you respect, who have the courage to tell you “no” and the compassion to support you when things get rough. You must be worthy of their feedback and support. You must appreciate their courage to tell you what you may not want to hear. Cherish this information. That means you listen, think about what they tell you and then decide your next steps.

*Who is coaching you?*

## 7. Keep your work-life and your real-life in balance

Energy and stamina is what it's all about. Being out of balance is like standing on one leg, it only works for a short time. Your body, mind and spirit are connected so treat them that way. You need sleep, exercise, nutrition, water and to stay centered.



- Sleep. That may mean something simple as learning the fine art of power napping. NASA research found that a 26 minute nap (*not 25 minutes*) improved performance by 34% and alertness by 100%. The Monroe Institute has a 30 minute Catnapper tape for \$14.95. I have used it for years to power nap when I needed to re-energize. (Available from [www.monroeinstitute.org](http://www.monroeinstitute.org))
- Exercise. Think of your blood as sludge if you don't. Take the stairs, walk 30 minutes a day. Schedule exercise times into your day. Ask for guidance at a gym or fitness center.
- Nourish your body. Eat live food and take vitamins. Live food means whole grains, whole wheat pasta, vegetables, fruits, nuts and legumes. It brings your cells energy and nutrition you need to think and move. Dead food is highly processed food with all of the building blocks you need removed. Foods like crackers, chips, soda, candy, fast food and pasteurized juices taste good but are only empty calories. Brightly colored fruits and vegetables offer the most nutrition to your body.
- Drink lots of water. It reduces stress and helps prevent fatigue. Without enough water your body will take it from a ready source, your bowels. The toxins from your bowels are then returned to your blood stream and your thinking becomes very muddy. Drink one half ounce of water for every pound of body weight. Space it throughout the day. Distilled or spring waters are better because of the chemicals that are used to treat the public water supply. Water from your local area is preferred over imported (and cheaper, too). Some bottlers use chlorine, so do your homework. Be aware that caffeine and alcohol cause dehydration.
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- Stay Centered. Each day, take 4-5 minutes and sit quietly in a place you will not be interrupted. If possible listen to the same piece of music, one that lifts your spirit. Breathe deeply with connected breaths (no stopping), with your mouth open or closed, for the first 90 seconds. The additional oxygen shifts your body chemistry and you will feel more relaxed. Affirmations are great way to start your day, "I am healthy, strong, successful and happy." Or ask a question and then just relax and allow your thoughts to flow freely. You can re-center yourself at any time with this technique of stopping and breathing.



*How's your balance?*

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**Kathleen Rich-New and Bob New** are the founders of **Clarity Works!** with the pragmatic and academic backgrounds to specialize in helping organizations improve communication and decision making. They are featured speakers at regional and national conferences. They are the authors of the widely-acclaimed *Looking for the Good Stuff...a guide to enjoying a appreciating life*; a non-technical introduction to Appreciative Inquiry. Contact: info@ClarityWorks.biz or (321) 452-7308  
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