

THE
PROFESSIONALS
COMPLETE
GUIDE TO



Leaving Your Laptop at Work

I

N THE SPRING OF 1992, IBM introduced the world to the ThinkPad portable ‘laptop. The world has never been the same. The good news is that we can now work almost anywhere at any time. The bad news is that we can now work almost anywhere at any time.

Ever since, millions of Americans have made bringing home work 5 days a week the new normal.

The downside to this behavior isn’t just more work, increased stress and less family time. The worst part of this 25 year trend is that our newfound ability to finish work at home has all but eliminated the need to stay focused and effectively prioritize during the work day.

The following proven strategies will help you increase your productivity at work so that you can leave your laptop at work and actually enjoy your free time.

“IF EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT, THEN NOTHING IS.”

– Patrick Lencioni

◆ CHANGE THE PARADIGM ◆



BELIEVE IT OR NOT, there once was a time that many smart people were absolutely certain that the earth was flat. Then, sometime between the 13th and 14th centuries, it became common knowledge that we live on a sphere and there was zero chance that you sail off the end of the planet into outer space.

This represented a significant paradigm shift.

You need to undergo a similar change in mindset if you're interested in learning how to leave your laptop at the office.

CURRENT PARADIGM

If I put in enough hours, I will complete all my open projects at home and at work.



NEW PARADIGM

No matter how many hours I work, I will never get completely caught up. There will always be more to do.

As soon as you realize that it's impossible to get everything done, you begin to filter all your daily activity through an extremely important filter. Instead of simply rushing from task to task, you will slow down and ask yourself an extremely important, and life altering question – Is this the most important project I need to complete right now.

In other words, you begin to prioritize. This shift in approach will help you to embrace all the strategies discussed below.

“IF YOU WANT SMALL CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE, WORK ON YOUR ATTITUDE. BUT IF YOU WANT BIG AND PRIMARY CHANGES, WORK ON YOUR PARADIGM.”

– **Stephen Covey**



◆ PLAN YOUR WEEK ◆



TELL ME IF THIS STORY sounds familiar.

You walk into the office on Monday morning, dive into your email and the next thing you look up and it's 4:40pm on Friday afternoon. Exhausted, you wonder – “What just happened?”

Like it or not, this is the world you live in today. You have more on your plate than you will ever be able to get done and you're drowning in a non-stop onslaught of information.

Faced with this new reality, your goal has very little to do with simply working hard. Now, it's absolutely critical that you allocate your time and energy towards the most important projects and as Patrick Lencioni pointed out – “If everything is important, nothing is important.”

For more than a decade, I've given professionals a very simple strategy for staying focused on what's most important – plan the week in advance.



Very few people follow this incredibly straightforward advice for 3 reasons:

1. Their week goes through massive changes, and it seems impossible to plan with so much uncertainty.
2. They don't have the discipline to complete a task that doesn't deliver immediate gratification.
3. They don't know how.

In response to these challenges, I've got a proven strategy for laying out a week that works every single time.



1. **Pick a Time** Set aside 15–20 minutes Sunday evening or Monday morning before you open email to plan.



2. **Select Categories** Group your activity into between 4 and 6 categories. For example, if you run a small business you might choose sales, clients, operations, accounting.



3. **Understand Capacity** Recognize that amount of “scheduled” time you will probably have in the upcoming week. If you're a Project Manager on a large construction project and your week is heavily influenced by weather, you may only have a few hours available that you can plan.

Sample Plan

Week of August 5, 2016

OPERATIONS

1. Complete analysis on purchasing the new equipment for the warehouse.

SALES

1. Review and submit proposals for the ABC and XYZ accounts.

STAFF/LEADERSHIP

1. Complete employee reviews for Steve and Beth.



4. **Choose your Tasks** Look at each category and ask yourself a simple question – What are the major projects (outside of the normal day to day stuff) that absolutely, positively must be completed by Friday at 5pm regardless of how crazy the week gets?



5. **Make it Easy** Most overachievers are overconfident on Monday morning and layout 137 hours worth of projects. Don't do this. Only include the most important items and give yourself a chance to win.



6. **Review and Revise** At the end of every week, look at what was accomplished and learn from the process so that you can more effectively plan in the future.



“GOOD FORTUNE IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN OPPORTUNITY MEETS WITH PLANNING.”

– Thomas Edison

♦ REDUCE DISTRACTIONS ♦

RESEARCH CLEARLY SHOWS that distractions are crushing productivity.

First, recognize that multi-tasking is a myth. You can't effectively do two things at once if one of those activities requires any concentration at all. For this reason, we should all put our phones in the trunk when we drive.



Next, understand that when you are working on something that requires your focus (which, if you're honest, is the majority of what you do), it takes your brain between 7 and 21 minutes to get back to the same level of concentration when you encounter even the slightest interruption. (In case you're wondering if I'm right, think back to how much you got done the last Saturday morning you came to the office, late night you worked, etc.)

There are 3 major distractions that you should work on reducing throughout your workday.



1. Humans Most people are social and as a result we enjoy interacting with one another. The problem is that every time someone engages in small talk, even if it's asking a simple question, it leads to a lapse of concentration that hurts productivity. Here's a few quick tips to help you reduce this distraction:



- *Shut your door* – If you have an office and you are in the middle of a project that requires your concentration, shut your door. I'm not suggesting that you keep it closed from 8am to 5pm, but if you have any desire to be productive you need to focus.
- *Use headphones* – If you're in the cubicle world or an open office environment, I suggest you wear headphones when you're in the middle of an important project that demands your complete attention (which most do).
- *Reset expectations* – If you're normally accessible to anyone every single minute of the day, this new behavior might seem a little rude to the guy in your office who wants to talk about his son the amazing football player. To keep them from getting their feelings hurt, just tell them that when your door is closed (or you're wearing headphones) you are in the middle of an extremely important project.



2. **Phone** Unless you're a receptionist or expecting an important call, there's absolutely no reason to answer a phone call (or text) when you're in the middle of a task requiring your focus. While I will admit there are exceptions, they are limited and believe it or not, your most important client will not fire you if you don't answer your phone every single time they call. Also, stop bringing your phone to meetings or lunch appointments.



3. **Email** This is the real killer. Research now shows that we're addicted to email because we love the little interruptions. I think the little brown envelope in the lower right-hand corner of your screen should be designed to look like a present because you get so excited when it pops up. Here's a few quick tips to help you reduce this distraction:



- *Turn it off* –When you're concentrating, your email should be off. Not simply minimized – off. No one (especially me) has the discipline to ignore the notification when a new message has arrived. I understand that you're worried that you'll miss that super important note and you'll lose your largest account or get fired. I promise this won't happen. I'm not suggesting you ignore email for the entire day, I'm simply encouraging you to get away from non-stop back and forth that is crushing your productivity.



- *Deal with it* – When you do check your email, deal with it quickly by deleting it, delegating it, addressing it (if it can be done in less than 5 minutes) or filing it. There's no reason to reread the same message 112 times a day and an Inbox with 379 messages just causes a truckload of unnecessary stress.

“YOU CAN'T DO BIG THINGS IF YOU'RE DISTRACTED
BY SMALL THINGS”

– Anonymous

✦ BLOCK YOUR SCHEDULE ✦

EVERY PROFESSIONAL on the planet has gotten to the end of the day or week, looked back and wondered why they couldn't find the time to get a handful of extremely important projects completed.



It happens.

In addition to the ideas discussed above, another great strategy for increasing your productivity and staying focused on what's important is to set aside certain times of the day/week to work on specific tasks. These are normally activities that take place on a regular basis. Here's a few guidelines to help you effectively implement this concept.



1. Start slow When I began coaching my clients through this concept I would have them detail their entire day from the moment they arose until their head hit the pillow at night. This never worked – not once. Instead, I recommend you give yourself a chance to be successful and start by setting aside 1 hour a day – that's it.



2. Understand your energy When you set aside that block of time, be mindful of the type of activity and your energy level. If you're not a morning person, I wouldn't schedule activity that requires you to be at your very best. Here's some of the popular items I've seen my clients block over the years:

- *Executive* – Daily planning, employee one on one meetings, reviewing financial information.
- *Salesperson* – Prospecting, updating CRM, research
- *Entrepreneur* – Accounting, prospecting
- *Everyone* – exercise, meditation, personal/professional development



3. Review and Revise Like your weekly plan, a block schedule will constantly evolve as you learn what works best for you. It's impossible for you to get it right the first time out. Mine continues to change after 14 years in practice.

“THE KEY IS NOT TO PRIORITIZE WHAT'S ON YOUR SCHEDULE, BUT TO SCHEDULE YOUR PRIORITIES.”

– Stephen Covey

◆ FORGIVE ◆

I CAN IMAGINE what you're thinking – These ideas are so simple, I will have no trouble changing my behavior and recognizing immediate benefits.

I wish it were that easy.

I've taught these concepts to thousands over the years and never, not one time, have I received the following type of email:



“CJ, I attended your time management workshop and it changed my life. I immediately implemented every concept you introduced and have yet to fall back into my bad habits.”

Changing these behaviors will be like playing tennis with the opposite arm or driving on the other side of the road – it takes time and you will fail.

When that happens, which it will, be compassionate with yourself, forgive the mistake and move on.

**“PERFECTION IS NOT ATTAINABLE, BUT IF WE CHASE
PERFECTION WE CAN CATCH EXCELLENCE”**

– Vince Lombardi