

# Productivity is a Team Sport

Time Management Isn't Just Personal

Everyone wrestles with time management challenges at one time or another. I have a library full of resources with “surefire” solutions to this ubiquitous problem. But what works great for some doesn't work for others. We're not all the same and personal time management starts with knowing ourselves. But that's a topic for another time.

Where most of these resources fall short is that they're all about “me”. How do I become more productive? Seems logical, but...

## My Success is Dependent on How I Lead Others

My foundational view of leadership is that it is *other-centric*. A leader's success comes from helping those they lead succeed. Tackling productivity as a team raises everyone's personal productivity, including mine.



## Team Productivity

Multiple factors play into why well-led teams increase all team members' productivity. For example, good teams clarify tasks, removing ambiguity-driven procrastination; high trust motivates teams to not let their teammates down; good leaders develop followers' skills, increasing their capabilities and productivity; and when teammates understand each other's priorities they can make good choices about whether an interruption is warranted or not. Today let's focus on these team-member initiated interruptions...

## Managing Interruptions

When you're doing focused work, even a 10 second interruption can create a 20-30-minute disruption. It takes time to get back into “the zone”. But short of reading your mind, how is an interrupter supposed to know when it's a good time to interrupt you?

## Simple Steps to Decrease Everyone's Interruptions

- **Talk About It** – Start an ongoing team dialog about how you're impacting each other's productivity – positively and negatively. Chances are you're impacting their productivity as much as they're impacting yours. You need to be available when you need each other. But you also need to learn to consider whether your current need is both urgent and important enough to justify a disruption to the other's performance. Sending a text may get the task off your plate, but you may have just pulled the other person out of “the zone” at a critical moment. Learn to use communication channels appropriate to the urgency and importance of the message.
- **Agree on Standards** – Define signals that indicate how safe it is to disrupt you. One office I worked in had a practice of putting a chain with magnets on the ends across cubicle openings to signal “do not disturb”. Agree that you'll only call when a response is needed immediately, otherwise schedule a call if something needs discussed. Use text messages only when a response is needed within the hour, otherwise send an email. Agree on how many times a day you'll check email, and turn it off the rest of the time. Set shared blocks of “Do Not Disturb” time. Whatever standards work for your team, document them and agree to them. Team members – including YOU – should give each other permission to question interruptions that seem inappropriate.

## Sacrifice for the Common Good

Like other team members, we as leaders should be willing to sacrifice our personal productivity to increase organizational productivity. But doing that appropriately requires clear priorities, good communication, and agreed upon methods that help us help each other.