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Doing the Right Things Right

How the Effective Executive Spends Time

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

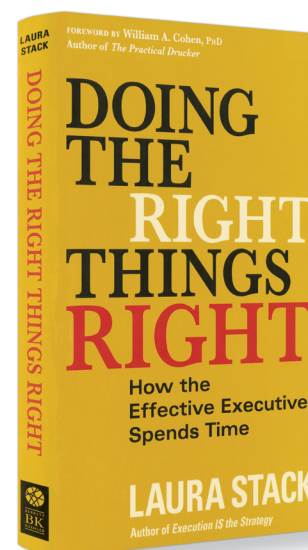
Inspired by Peter Drucker's groundbreaking book *The Effective Executive*, Laura Stack details precisely how 21st-century leaders and managers can obtain profitable, productive results by managing the intersection of two critical values: effectiveness and efficiency.

Effectiveness, Stack says in *Doing the Right Things Right*, is identifying and achieving the best objectives for your organization — doing the right things. Efficiency is accomplishing them with the least amount of time, effort and cost — doing things right. If you're not clear on both, you're wasting your time. As Drucker put it, "There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

Stack's 3T Leadership offers 12 practices that will enable executives to be effective and efficient, grouped into three areas where leaders spend their time: Strategic Thinking, Teamwork and Tactics. With her expert advice, *Doing the Right Things Right* will give you scores of new ideas on how you, your team and your organization can boost productivity.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The 12 practices to be both effective and efficient.
- The three activities that help you make sense of the 12 practices.
- Why executives have evolved from being bosses to team members in recent decades.
- Strategies to communicate better and motivate your team.
- How to use technology to make you more efficient, rather than letting it overwhelm you.



by Laura Stack

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

by Laura Stack

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Introduction

In *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker provides what he promises in the subtitle: a definitive guide to getting the right things done, complete with all the things an effective executive must do to help keep his or her organization afloat. He explains the “why” and the “what to do” in a superlative manner — as always. If the book has a flaw, however, it’s in not examining the “how.”

How does the modern executive — a somewhat different animal from the executive Drucker defined in 1967 — do the job both effectively and efficiently? How does the executive at any level mine that intersection of effectiveness and efficiency to get the right things done right?

In business, effectiveness is summed up by “doing the right things.” Efficiency is summed up by “doing things right.” When effectiveness lacks efficiency, it’s often unproductive. A task that should take four months to complete can end up taking fourteen. Additionally, efficiency without effectiveness can go devastatingly wrong. It doesn’t matter how well your team climbs Mount Everest if your intention was to climb the Matterhorn.

To be both effective and efficient, today’s leaders should follow 12 practices: goals, change, communication, decision-making, environment, performance, motivation, growth, value, technology, agility and balance. These 12 practices, which supplement Drucker’s work, describe how to do the right things the right way. They are up to speed for our modern times, where flexibility, agility and on-the-spot, in-the-moment execution rule.

In addition, what leaders actually “do” during the day and where they spend their time can be grouped into three leadership activities called the “3T Leadership” roles. These three activities (Strategic Thinking, Team Focus

and Tactical Work) also describe the three parts below. As shorthand, these 3Ts are referred to as THINK, TEAM and TACTICS. The 3Ts are the chief time management roles for leaders:

- **Strategic Thinking:** Acting as the organizational strategist who focuses on business goals.
- **Team Focus:** Serving as the conscientious leader who focuses on employee productivity.
- **Tactical Work:** Being the productive performer who focuses on task completion.

Each of the 12 practices for doing the right things belongs to one of the 3T categories. In general, as an executive moves up the leadership ladder, the percentage of time spent in each category tends to shift, becoming less tactical and more strategic. ●

PART I: STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic thinking boils down to one simple question: *What is the desired outcome?* The answer to that question helps an executive drive organizational strategy through various ways to maximize results in minimal time, maintain a bird’s-eye view of the big picture and ensure the team aligns its goals with those of the organization.

Your goals tie together all the disparate members of a team as well as the strategies that apply both individually and collectively. By its very nature, strategic thinking requires you to learn to make the best decisions you can as quickly as possible, boosting innovation and flexibility, helping your team adapt to circumstances as they change. Just as importantly, you have to be able to communicate those adaptations to all involved. Like the captain of a ship, you should always consult with your officers before



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making a decision, taking their viewpoints and suggestions into account. But the decisions are ultimately yours, and you must make them. Once you've made a decision, you and your team have to execute immediately — on the spot if necessary. ●

Goals

Align Strategy and Objectives

Strategy tends to fall into place more easily when it's built on mission, vision and values — which, in turn, makes it easier to determine corresponding goals and tactics. Effective leaders hitch themselves to the organization's star and align team and personal goals with the organization's. Then they determine the most efficient ways to advance together.

Some of your team members will have a better understanding of goal-setting than others, so it's up to you to make sure they all stay on the same wavelength. Here's how:

- 1. Start with individual team members.** You'll find it easier to establish team goals if individual members also have personal goals to reach for. As you learn your team members' personal and professional development goals, help them find ways to weave those goals into the general goal-fabric of both team and organization.
- 2. Set reasonable goals.** Whether it involves finishing a particular project or improving overall performance, provide your team with reasonable goals that include time-based milestones and objectives.
- 3. Ensure a supportive, productive working environment.** Invite open discussion and sharing of resources. Continually ask people how they think productivity can be improved.
- 4. Clear the way to the target — and give your team something to shoot for.** As the leader, you're also a facilitator. You not only have to clarify what the goals are and how to get there, but you'll also need to help blaze a trail.
- 5. Track your team's productivity, and provide meaningful feedback.** You can't manage what you can't measure. Keep an eye on your team deliverables and overall production using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), timesheet software or scoreboard programs such as Kaptasystems.com or i-nexus.com. ●

Change

Embrace Innovation and Adaptability

Modern leadership involves more than just telling people what to do. Because you're responsible for helping the company stay profitable, you have no choice but to embrace change. Change has become essential to the continued growth and development of global business. It stirs things up, cross-fertilizing ideas and aerating the waters of creativity. You can't afford complacency, because some hungry young company will always be pushing the envelope and trying to steal part of your market share.

Innovation provokes changes that must occur for us to move forward. It can be tricky, but there are ways to handle innovation so you can advance your agenda without having the situation blow up in your face. For example, don't try to act on all your ideas at once. Don't let history hold you back, either. Just because something didn't work before doesn't mean it won't work now. Also, don't assume the experts are right. Even experts sometimes get it wrong.

Today's leaders should adopt these six change management methods:

- 1. Employ enhanced flexibility.** Instead of trying to meet requirements that no longer match reality, be open to modifying the scope and direction of projects as you move forward.
- 2. Aim for controlled growth.** As we move into a business landscape that has been decimated by recent economic troubles, we must take care not to expand too far, too fast. Take time when you need it so you can consolidate your gains.
- 3. Consider calculated abandonment.** In the spirit of controlled growth, you may need to help your people adjust to changes that result when company leaders decide to cut losses by selling off or abandoning underperforming projects, markets or locations.
- 4. Constantly upgrade your technology.** Given how fast technology advances, the stuff you were using last year might be given away in cereal boxes next year.
- 5. Retune your team's activities regularly.** While you rarely want to micromanage, check in with your people regularly to make sure they're in tune — not only with the team but with the organization.
- 6. Evolve with society.** No matter how much you love the product you make or service you provide,

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it can become obsolete overnight as society changes. You may have to change just to stay relevant, so be willing to reconsider your branding and reinvent yourself occasionally. ●

Jump on the phone or meet face-to-face instead of sending a volley of email. ●

Communication

Share Mission, Vision and Ideas

Effective communication sets profitable, productive organizations apart from the duds. It can take many forms, but the factors that work best are plain talk, honesty and cooperation. Your communication must be simple and straightforward, especially when conveying the organization's mission to employees.

To ensure your team members do their work correctly the first time, communicate your expectations clearly and concisely. Follow these three rules:

1. Repeatedly communicate your expectations.
2. Triple check for understanding.
3. Communicate in multiple ways.

Promoting Your Vision

Clear communication is important in all directions, upward and laterally as well as downward. People who rise to a management level are often competent and strong willed, so you might find yourself at odds with another peer leader or with your own superior. When you're at loggerheads with someone for any reason, you'll want to find the most efficient way to resolve the issue quickly. Here's how you can argue your point productively, so everyone can move quickly through the dispute phase and get back to work.

Get all your ducks in a row. Prepare your arguments, and have your facts straight. Probe them for weaknesses, so you can strengthen your position. Run your thoughts by neutral people, and ask them to shoot holes in your argument.

Disagree early, clearly and politely. Remain open to others' points, but make your position clear. Be simple, to the point and specific about your concerns. Don't dispute an argument in general terms; always use specific examples to refute it. Don't use sarcasm or name-calling.

Consider the opposing argument. Others in a dispute may have several good points, in which case you can integrate those points into your decision-making process and hammer out a compromise.

Keep the lines of communication open. You can't work something out if you won't talk to one another.

Decision-Making

Resolve and Execute Decisions Promptly

Too often, indecision rules in the workplace, because decision-makers fear making mistakes. Yet the occasional mistake is the price of effective decision-making. It's better to take a wrong turn than no turn at all. You can always change direction to correct an error or to meet a new threat or opportunity head-on.

Test your choices against these imperatives:

Core values, mission and vision. If you're in alignment with your organization's core values, some decisions will come surprisingly easily. Ditto for mission and vision.

Outcome. Follow the decision to its logical conclusion. Can you see danger lurking somewhere down that path? Does one possible outcome satisfy you more than the others? What contingency plans can you put into place?

Return on investment (ROI). This is crucial for most businesses. Will your decision make your company more money than it spends? Include all the factors you can think of, and remember, it's what happens in the long run that counts.

Opportunity cost. Every choice you make closes other doors. If you decide to do something, what will it keep you from doing in the future? Is what you skip worth missing out on? What other trade-offs will you face?

Efficient use of time and resources. Will this decision slow workflow and efficiency in your organization? If so, you'd better choose "tails," unless some other benefit offsets the wasted resources.

Execute Decisions and Move Forward

Once you've made the decision, execute! When it comes to productivity and success, execution trumps all. The ability to make ideas happen means the difference between success and failure, so sometimes you have to set a hard line and be the boss. That means, among other things, stop accepting excuses, set strict deadlines, don't overcomplicate things, hone the team's skills and help them structure their time. ●

PART II: TEAM FOCUS

Effective, efficient executives take responsibility for the return on investment (ROI) their teams generate,

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because doing so benefits the entire organization. Getting discretionary effort from team members begins with genuine concern for them and their lives — an approach that previous generations of executives might have found a little too touchy-feely for their liking. Some still do. But during the past generation or so, something unusual has happened: executives have evolved from being bosses to being team members. Oh, they're still in charge, but smart leaders realize they get further by forming partnerships with their employees. Business has always been a collaborative endeavor, and today it must become even more so to facilitate efficient execution and greater productivity. ●

Environment

Build an Open Team Culture

Most of how your team culture develops boils down to what you do as a leader. The easier you make it for your team to excel, the more likely it will. Remove the obstacles to your team's success. Encourage teamwork, empower everyone and emphasize accountability. Root out any internal limitations.

Business is becoming more complicated, competitive and unpredictable by the day. Those in leadership positions must be constantly aware of this reality, because the decisions made affect the lives and careers of everyone on the team and sometimes influence the fate of the entire organization.

Organizations often grow top-heavy because leaders won't let go of old responsibilities when they take on new ones — even when the old ones are money pits. Aside from an unwillingness to abandon unworkable initiatives, leaders create unnecessary complexity when they

- Overthink business situations.
- Overengineer products and services.
- Lose focus on what truly matters.
- Avoid handling important issues.
- Repeatedly reinvent the process “wheel.”
- Aimlessly chase unclear goals.
- Fear that simplifying means eliminating jobs.

Here are four tools to use to simplify your life.

1. **Streamline workflow processes.** Constantly tweak your workflow by trying new things, clearing your team's path, slashing bureaucracy, replacing broken and underperforming “parts” and occasionally overhauling the whole work engine if necessary.

2. **Apply simple rules to business situations.**

Cleaning up your processes accelerates business wonderfully, resulting in greater simplicity and greater profits.

3. **Cut unnecessary positions.** Simplifying may mean you no longer need as many people to do the job as you once did. Decrease head count through transfers, attrition, retirement and lateral promotions.

4. **Include a sunset clause for all projects and initiatives.** Make the end of an endeavor part of its natural life cycle. Plan for that ending, and when it comes time to shut down, do so — unless there's an overriding reason to continue.

As you build and refine team culture, you'll consistently have trouble challenging your best and brightest enough to keep them engaged with their work.

What they really need is purpose: a chance to excel at something that matters. Give them the opportunity to prove they can excel. Here's how:

- Touch base regularly with your top employees, allowing them open access to you.
- Offer them tasks with a real chance of failure.
- Keep them busy. Pile your employee's plates full of a variety of tasks, so when one gets boring, they can jump to another.
- Help them fall in love with the process of marketing, coding, writing, speaking or whatever their job entails, and they'll never be bored. ●

Performance

Forge a Results-Oriented Team

In today's sped-up business environment, style is less likely than ever to triumph over substance. Results — not just staying busy — define productivity, while acting as a benchmark for new efforts. And producing results is at the heart of what it means to be efficient and effective. Move forward with positive energy, developing the talents of your team members so you'll inevitably enhance performance.

No matter how well you run your own team, you'll have weaknesses that can undermine your strengths if you're not careful. Maximize strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses, but at the same time, you should know your weaknesses so you can work around them — and root them out whenever possible. Follow this process:

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Conduct a classic SWOT analysis. List your team's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Dig deeper than the obvious, and consider your options thoroughly.

Consult your team. As a leader, you may have different ideas of what constitutes a weakness than your team does, so ask your people to contribute their ideas.

Audit the big picture. Don't ignore the big picture in favor of minor issues or get caught up in the daily minutiae, even briefly. Look around often. Make sure an unexpected change or threat doesn't run you down.

Respond well to feedback. Don't blow off criticisms, constructive or otherwise, especially when they come from within. Rather, invite them.

Look at everything. Weaknesses are not necessarily obvious; they might not even look like weaknesses at first.

Once you've conducted your SWOT exercise and examined team performance, you may find you have little or nothing to worry about. But that doesn't mean you can rest on your laurels. Note not only where you are and where you've been but where you want to be in the near future. ●

Motivation

Harness Creativity and Loyalty

What can you do to motivate your employees? Helping them help themselves by devoting themselves more fully to their careers is a win/win situation. There's no altruism here: fully engaged employees, who are passionate about their work, keep team and organizational performance trending steadily upward.

Truth is, you can't really motivate people to do anything; they have to motivate themselves. But you can provide incentives and an environment people find motivating, so they're inspired to contribute their discretionary efforts. It's as easy as ABC and DEF:

A = Analyze. Everyone's different, so determine what each person wants in return for extra discretionary effort. Give them all the opportunity to profit when the company does. For example, offer flexible scheduling, raises, bonuses, conference attendance, part-time telecommuting, certificates or pats on the back — whatever it takes.

B = Balance. Your team members need a good work/life balance to remain productive. Make sure everyone gets the rest and the breaks they need — from daily coffee to their annual vacations — and they'll take care of you.

C = Communicate. Explain what you need everyone to do and why — clearly, plainly and honestly. Keep the lines open for whenever a team member needs assistance.

D = Direction. You'll see better results when you strategically align individual and team goals with their organizational counterparts.

E = Expect. Let your people know what you expect from them as unambiguously as possible. But if someone discovers a better way of getting from here to there, let them take it — as long as it's ethical and legal.

F = Facilitate. When your team sees you out there fighting for them by providing the assistance they need to improve, they can't help but want to do their best for you.

Allowing your team to unleash their creativity on your collective business problems is also an excellent way to motivate them to donate their discretionary effort to the organization. To combine creativity with your work processes, set aside time for creativity, study other disciplines, listen to your team's ideas and advice, and don't punish failure. ●

Growth

Emphasize Continuous Improvement

Once you've built and shaped your team members into a vehicle for true productivity, focus on finding ways to optimize their performance through further growth. Effective, efficient execution is not a fixed destination; it is a moving target that can only be hit consistently if you and your team are seeking ways to constantly improve.

Growing together as a team and growing to become a team creates cohesion — with individual team members interlocking smoothly into one efficient entity. A mature team develops features that naturally boost productivity. You can facilitate this process and avoid problems by understanding not only how *you* think but also how your team members think.

Among other things, a quality leader accepts both credit and blame when it's due. Leaders act on constructive criticism without overreacting to the pain that accompanies it, because they know it can offer insight into where growth is needed.

Growth occurs on all levels in an organization — or at least it should. While you have to center growth on your team to best benefit the organization, individual growth at the leadership level and cross-team development also affect team growth.

No matter where you stand in an organization, you can always improve your game. Practice these tips for accepting and acting on constructive criticism: listen more and talk less, ask for specifics (an example or suggestions for what to do about it), take corrective action and follow up. ●

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PART III: TACTICAL WORK

Truly successful executives are those who can thoroughly mine the intersection of efficiency and effectiveness to maximize their value and that of their team's whether that team is a small group or an entire division, department or organization. Recall that effectiveness is doing the right things; efficiency is doing things right. Doing the right things right are the tactics by which you get things done and achieve strategic execution at the right time in the right place. ●

Value

Focus on High-Impact Activities

We know that time management determines how well we manage not only our own operational, day-to-day responsibilities but that of our teams as well — and most of us do try to make sure we handle it in a manner that's both efficient and effective. Your best formula for both personal and team success is to make a serious effort to consistently value your time.

To do the best job possible, value your time both realistically and highly. Depending on your leadership position, your value to the organization may be thousands of dollars per hour. Once you've pinned down the value of your time, use these tips as you move forward:

Delegate your authority and tasks as widely as possible, to capable people who can do certain things better than you can. Retain the few high-priority, high-value tasks only you can do most profitably.

Avoid false economy. If what you're doing costs more in terms of the value of your time than it's worth, stop doing it.

Cracking the Whip on Time-Wasters

You've no doubt learned how to apply self-discipline, or you wouldn't have made it as far as you have in your career. Now apply that discipline to your team to ensure they aren't wasting valuable time either. Clarify goals and review them at regular intervals. Also clarify the organizational environment your team works in, explaining to team members precisely what you'll accept, what you won't and what's explicitly against the rules. Make it clear that, while you don't intend to be punitive (unless something goes badly wrong), you expect people to accept responsibility for everything they do, regardless of the

outcome — yourself included. Act as a role model and follow company policy. Don't expect the team to do what you say rather than what you do; the real world doesn't work that way. ●

Technology

Master Data Handling and Workflow

How executives organize their personal work matters more now than it ever has. Things as simple as efficient time management, organization and email processing help you save time and sharpen the knife of effectiveness.

Technology has been a blessing in this regard, but it's a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it's helped make modern workers more productive. Conversely, technology can be tyrannical. Not only do you risk Schlimmbesserung (the effort to make something better that actually makes it worse), it sometimes makes it easier for others to steal proprietary information. You may also become trapped by your technology, unable to survive without it.

Reducing Your Information Intake

The only way to overcome “infobesity” is to triage mercilessly, then reduce the amount you take in forever. Keep these tips in mind as you work toward stemming the info-tide.

- Limit your exposure to external information at work.
- Check your email as little as possible.
- Employ the right means of communication. Carefully select the most efficient means of communication for each issue.
- Maximize reading time. Adopt a speed-reading system, or carry around material for downtime reading in your briefcase.

Pioneer New Technology

New technology can have its dangers. Improperly implemented, it can slow or stop productivity. Additionally, inexperienced or malicious users can leave backdoors open for hackers and identity thieves to waltz right in and steal or corrupt data. So before you dive in, dip a toe in the waters first. Before you take the plunge with new technology, study its impact. Will the new technology really upgrade productivity? Calculate the costs, and include an exit strategy. Test the new technology to make sure it does all it promises — and don't hesitate to roll back to your old tech if it doesn't. ●

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Agility

Maximize Speed and Flexibility

Effective, efficient execution demands agility. Agility means responding to change of any kind with speed and flexibility, whether it's a new client demand or a paradigm shift. Handling new challenges on the fly, swerving onto a new course, stopping suddenly and reversing direction — it's all in a day's work for the modern business professional.

Given today's go-go-go approach to modern business, agility is applicable to most fields. A flexible model breaks a project into manageable pieces, all with independent milestones, due dates and testing phases that team members can handle independently if necessary. That way, when a delay occurs in one area, it doesn't stop the entire project dead in its tracks. Take these actions the next time you assign your team a new project:

Examine it carefully from all angles. Focus on the needs and requirements first. Think about where and how you can split the project into discrete pieces that particular team members or subteams can handle.

Cut the diamond. You can easily “part out” some projects, but you will have to deal with others more carefully, much like cutting a diamond. Once you've determined you can split the project into pieces, do so. Hand the pieces out to the people best suited for them, complete with their own specific milestones and deadlines.

Build in flexibility. A project built from many independent parts is naturally more flexible than a sequential project. It more easily absorbs the need for changes, additional testing and new features as they arise. You can also implement feedback more quickly.

Put it back together. As sections of the project come in, slide them in place, leaving space for the later bits to allow greater flexibility in terms of responding to customer and market needs. This requires careful planning and preparation, perhaps more so than traditional project management.

Also, if you want your team, division, department or company to truly improve, you have to hire for versatility, not indispensability. If someone is indispensable, then you can't replace them. If you can't replace them, the team can't advance without them. So if that person dies, leaves or even takes a vacation and forgets to leave the keys to the filing cabinet (metaphorically speaking), the team is unable to move forward. Instead, make sure your teammates are somewhat interchangeable, so you can maintain your productivity no matter what. ●

Balance

Sustain Your Physical and Mental Health

In order to be an effective, efficient leader, you have to take care of yourself at least as well as you take care of your team, by maintaining balance in your life. We certainly know we do better, more productive work when we feel well. And yet many of us get stuck in a vicious cycle. When we work long hours and run short on time, we cut into our precious free time — the time when we would do the things that keep us healthy: exercise, sleep, eat and drink properly and have fun.

Good health doesn't automatically produce productivity, but it prepares you for it. You can't control all the factors contributing to good health, but you can control most of them.

The Big Five (sleep, eating well, hydration, exercise and mental health) are inextricably interrelated: sleep impacts weight as well as mental health, as do exercise and good diet; too much weight from poor diet and lack of exercise can contribute to self-esteem issues; happiness can convince you to take better care of yourself ... you get the picture. Strive to get each of these factors under control, and your productivity will scale upward.

Working hard and doing your job well are important. That said, you shouldn't live to work. Instead, you need to regain control of your productivity so you can get out of the office on time — not only to recharge and recapture your mental edge but also to devote time to the people you care about and who care about you.

These days, it's not enough for an executive to do the right things; he or she has to be superbly efficient, too. As executives, we must manage this intersection of efficiency and effectiveness carefully to ensure we do the right things right, wasting as little time as possible in the process. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Doing the Right Things Right*, you'll also like:

1. **5 Gears** by Steve Cockram, Jeremie Kubicek. Kubicek and Cockram describe five gears that represent different modes of effectively connecting with others and balancing work and life in a productive way.
2. **The 5 Choices** by Adam Merrill, Leena Rinne, Kory Kogon. The authors present insights from FranklinCovey to redefine time management in ways that will increase the productivity of individuals, teams and organizations.
3. **Brief** by Joseph McCormack. McCormack offers a step-by-step approach to getting to the point quickly and delivering every message with maximum impact.