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→ STRATEGIES TO *UNLEASH* YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

What does it *actually* mean to be productive?

Today's work environment has shifted over the past few years and, for many, returning to 'how things have always been done' feels irrelevant. Now, more than ever, productivity is measured by results, however and wherever the work takes place.

Productivity can soar for a hybrid workforce—the key is to learn how to equip your team and leverage their productivity to maximize results while maintaining momentum to reach organizational goals.

Let's get started!

PRODUCTIVITY REDEFINED

Productivity is how employees—whether in-office, remote or hybrid—are assessed as to their efficiency in the performance of their jobs.

How you choose to measure this will depend upon the job requirements and industry but generally, it's based on the output of the employee within a specified period of time. Often, an employee's productivity is evaluated based on a related average of employees performing similar work.

Simply, productivity increases the overall efficiency of an organization. Typically, this reflects that all resources are being leveraged for optimum performance levels. In business, increases in product output will result in lower overhead and, in turn, provide a higher profit. Conversely, when productivity is overlooked, the result is often higher costs for production and reduced profits.

What does this mean for profit?

Focusing on productivity—rather than solely profits and revenues—often results in a more successful company. The gravity of this should never be ignored. While the main goal of a successful business is profitability, productivity extends beyond that. If tasks are completed as efficiently as possible, payroll will decrease, employee morale will increase, and customers will recognize—and appreciate—that your company is well-structured.

So, how and where do you, as a business leader, establish productivity within your company?

The first place to look is right under your nose.

WHAT YOUR DESK SAYS ABOUT YOUR STATE OF MIND

As successful leaders, you want to feel like you have everything together—and know what your personal and professional goals are while leveraging to-do lists, project management software, and other organizational tools.

But, how many of you organize your desks, cars, and offices similarly to your task lists? Dave Ramsey once

said, “Your physical desktop represents the organizational condition of your mind and maybe even indicates the organizational condition of your whole company.”

Having read that—and nervously assessed your desk as you did—what message do you think your desk conveys? Every day you’re inundated by incoming projects and tasks. If you’re not good at delegating and organizing, it can become overwhelming—and you may lose control of your workspace.

Simply, your desk represents your state of mind. Maybe you’re running to tasks and projects reactively, instead of being intentional and proactive about effective processes and long-term project goals. Granted, there are certain things you likely need (and want) at your desk: a computer, headphones, pen and paper, etc.

If your workspace is feeling cluttered and contributing to the chaos surrounding your productivity levels, it’s time for a clean sweep. We suggest:

- ✓ Dedicate five minutes at the end of each day to cleaning your desk
- ✓ Don’t leave any dishes, cups or wrappers overnight
- ✓ Leave only essential items out
- ✓ Keep a planner accessible
- ✓ Have—and use—trash and recycling bins
- ✓ Keep it simple
- ✓ Put away everything when you’re done using it
- ✓ Use a whiteboard
- ✓ And last—but certainly not least —delegate when needed

HOW YOU’RE WASTING 70-PERCENT OF YOUR WORKDAY ENERGY

Whether you lead a team of high performers or you’re the high-performer in question, there’s a good chance you’re spending too much time on tasks that could easily be delegated.

That’s what venture capitalist and former CEO of three companies, Bill Trenchard, shared with Inc. magazine in [this article](#). His time spent with dozens of CEOs showed that a full 70 percent of their time was spent on what he called, ‘sub-optimal’ activities.

However, he did find a few superstar time managers among his coaching clients and found that those leaders did the same things consistently. We’ve experienced these same techniques getting used in combination with the services of a virtual executive assistant—to completely alter how business leaders spend their days and set their organizations on a path toward increased productivity and results.

What do these leaders do consistently?



EMAIL TEMPLATES

Turning over your inbox, at least in part, to a virtual assistant will free nearly six hours on average every day, without sacrificing timely responses. Work with your virtual assistant to determine the most common requests and craft templates your assistant can send on your behalf. Some of the most important responses will be to decline a request for your time and involvement. A well-worded response in an email template, and an in-depth discussion with your virtual assistant about which requests you want to accept, will prevent you from spending unnecessary hours involved in a project.



EMAIL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Leaders who optimize their workdays have a strategy for managing their email. Hint: It's not monitoring an inbox all day, every day. Effective leaders check their inboxes two to four times a day, and leaders who've handed off their email management to an assistant report that it revolutionized their workdays.



PLAYBOOKS

Leaders shouldn't spend their time writing step-by-step instructional manuals. If there's an activity you find yourself doing more than three times and it's not something that only you can do, such as strategic planning, business development, and similar—then someone else should take on this responsibility. Dedicate time to documenting how you accomplish these tasks and hand that document—along with the responsibility for results—to someone else.

WHAT, EXACTLY, IS KEEPING YOU FROM BEING PRODUCTIVE?

The Dangers of Multitasking

We have been indoctrinated with the belief that multitasking is the only 'tasking.' However, multitasking may cause more harm than good—especially if you're bad at it.

Multitasking requires the ability to focus on the execution of multiple things at once—and the human brain is simply not wired to do that. Consider the cognitive science findings of [David Meyer](#), Director of the [Brain, Cognition & Action Library](#) at the University of Michigan:

- ✗ "You can't do two cognitively complicated tasks at once."
- ✗ "Too much access to the cerebral grid shuts down critical thinking."
- ✗ "Multitasking is...very often highly inefficient and could be dangerous to your health."
- ✗ "The conflicts triggered by incessant multitasking can set off chronic stress and slow you down."
- ✗ "Even the most adept multi-tasker will crash and burn trying to resolve simultaneous conflicting demands."
- ✗ "If you're disciplined enough, you can map out the usage of your time in a way that minimizes your exposure to interruptions."

Create a Zero-Tolerance List

What can you stop doing to devote more time and focus on the goals you've set? Here's a possible list:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 Social media | 4 Instant email replies |
| 2 Texting | 5 Reading/watching news sites |
| 3 Streaming services | 6 Badges or notifications on your phone |

It's easy to lose yourself and your daily momentum with distractions. So, place them on your Zero-Tolerance List.

Now that you've listed what you should stop doing, let's move to how you can start accomplishing more.

5 SIMPLE PRODUCTIVITY STEPS

Executives, team leaders, and individual contributors of any company can benefit from these practices.

If you want a simple solution to complete tasks in a relatively short period of time, follow these five steps:

1 Decide how long you will work.

Don't plan based on, *"I'll work as long as I can,"* or *"I'll work as long as I feel productive."* Set a specific length of time and stick to it.

2 Tell everyone your plan.

Communicate your plan to everyone who needs to know. Interruptions are productivity killers so eliminate them as best possible.

3 Start early.

Have you ever taken a long car trip for a vacation and left really early in the morning? Those first few hours on the road fly by because you've stepped outside your norm. The same idea applies to work.

4 Take productive breaks, not rest breaks.

Momentum is everything. Don't take a walk, watch TV, or scroll mindlessly. You'll need breaks, but breaks should not compete with your desire to accomplish your goals.

5 Don't quit until you're done, even if finishing takes longer than expected.

Stopping short is habit-forming. There's a significant difference between a starter and an executor.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO SAVE YOU MORE TIME

At [BELAY](#), we work with organizations of all sizes across the U.S. and Canada and see countless business leaders who could benefit from more productive time management skills. Over the years, we have noticed interesting habits that waste time and kill productivity.

Four Tips to Save Valuable Time

1 Invest the extra time upfront to teach someone else how to help you.

Set aside 30 minutes to train an assistant on how to do something you do in 15 minutes every week. It's worth it in the long run.

2 Don't be afraid to ask for help.

If someone is hired or has volunteered to assist you, they want to be able to help. Delegate dinner reservations with clients, booking travel, or meeting notes. If it will free you up to do what only you can do, it's always worth asking.

3 Set proper expectations.

You set everyone up for success when you set expectations upfront. Communicate deadlines, where the task falls in the list of priorities, and who needs to receive the completed project.

4 Embrace technology.

Look for ways to automate your systems. Save contacts, documents, notes, and any other key information electronically—so it's easy to find. Set recurring appointments, use document management systems and electronic task lists.

Protecting your time is not rocket science. It's about the willingness to let others help you.

It's about trusting someone to come alongside you and help protect your time as a leader. It could ultimately be the best decision you make for you and your organization.

DELEGATION VS. DIY: WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

At some point, when a high-performing employee is excelling, they come to a place where productivity reaches the intersection of 'Do It Myself' and 'Done For Me.'

The former protects your money, the latter protects your time. So, what will you protect?

Many high-capacity go-getters can task away without needing assistance. They blow through tasks and think it would take them longer to teach an assistant than just to do it themselves. Sound familiar?

The fallacy in this notion is that when you sum up the amount of time the task(s) take up over an extended period,

it ends up being way higher than it would be to train someone qualified to help.

Hiring an assistant to execute tasks and get a job done is not a luxury. It is just plain smart. Chances are, they can do the job better than you, quicker than you, and more productively. Your pride—not your budget—prevents you from delegating so you can focus on leading well.

To put it in the clearest perspective, money is fluid; it comes and goes. But your time? Time is finite. Protect it at all costs. You can either use it wisely or waste it. The decision is yours.

You've cleared your desk, learned new ways to save time, and discovered great resources to help you delegate. The thing is, tools can help you be more productive with your teams, too.

5 ESSENTIAL COLLABORATION TOOLS

Research has shown that virtual teams are just as, if not more, productive than their in-office counterparts.

And that's a good thing because today's work environment is substantially different than it was just a year ago—and, for many, it shows no signs of returning to 'how things have always been done.'

So, whether your staff works from home or in a brick-and-mortar office—or both—now, more than ever, the tools with which we equip our teams to maximize their collaboration prove paramount.

Inarguably, there is a slew of novel technologies developed to support this endeavor.

The top five virtual collaboration tools we use at BELAY:



Zoom

There's no replacement for face-to-face interaction. However, video conferencing applications such as Zoom allow virtual teams to maintain efficient communication from anywhere. It also allows meeting participants to share presentations, screens, and other content in real-time, as well as the ability to send official email invites to clients for a more professional appearance.



Google Documents

There's a wide variety of document collaboration tools out there, but Google Docs remains the gold standard. It's a streamlined, no-nonsense platform that allows team members to collaborate on a document from anywhere. Docs also provides ample cloud space in Google Drive to share and exchange files. Arguably the best feature? It's free.



Slack

Slack claims to be '... a collaboration hub that connects your organization—all the pieces and the people—so you can get things done.' And we're here to corroborate those claims.

With Slack, you can collaborate online—just as you would in person—by bringing the right people and information together in a one-stop shop to communicate efficiently, stay connected, and get things done—faster. Fast, efficient. and communicative? That's (productivity) music to our ears.



Asana

Asana is a cloud-based software that facilitates colleagues within an organization to track and manage the progress of projects. Simply, tasks are created to monitor individual contributions to a larger, collaborative project.

Teams can add tasks, assign them to colleagues, set due dates, comment, and share relevant documents while notifications on the status of each task—and their approaching deadlines—are sent to your inbox. Best of all? It's customizable. Want to work in a way that is driven by conversations? Asana can do that. Prefer to work in a way that's driven by tasks? Asana's got you covered, too, so every team has the opportunity to collaborate and stay on track in a way that is most productive for them.



Grasshopper

Grasshopper is a phone service, designed to work on top of your existing landline or mobile service. Like many virtual phone systems, Grasshopper offers a mobile app that allows you to make and receive calls from your business number—even when using your personal mobile devices.

There are *literally* hundreds of websites, platforms, and applications designed to help virtual teams connect and collaborate. We couldn't possibly list them all, but these five are a great place to start.

Remember: Don't work harder when you can work smarter!

We would be remiss, however, if we didn't point out how all of these changes we're proposing might impact your culture. So, how exactly do you delegate and be more productive without messing up the status quo in your office?

HOW TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY CULTURE WHILE INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

Healthy Growing & Company Culture

If you're finding there's more work to do than there are hours in the day, it might be time to increase your staff headcount. It's normal to feel apprehensive when you've grown faster than you anticipated.

However, we want to help alleviate your concerns by offering tips for how to navigate an evolving team.

Results Over Availability

Building a business from an idea to achieving long-term success is no easy task. While growth is always the goal, growing too quickly can lead to the inability to keep up with employee needs. Grow too slowly and you might not make payroll.

Whether you lead an in-office, remote, or hybrid team, benefits such as in-house daycare, paid maternity/paternity leave, flex-time, remote opportunities, and hired contractors are a growing trend. Gone are the days when an employee clocked in at 9 a.m. and clocked out at 5 p.m. The corporate culture is shifting and evolving.

Productivity is no longer measured by how long you're at a desk—or if you came into the office at all; it's all about results.

Tech For The Win

Technology has revealed opportunities for businesses to truly show how much they value and respect their employees' needs. Experts have seen impressive productivity increases when workers are given flex-time and remote access.

According to a ConnectSolutions Study, "[Seventy-seven percent of remote workers](#) get more done in fewer hours thanks to fewer distractions like meetings, conversations, and noisy coworkers."

It allows employees to work at the times they are most productive and in an environment in which they are most comfortable. Individual or team check-ins can be done with the latest video, phone or messaging technology and apps. Given the chance to meet the needs of their life outside of the office, most employees become even more invested in the company that places such value on their personal needs. This is, however, contingent upon the individual, their personal discipline, and the policies stipulated by the employer.

Additionally, it cuts expenses for the employer who has a dispersed workforce. People working remotely don't require employers to pay for office space, equipment, heating/cooling, electricity, and certain types of insurance.

According to [Global Workplace Analytics](#), "... employers can actually save over \$11,000 per half-time telecommuter per year, which is a lot of money when you think about all 3.7 million employees who currently work from home at least half the time." Sick and personal time off decreases as well. These studies seem to show that while the productivity argument can be manipulated, the decrease in overall expenses to the employer is without dispute. By giving employees the freedom to work remotely, productivity increases, expenses decrease and you'll have a much healthier team to work with.

Businesses recognize the benefits in offering remote opportunities and hybrid models may be the new way forward. This is simply just an idea to consider as you start to evaluate the power of productivity within the organizations you lead.

A New Reality

As you grow in numbers, the plans for scaling your workforce start by thinking of what you want your culture to be in five years.

Be careful to not get stuck in the past with how you approach your employees and their needs. Stay on top of new trends in business models, technology, and employee benefits. Do your best to invite employees into the conversation and you will be rewarded with reminders of why you hired these amazing people to begin with.

A team that works and plays well together is your most profitable asset.

HOW CAN A VIRTUAL SPECIALIST HELP WITH PRODUCTIVITY?

Many of our clients come to us because their businesses have outgrown their available time.

These leaders find themselves buried under the details that come with a successful venture and are in danger of drowning in those responsibilities.

A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT CAN:



Protect Your Calendar

By working with your assistant to determine a work schedule that suits your needs, you'll free up a lot more time. Your assistant can handle all the back-and-forth of scheduling necessary appointments, and help you prioritize your calendar more effectively.



Manage Your Inbox

According to some estimates, workers spend more than six hours a day checking emails. Other studies show that it takes up 28 percent of an employee's time. Virtual Assistants shoulder the burden of email, acting as air traffic controllers of a leader's inbox. A Virtual Assistant can organize your inbox so it's more efficient for you.



Push Projects & Ideas Forward

Rather than spending hours of your week following up on vendors, contractors, and unpaid invoices—delegate those time-consuming tasks to a BELAY Virtual Assistant. They can keep your projects moving towards deadlines so you can focus on your portion of the project and brainstorm new ideas.



Deal With The Details

BELAY Assistants deal with thousands of details every day for our clients—seriously, thousands!

Confirming flights/hotels/car rentals, scheduling appointments, recording mileage expenses, making phone calls to potential vendors or customers, researching new productivity tools, transcribing meeting notes, posting social media updates, proofreading documents, writing documentation, creating PowerPoints, updating project software or task management applications, and the list goes on.

If you ever catch yourself wondering, *"Why am I doing this task?"* a BELAY Virtual Assistant can tackle it.

Businesses of all sizes—and at every tenure level—are at risk of bookkeeping mistakes.

Keeping the books and preventing blunders are a financial equalizer among all organizations. It's just par for the course of doing business. A Virtual Accounting Professional can help keep you in the driver's seat of your business while they tackle the daily crunching of numbers.

A VIRTUAL ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONAL CAN:



Handle Your Bank Reconciliations

BELAY Accounting Professionals love numbers. They choose to spend their day deep in your books looking for any potential problem that might be lurking as they reconcile your various accounts. Accounting Professionals can serve as a strong spoke in the overall wheel of organizational financial accountability. They can initiate conversations about identified concerns, clarify and reinforce policies, help develop newer, better practices, and perform reviews of legacy data to spot gaps and opportunities.



Compile Tax Documents & Work With Your CPA

Let's be honest: No one likes receiving a phone call from their CPA. Their phone call usually ends with having to search for a missing document or receipt. This is where having a dedicated Accounting Professional can be a tremendous timesaver. They will own this communication and provide any needed documents to your CPA in a timely fashion.



Keep Your Books Organized

Business owners, new and veteran alike, may inadvertently blur the lines between personal and business finances. They blend expenses, pay bills out of both accounts and build a case for writing off a personal discretionary expenditure as a business deduction. Accounting Professionals keep small businesses and entrepreneurs on target, on task, and more accountable. Plus, they can recommend tools to maximize and segment expense tracking.



Deal With The Details

Though Accounting Professionals are not necessarily IRS-Certified Tax Preparers, through experience, they may have developed an eye for applicable business deductions. These could include professional development classes, matched funds contributed to employees' retirement savings accounts, home offices, hardware, supplies, repairs, and more. This is one area where their know-how as finance generalists brings added value.

A MARKETING ASSISTANT CAN:



Enhance Your Content

No one likes to stress over a blank page. With a Marketing Assistant you don't have to wonder what to say—or how to say it—ever again. Whether it's blog posts, lead magnets, or social media captions, a Marketing Assistant will write on-brand content targeting your ideal audience. In addition to exceptional copy, your Marketing Assistant can work with a graphic design team or utilize their own graphic design tools to create purposeful, targeted content that moves your brand forward.



Create Content Calendars

Your Marketing Assistant will create a cohesive and strategic content calendar that aligns with your company's marketing goals. They will schedule social media posts, blogs, podcasts, etc.—lanning the upcoming month's content to include any event promotion, holidays, or other reminders. They will also conduct research to implement the most strategic cadence and content for your calendar based on your audience.



Increase Communication & Engagement

Creating engagement takes time—and a lot of it. Your Marketing Assistant can dedicate blocks of time to engage with your online community and streamline your communication. From crafting intentional email campaigns to scheduling daily social media posts, they can make contact with your audience daily. This includes researching, following, and intentionally engaging with accounts and brands relevant to yours.



Provide Reporting

You can't grow without the right information. Your Marketing Assistant will identify which metrics are most important for your specific marketing goals and track your progress through targeted reports. Whether it's social media/email campaigns or webinar registrations, they will provide integral data and analysis so that you can make better-informed marketing decisions.



Deal With The Details

Delegation is all about outsourcing the details that are taking up too much of your brain power and time so that you can concentrate on bigger tasks. Your Marketing Assistant will deal with all of the little marketing details that pop up like copywriting/proofing, pesky notifications, ever-changing social media trends, and online community management. Leave the details to your Marketing Assistant and get back to what you do best.

We get it—you can't just take our word for it. We need to put our money—and messaging—where our mouth is. Take a minute to read these [successful stories](#) from BELAY clients.

When you're finished, we'll be ready and eager to match you with a [BELAY](#) Virtual Assistant, Virtual Accounting Professional, or Marketing Assistant of your very own.

CASE STUDY:

Nick Knapp



The Challenge

Since 1994, [Knapp Business Solutions, Inc.](#), has been a family-owned firm. Nick Knapp trusted his co-workers fully—as in keys-to-his-house kind of trust. Then again, it helps that they were family.

When the business continued to grow, as did the number of tasks and unread email threads in his inbox. As a husband and father of a one-year-old, Nick was continually faced with missing bedtime, something he cherished. He knew a change was necessary.

Nick attended the EntreLeadership Master Series and went to BELAY's breakfast session with Chris Hogan on delegation. However, delegation wasn't his problem. As he worked through his tasks, and those he delegated to his team, he realized that all of their plates were full, too. He was the lid on his own business.

It was time to find help—but, how could he find someone he could trust like family? That's where we came in.

The Solution

Within a few weeks, he had a new BELAY VA, Cindy, and an inbox that slimmed down "... from several thousand untouched emails to about 40." The relief was almost instantaneous, and he knew he had made the right decision for himself, his business, and his family.

After the first few Zoom meetings with Cindy, he quickly learned she could be trusted with the tasks he delegated to her.

"I could spend hours dealing with my inbox or I could work on the company," Nick says. "Why force myself to do something I hate that is not anywhere close to what I need to be doing?"

After giving his VA the reins to his inbox, he knew it was the best decision. Not only was his inbox more clear, she was now responding better to the correspondences formerly buried or given a rushed—and stressed—response.

With that much-needed breathing room opened up, Nick was able to focus his energy on business strategy. Then, life threw Nick a curveball—as it so often does—and six months into their partnership, his VA was offered a full-time opportunity with another client. Nick was happy for her but worried all of the progress they'd made together would be lost.

Much to his relief, she had taken incredibly detailed notes on his preferences and processes and even trained his new VA, Diane. "It was probably the easiest transition I could have imagined," he says. She jumped right in, full speed ahead.

The Results

Within a month of hiring a BELAY VA, Nick's family and staff noticed a difference. Because his VAs were both proactive, he was able to be proactive with his time.

"I didn't have this nagging in the back of my head," Nick shares. "I used to need to sit down and take a weekend to deal with my inbox or deal with all these other things. "Now, my response to the actual emails I have to deal with are so fast because I only have to deal with a very small subset and everything else she handles for me. People love the fact that I'm super responsive, and for my family, it has made a huge difference."

His inbox—and stress—were minimized, while his limitations were recognized. Diane jumped in at every opportunity to take things off his plate, and to the finest detail, completed with the care that was due. Those spreadsheets that used to steal all of his time? "That's Diane's world," Nick says. Now, his attention could focus on what truly matters, like being home in time to tuck his one-year-old into bed.

"That was something that happened really, really quick," he adds. "Within a month, I had enough stuff off my plate that I was able to meet my goal of being home by 5:30 p.m.—that's been absolutely huge."

NOW, IT'S YOUR TURN

Keeping your company productive and leading with intention is no simple task. Hopefully, we've provided you with tools and resources on how to go about doing it better than before.

For you to successfully lead the charge and maximize results, you simply need to change the lens with which you view—and measure—the power of productivity.

We believe in your ability to delegate. If, at any point, you get stuck, you can trust that we're always here for you! If you're ready to reclaim your productivity, simply [fill out this form](#) to start the process of transforming your workday.



ACCOMPLISH MORE. JUGGLE LESS.

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