



## IN THE NEWS

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### **Surveys on Wasted Time and Internet Use a Wake-up Call for Corporate America, Leading Productivity Expert Says**

*Lots at stake for corporations and employees in improving personal productivity*

Highlands Ranch, CO (July 2005) -- New surveys revealing that the average American worker wastes more than two hours each workday -- mostly using the Internet for personal use -- ought to inspire corporations and their employees to take immediate steps to improve personal productivity, says [Laura Stack, MBA, CSP](#), bestselling author of *Leave the Office Earlier* and a leading authority on productivity and workplace issues.

"These survey results help explain why so many workers are stressed by time pressures and constantly struggling to stay on top of their workloads," Stack says. "If you're wasting a quarter of each work day, then you're behind the eight ball before you've even gotten started. The solution is for people to re-examine their work habits and implement new strategies and tactics for improving their personal productivity."

The first [survey, by America Online and Salary.com](#), calculates \$759 billion in salary paid annually for work time that is wasted. In addition, survey respondents cited personal Internet use as the top time waster.

The second [survey, by Websense, Inc.](#), estimates that "internet misuse in the workplace costs American corporations more than \$178 billion annually in lost productivity."

Stack says these findings point to the urgent need for both workers and corporate leaders to take action. "Workers want to be and feel more productive in their jobs," Stack explains. "Corporations benefit from improved worker productivity not just because it boosts revenues, but because it also enhances employees' job satisfaction, and consequently, job performance."

Stack cites the surveys as proof that workers need concrete ideas for using their time more productively.

“Employers have no illusions about workers using Internet access for personal reasons,” Stack says. “It is assumed that workers will occasionally surf the Web for purposes unrelated to business. But workers better serve themselves and their employers by using the Web prudently and productively. If you’ve got down time and want to go online, then spend your time and Internet access -- both of which are being paid for by your employer -- to research your company’s competitors, find useful industry data, improve your knowledge base in your area of expertise. You will also feel better about how you are using your time on the job.”

Acknowledging that socializing with co-workers was listed in the AOL/Salary.com survey as the second leading cause of wasted time, Stack says: “Given today’s emphasis on teamwork, socializing is essential for communication, coordination, and conflict resolution. But putting limits around socializing is an important way to recover time for more important things. Remember that the promises you’ve made to yourself and others are more important than someone else’s desire to chat. Conversations can be postponed; your responsibilities cannot.”

For more tips on how to be cut down on wasted time and be more productive, please visit the Media Room at [www.TheProductivityPro.com](http://www.TheProductivityPro.com) (password: productivitypro). Free articles are available, and reprint permission is provided.

#### About Laura Stack, MBA, CSP

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, is president of [The Productivity Pro, Inc.](http://www.TheProductivityPro.com), an international consulting firm specializing in productivity improvement in high-stress industries and is also the media’s go-to expert on personal productivity and workplace issues. Laura is the author of the bestselling book *Leave the Office Earlier* (2004 Broadway Books). She has appeared on many top news media outlets including CNN, NBC-TV, NPR, Bloomberg, the New York Times, and numerous leading magazines. Laura presents keynotes and seminars on surviving information overload, managing multiple priorities, reducing stress, and balancing work and family.

Top Time-Wasting Activities	(%)
1 Surfing Internet (personal use)	44.7%
2 Socializing with co-workers	23.4%
3 Conducting personal business	6.8%
4 Spacing out	3.9%
5 Running errands off-premises	3.1%
6 Making personal phone calls	2.3%
7 Applying for other jobs	1.3%
8 Planning personal events	1.0%
9 Arriving late / Leaving early	1.0%
10 Other	12.5%

From [Wasted Time At Work Costing Companies Billions](#),  
Salary.com, July 2005

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# Using Time Wisely

## Proven Tips for Taming the Top 5 Time Wasters at Work

### 1. Meetings

- Schedule meetings involving brainstorming, problem solving or strategic thinking in the morning when productivity is usually highest.
- Schedule routine staff meetings, project updates, or information-only meetings during lulls in productivity. Better yet, forget the meeting and share or distribute information with email or memos.
- Always use an agenda and always start on time.
- Schedule meetings an odd starting times like 10:17 a.m. Try it and you'll be amazed how prompt -- or even early -- everyone is.

### 2. Phone

- Answer it. By the time someone leaves a message, you listen to it, write down the details, and call back, you could have saved time by simply answering.
- Use voicemail strategically. Let your voicemail pick up when you have a pressing deadline.
- Keep the conversation focused. If a conversation is off-target, use your agenda to bring it back on track.
- Return all phone calls at once, if possible. You will naturally get right to point, saving you time.
- Use a wireless headset so you can use your hands to complete minor tasks.
- When you're going out of town and need to connect with co-workers, schedule a conference call to handle all matters once a day.
- Prioritize the order in which you return calls.

### 3. Email

- Set aside a specific number of times a day to check and handle your email rather than doing it every time the impulse strikes you.
- Use the subject field to indicate contents and priority.
- Agree on acronyms to use that quickly identify actions. For example, your team could use <AR> to mean "Action Required" or <MSR> for the Monthly Status Report.
- Include the word "Long" in the subject header so the recipient knows the message will take time to read.
- Sending a one-line text message to a Blackberry? Send the message in the subject line, using <EOM> to signal the End of Message.

- Instead of forwarding a series of forwarded messages, write a brief summary of the key points or select and highlight the essential information. That way the recipient doesn't have to waste time scrolling through pages of information.
- Turn off your email program's email notification feature.

#### **4. Clutter**

- Discard. If you tell yourself "I might this some day," get rid of it permanently.
- Delegate. Hand off as much as you reasonably can. We cannot manage by doing it ourselves in the Information Age, so give away as much as possible
- Delete. Stop any reports, memos, letters, minutes, catalogues, magazines, and junk mail that you don't need or have time to read.
- Organize files based on the frequency they are accessed: at least daily, monthly, yearly, and rarely.

#### **5. Interruptions**

- Agree on a signal to let co-workers know when someone is not to be interrupted unless it is an emergency. For example, turn your nameplate around or hang a colored ribbon on your cubicle.
- Set aside "down time," periods of time every day where you cannot interrupt another employee, schedule a meeting, or answer your phone. Inversely, establish fixed office hours when you can be interrupted.
- Schedule regular check-in times for updates from people you must talk to often.
- Go into hiding. If you absolutely have to get away for a solid hour without being interrupted, find an empty conference room or borrow a vacationing colleague's office.
- Use verbal tactics and body language. Stand up when interrupted and immediately state how much time you have.

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