

# ***FASTER TOGETHER***

***ACCELERATING  
YOUR TEAM'S  
PRODUCTIVITY***

***LAURA STACK***

### **Praise for *Faster Together***

“Laura Stack is on a roll! In *Faster Together*, she applies hard-earned experience toward helping your team function more effectively at work. Discover how to tweak your team’s business processes toward greater productivity.”

—**Deanna Cauley, Vice President, Talent Management, Red Robin International, Inc.**

“Feeling trapped by an unreasonable work-life balance that barely leaves you enough personal time for meals and sleep? Grab Laura Stack’s new book, *Faster Together*. Though at first glance it’s all about productivity, Laura’s advice helps you save time in all aspects of your work and life, so you actually get to enjoy the ‘life’ part as well as the work.”

—**Montague “Cosmo” L. Boyd, Senior Vice President, Financial Services**

“In today’s market, agile speed is a must. The business arena is changing more rapidly than ever before, which requires workers and leaders who can stop on a dime and shift direction on a moment’s notice. *Faster Together* is the ultimate guidebook for rapid, efficient productivity in the modern working world.”

—**Mike Howard, Chief Security Officer, Microsoft**

“Do you really understand how fairness, accountability, systems thinking, and technology affect the speed of your team’s work process? Laura Stack does, and she knows how to help you maximize every aspect of all four. In *Faster Together*, she shows you how to rev the engines of even the most efficient work process.”

—**Andrew Lawrence, Vice President, Enterprise Learning and Personal Development, SCL Health**

“If you think ‘fast’ and ‘quality’ are mutually exclusive, think again. Laura Stack’s *Faster Together* gives team members all the tools they need to speed up their processes and change their mindset about accountability, systems, and technology. To make a quantum leap in productivity, you’ll want to buy a copy for all team members!”

—**Dianna Booher, author of *Communicate Like a Leader* and *What More Can I Say?***

“No one understands and teaches quick, efficient productivity as well as Laura Stack. In her latest book, *Faster Together*, she demonstrates to leaders and team members alike how they can improve their work processes and achieve success faster. A must-have for the ambitious work team!”

—**Jeremy Eaves, Senior Director, Employee Relations, DaVita**

“Laura knows how to make anyone more productive. In *Faster Together*, she shows how teams can work together seamlessly and efficiently and address any ‘speed bumps’ on the road to success. Highly recommended for any manager or team member looking to accomplish more in less time.”

—**Laura Vanderkam, speaker and author of *I Know How She Does It***

***FASTER TOGETHER***

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*Doing the Right Things Right:  
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*Execution IS the Strategy: How Leaders Achieve  
Maximum Results in Minimum Time*

*What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks,  
Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day*

*SuperCompetent: The Six Keys to  
Perform at Your Productive Best*

*The Exhaustion Cure: Up Your Energy  
from Low to Go in 21 Days*

*Find More Time: How to Get Things Done at Home,  
Organize Your Life, and Feel Great About It*

*Leave the Office Earlier: How to Do More  
in Less Time and Feel Great About It*

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***LAURA STACK***  
***MBA, CSP, CPAE***



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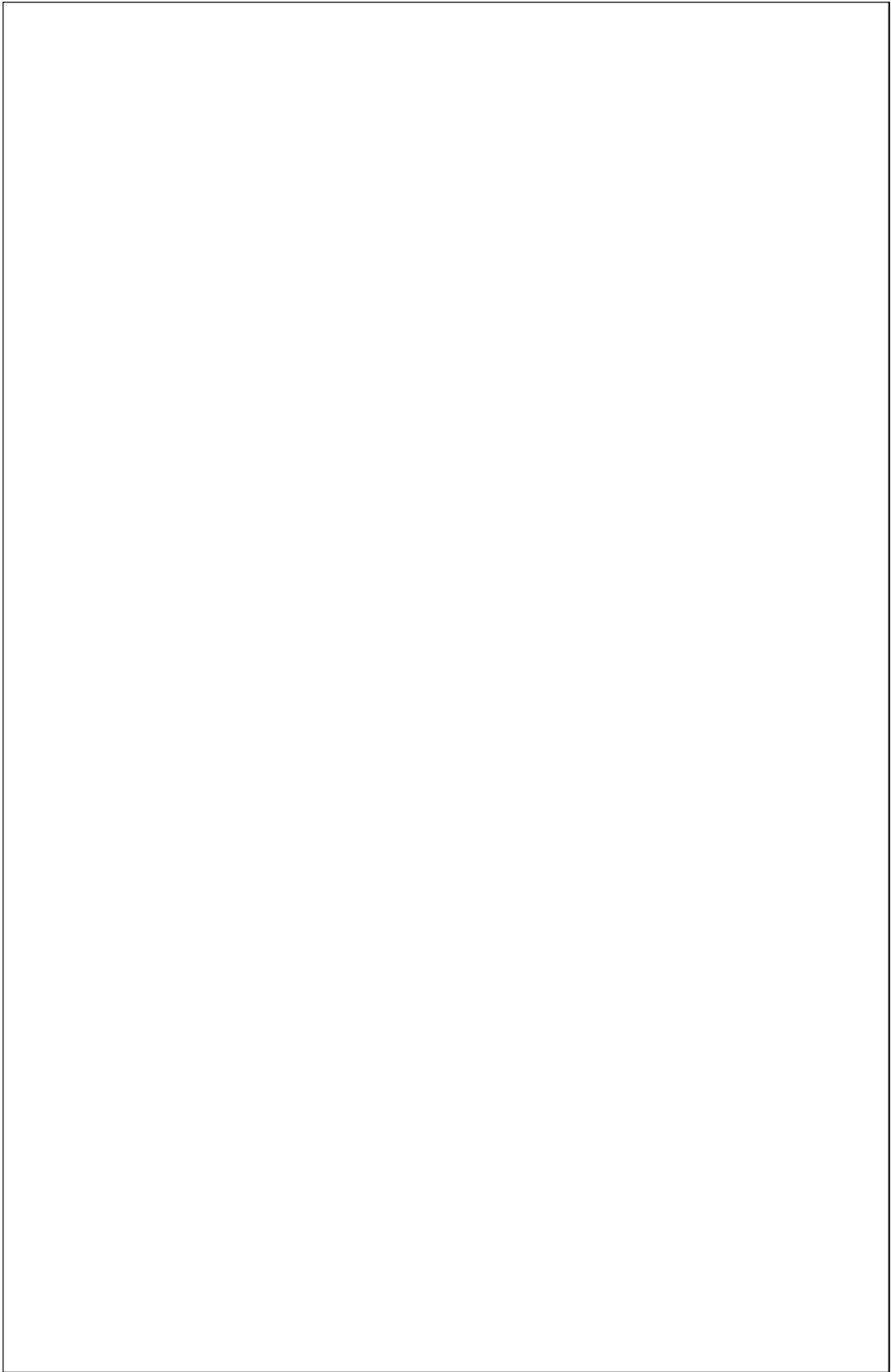
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#### NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I make use of many lists and protocols throughout this work, because they're an important core tool to make your team faster. Lists help a team maintain focus and stay organized, drive clarity and action, and provide tools to the four Keys that will help make your team go faster. You're free to adapt these lists and protocols for your team, if the words "Excerpted from *Faster Together* by Laura Stack © 2018" are included in the document.

To my incredible team,  
without whom all would slow to a crawl.  
Thank you for proactively seeking ways  
to increase our collective productivity  
and help us go faster together.





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## **PREFACE**

The idea for this book came to me at a leadership team meeting of forty global supply chain leaders, who collectively oversaw ten thousand employees. I was scheduled to present a three-hour workshop titled “How the Effective Leader Spends Time.” About thirty minutes before the meeting started, as people were entering the room, chatting and getting coffee, a man came up to me—to introduce himself, I thought. Instead, without even giving me his name or shaking my hand, he leaned in close to me and spoke in a hiss: “I’m really glad you’re here today. I could be so much more productive if it weren’t for all these *people*.” He looked pointedly at a few in particular, nodding toward them as if to call them out.

“Ah, this is *really* why they brought me in,” I thought.

I’m the proud daughter of a retired U.S. Air Force colonel and grew up on the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I have two brothers, one a year older and one a year younger. Not having a sister, and with relatively few girls in the neighborhood, I grew up somewhat a tomboy. I wore Toughskins hand-me-downs from my older brother. (Remember those? We really did grow out of them before the pants wore out.) I could shoot BB guns with great accuracy,

climb trees, build forts, and win wrestling matches. I loved anything that went fast—the Thunderbirds (a performance team of F-16 Fighting Falcons) flying over our heads, trains, and *cars*. Especially cars.

For as long as I can remember, I wanted a Corvette. I remember seeing one as a little girl and asking my father what it was. I loved the “swoopy hood,” as I called it. But since I live in south Denver now, a car like that is rather impractical, as it can’t be driven for much of the year and would just sit covered in the garage.

In July 2015, when I was honored to be inducted into the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame by the National Speakers Association, my husband John surprised me with the gift of a Corvette. Not just *any* Corvette—a red convertible 650hp Z06 loaded with all the options, with a black racing stripe and a black and red leather interior. She has a custom Colorado license plate emblazoned with ZORA, which is the name of the Belgian-born American engineer whose work at Chevrolet earned him the nickname “Father of the Corvette,”<sup>1</sup> and which also happens to rhyme with Laura. Obviously, I love that car—she’s a dream come true.

Because I was raised in the military, I am quite the rule follower, so I followed all the manufacturer’s rules. I didn’t take Zora over 4,000 RPM until after her 2,000-mile break-in period; I got an oil change at 500 and 2,000 miles, and then she was ready to *really* drive.

However, I didn’t really know how to drive her. Oh, I *thought* I knew how to drive her—until I attended a two-day “Corvette Owners School” at Ron Fellows Performance Driving School at Spring Mountain Motor Resort in Pahrump, Nevada. Then I learned how shockingly little I knew about my car’s capabilities.

They gave me a Z06 to drive that was identical to mine in every way, minus the convertible top. Before I got behind the wheel, I rode shotgun with the instructor for a demo ride—and promptly left my throat on the starting line as we went from 0 to 60 mph in 2.9 seconds. I had *no idea* the car could be driven that way. On several occasions, I honestly thought we were going to crash as he roared into the hairpin turns, but the car just sat down and hugged the track.

I was so excited that I whooped and hollered at the end of the run. I couldn't wait to drive! I spent the next two days unwinding how he did that, and by the end of the course, I was driving less like a grandma on a Sunday outing and a little more like my instructor. (Not to brag, guys, but I was the only woman in the class, and my times were better than all the men's except one!)

Until I learned how to enter turns, hit the apex, accelerate out of turns correctly, understand oversteer and understeer, and use proper speed, braking, paddle shifting, and torque, I wasn't very effective as a driver.

So why am I telling you all this? Because it's the same with your team. You have at your disposal what I consider to be the most powerful productivity machine in existence. You may think you know how to drive your "Team Car" correctly, thank you very much. But until you *really* understand the capabilities of the people around you, you won't be the most effective and efficient worker you can be.

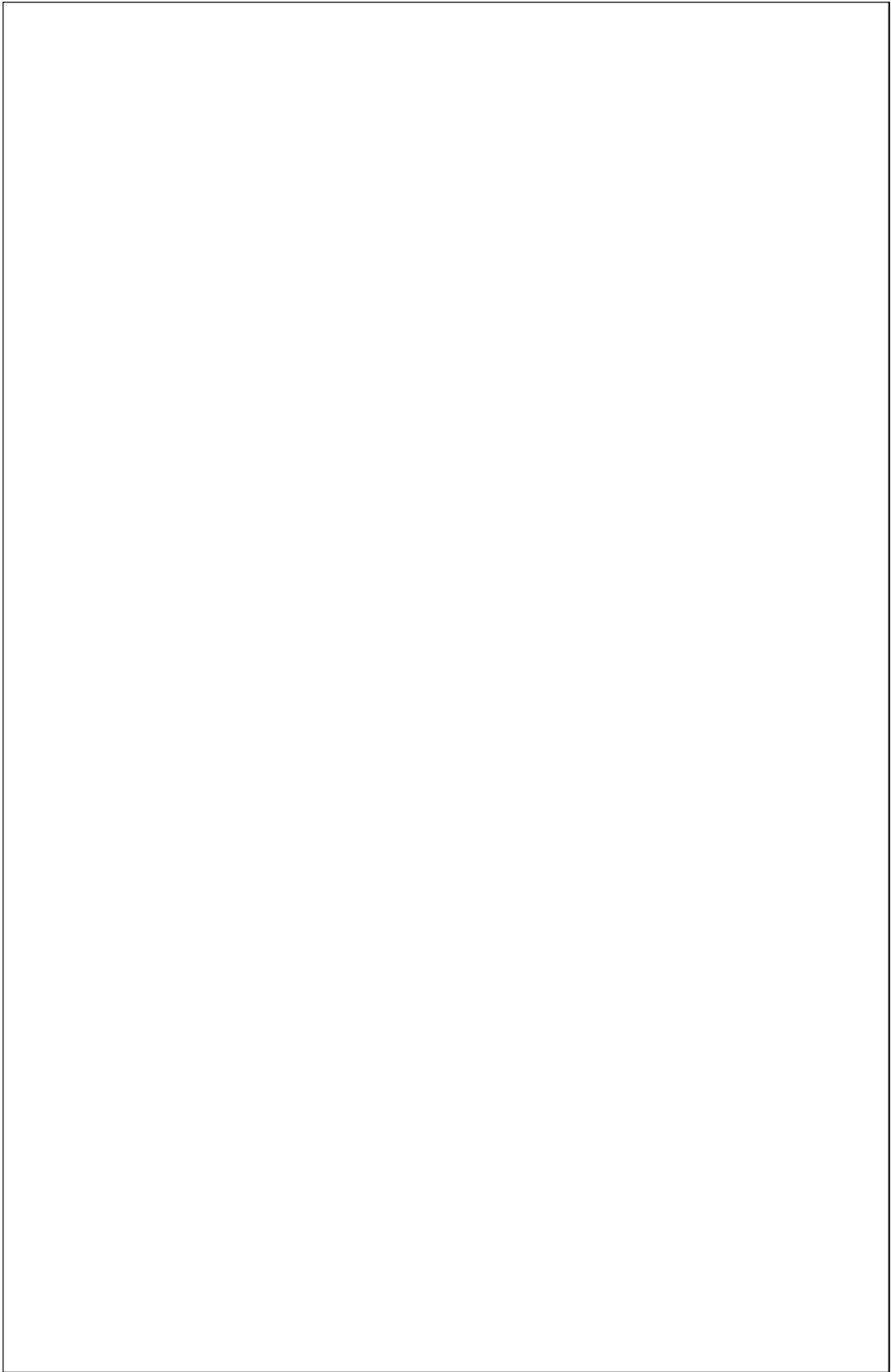
That's why I wrote *Faster Together*—to put *you* in the driver's seat of your Team Car, and teach you and your team members how to accelerate your team's productivity on the track to success. Obviously, four people can't ride in a Corvette the way the cover jokingly illustrates, but you're all in it together.

Circling back to our meeting, the leader who talked to me

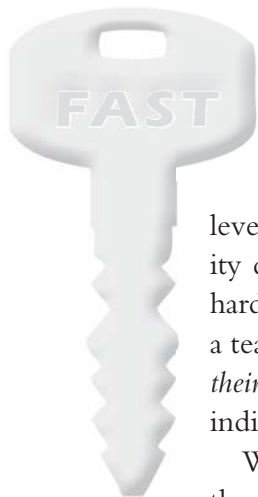
had it exactly backward—he was successful *because* of “those people,” not despite them. Even the best single person can’t succeed alone, not even you. By the time the seminar ended, it was clear *he* was one of the biggest problems. Individual productivity is just the beginning of business profitability; the real winner is team productivity. Despite how highly that leader thought of himself, the team was much faster together. By the end of this book, you’ll truly understand the abilities of your team. So, rev your team’s engine, and you’ll soon be roaring down the track together!

***FASTER TOGETHER***





## ***INTRODUCTION***



All seven of my previous books have focused on improving personal productivity at some level—for individuals, employees, and leaders. I still believe every professional should strive to improve his or her own productivity levels. But after twenty-five years as a productivity consultant and speaker, I've realized just how hard it is to improve *your* productivity if you're on a team of people who don't care about improving *theirs*. When you're surrounded by slow-moving individuals, you're stuck in a traffic jam of sorts.

Wouldn't you love it if everyone hopped into the FAST Team Car and raced away? That's why I've shifted my primary focus from helping team members become more productive individually to helping teams become more productive collectively, which is a hugely important distinction.

Throughout the book, as a valuable member of a team, I will encourage you to continually ask yourself questions such as:

“What can I do to make my team go FAST?”

“How can I personally remove the speed bumps that are slowing my team down?”

“In what ways can I take personal responsibility to save time for my team?”

“How can I help my team go FASTER TOGETHER?”

Think of this as the workplace version of President John F. Kennedy’s famous statement: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Imagine how efficient your team would be if everyone on it adopted this mindset! Over time, team culture would change so that everyone would always be looking for the fastest way to help each other. This attitude emphasizes the reciprocal, collaborative nature of time. You work to save everyone else time, and they work to save you time.

### **WHAT IS A TEAM?**

What one person calls a team may be different from another’s definition. I define a **team** as a group of people who work cooperatively and collaboratively to achieve goals. The best teams are tight-knit groups of individuals who each have well-defined functions, ideally with a slight amount of overlap so that the team won’t fall apart if one or two people go missing temporarily.

A team is distinguished from a work group in that a work group is more loosely defined, usually larger, and generally made up of individual contributors who coordinate their independent efforts; a team shares a common purpose and its members are reliant on each other to achieve their goals. The best

teams possess a high level of morale and camaraderie, but they are willing to disagree if that disagreement ultimately shapes a stronger decision. All members of the team then work together to execute the decision.

Teams typically have a leader, though they can be self-contained. They don't always work in a single location; with modern communications, they can be distributed or virtual, with members all over the world. Teams may be large or small, but in the workplace, the best teams contain no more than twelve to fifteen members. Some authorities, like Amazon's Jeff Bezos, would argue that they should be smaller. Large teams become unwieldy because there are too many points of communication, which break down more easily.

By this definition, a two hundred-strong department overseen by a VP is not a team; rather, the department would consist of multiple teams. Some people would be members of more than one team. For example, the VP and her directors, a director and his managers, and a manager and her direct reports—all are teams. In this case, the directors and managers would belong to two teams each.

### ***WHY BOTHER WITH TEAMS AT ALL?***

In the modern office, workers deal weekly with hundreds of emails, constant communication, and seemingly endless meetings. These can be managed efficiently, or they can be a huge time drain. It all depends on how the team approaches them. The team can get the job done more quickly together than can any Lone Ranger. Yes, some sports teams have standouts who pull the team's ranking upward—Peyton Manning, Mia Hamm, and Stephen Curry come to mind—but they couldn't do their jobs without everyone else on the team supporting them to the best of their abilities. If you want your business to

win the race, everyone must contribute. When done well, the team wins championships and outpaces all the other cars, just like the cover illustrates.

Thus, an important skill for any person in the workplace today is the ability to “team well.” We’re all on formal and informal work teams, and while there are things involved with teaming that can potentially slow us down, they don’t have to. *Fast* is the law of the modern business jungle. Race car driver Mario Andretti once said, “If everything seems under control, you’re just not going fast enough.” While we don’t want to be reckless, the team will have a sense of controlled chaos when you’re doing enough, which is the same feeling you get when driving a Corvette to its true capacity.

Saving time is not just the responsibility of the team leader. Each individual team member must take personal responsibility for going faster. Certainly, the team leader can provide this book for each person on the team, especially if the team isn’t firing on all cylinders, but the manager or supervisor becomes a team member/contributor in this process. The team will create its own results. Everyone is responsible for spotting and smoothing out what I call “Speed Bumps,” so they can go faster together.

### ***HOW TO USE THIS BOOK***

You can read this book solo and work to influence your team. If you lead a team, you can get some ideas on how to help your team become more productive. But the *most* effective use of this book is if the team works on the Faster Together program, well, together.

First, your team should appoint someone to lead your efforts as you work through this book together; however, that person doesn’t have to be the formal leader. It can be the formal leader if you choose, but some teams are fairly self-managed,

so this will vary. The leader of this program will be called the team “Car Chief.”

In a NASCAR pit crew, the Car Chief performs a majority of the scheduling and day-to-day preparations at the shop prior to the race weekend. According to Wikipedia, this person is “responsible for managing the crew throughout the weekend, ensuring that the car meets all of NASCAR’s inspection requirements, and overseeing changes to the car requested by the crew chief or the team engineer.”

Who should be your Car Chief? In general, the Car Chief can be anyone who’s a go-getter, a self-starter, and ready to engage. That should be easy to figure out—who is your resident speed demon? Merriam-Webster defines “speed demon” as “someone or something that moves or works very fast.” In my mind, the term conjures up an image of the Tasmanian Devil or the Road Runner from the Looney Tunes cartoons. Usually he or she is apparent to everyone. It’s the person who would be most excited about the team becoming Faster Together, and who constantly makes suggestions about how things can be better. You should all nominate this person.

The Car Chief will facilitate the Faster Together program using a special manual. You may also choose to purchase workbooks to accompany the book for each team member, which should be completed as you read this book. As you implement the program within your work teams and informal teams, this book and workbook will provide a blueprint on how to accelerate your collective productivity. These additional support resources can be found at [www.fastertogetherthebook.com](http://www.fastertogetherthebook.com).

You’ll bulldoze your team’s speed bumps, fast-track your Team Car, and achieve greater results more quickly. Using this book, your team will learn to lead each other, pick each other up when someone falls, and work Faster Together.

## ***THE F-A-S-T TEAM MODEL***

The most productive teams hold four Keys to a FAST Team, which are the four parts to this book. **F-A-S-T** is an acronym for **F**airness, **A**ccountability, **S**ystems, and **T**echnology. These four factors are crucial to collective productivity in the modern office:



### **KEY 1—*FAIRNESS***

Proper under the rules; honest; just; straightforward.



### **KEY 2—*ACCOUNTABILITY***

Responsible for someone or for some action; answerable; within one's power, control, or management.



### **KEY 3—*SYSTEMS***

One element can impact the whole; interrelated linkages and interactions between components; a set of correlated people.



### **KEY 4—*TECHNOLOGY***

Specific methods, materials, and devices used to exchange information; creation and use of technical means; use of knowledge to solve problems.

[Your team may be more familiar with the **S-L-O-W** model: **S**loth, **L**aziness, **O**bjections, and **W**orkarounds; or **S**luggish, **L**ethargic, **O**pposing, and **W**eary, which we're *not* going to cover in this book.]

## The F-A-S-T Team Model



The four Keys to a FAST Team, with their twelve Accelerators.



## ***THE TWELVE ACCELERATORS***

Each of the four Keys has three corresponding Accelerators, which make your Team Car go faster. An accelerator on a car is a device (usually a pedal) that controls the speed of the engine; for your team, an Accelerator is a person or a thing that will cause something to happen or develop more quickly. The Accelerators represent the twelve chapters of the book:



### ***KEY 1—FAIRNESS***

1. Building Relationships
2. Handling Conflict
3. Improving Cohesiveness



### ***KEY 2—ACCOUNTABILITY***

4. Trusting Your Team Members
5. Accepting Responsibility
6. Maximizing Performance



### ***KEY 3—SYSTEMS***

7. Making Effective Decisions
8. Managing Time
9. Increasing Efficiency



### ***KEY 4—TECHNOLOGY***

10. Communicating Properly
11. Meeting Effectively
12. Following Protocols

Each Accelerator, when properly implemented, will quicken your team to maximum productive speed for that Key—without being reckless.

When you're trying to accelerate on a road, your biggest hindrances are stop signs, stop lights, and speed bumps. In my experience, speed bumps are the most annoying, because they don't just slow you down, they jostle you uncomfortably as well—and you don't get nearly as much warning that they're coming up. If you hit one too hard, you're in the shop for repairs. In fact, if you face more than a few, you'll be slowed down so much that your progress—i.e., your productivity—will be significantly curtailed.

That's why I've included the four worst "Speed Bumps" for each of the twelve Accelerators in this book, forty-eight total, to show you how you can overcome their limiting effects and annoyance. Your team's productivity will be slowed to a halt if you don't find ways to flatten them. Your team should overcome each Speed Bump to master the corresponding Accelerator and Key, so that, together, you can lead the pack within your business segment.

. . . . .

The SLOW eat the dust of the FAST,  
and in the end, only the FAST survive.

Let's get moving!

## ***THE FAST TEAM TEST***

The FAST Team Test will either confirm your suspicions, amplify key areas of focus, or change your mind altogether. The purpose of the FAST Team Test is to rate, in your opinion, how well your team has mastered the four Keys of FAST Teams and implemented the twelve Accelerators.

Each person will individually rate the team, based on his or her experience, perception, and opinion. For each Accelerator, the test drills down to the four corresponding Speed Bumps to determine if your team has a problem with that item. That way, you know which of the forty-eight Speed Bumps your team should start with to maximize speed and productivity.

After you take the assessment, transfer your scores to the Score Sheet to analyze them further. If you're working this program as a team, the Team Car Chief will schedule the first meeting, so make sure to print and bring your results to that meeting or have the PDF available on a device.

You can also take this test online at [www.fastertogetherthebook.com](http://www.fastertogetherthebook.com). If you request your test results be emailed to you, you'll receive a PDF with your score. Team members can bring their individual reports to the kickoff meeting to compare results. We also offer a customized team assessment with collective scoring; email me at [Laura@TheProductivityPro.com](mailto:Laura@TheProductivityPro.com) to inquire.

After you finish the program, you can take the FAST Team Test again several weeks or months later to check your understanding and implementation of each Key. With each reiteration, you'll gain a better understanding of where you need to be on the FAST Team scale, and what Speed Bump you should all work on next.

Even if your team isn't working the program with you, you can read the book independently and work to influence your team members. Frequently stop to ask yourself this question: *"How can I make my team go FAST?"* And don't worry: for each of the Keys, Accelerators, and Speed Bumps that follow, I will not only remind you of that question, I'll give you real-life examples from my experiences and my clients' experiences to illustrate how you and your team members can become FASTER TOGETHER.

I'm a much better driver now, because I listened to what the instructor was telling me and worked hard to implement changes in my behavior. That's all I ask of you. I hope this book helps you and your team to go FASTER TOGETHER and achieve a higher level of success.