FASTER
TOGETHER

TEAM

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?***

Other Books by Laura Stack

Doing the Right Things Right:
How the Effective Executive Spends Time

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

FASTER
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LAURA STACK
MBA, CSP, CPAE

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.

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,"[1] 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!

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.

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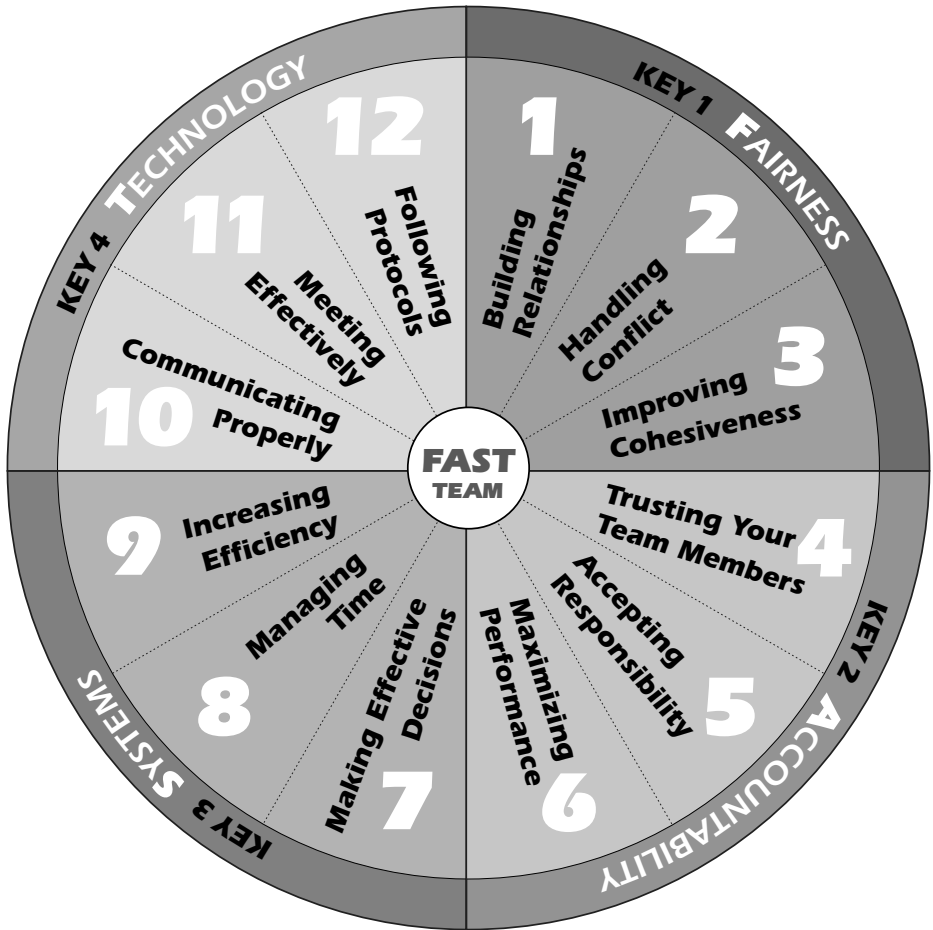
The four Keys to a FAST Team, with their twelve Accelerators.

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.fastertogetherthe book.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 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.

THE FAST TEAM TEST

Before you take this assessment, consider these questions:

Where do you currently feel your team needs improvement?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Where is your team inefficient?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

How do people slow each other down?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What can you personally do to help your team go faster?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

KEY 1: FAIRNESS

Accelerator #1. Building Relationships

To what extent does my team:

1. Work together to maximize team productivity?
We apply the same performance standards to
everyone and speak up when someone doesn't
pull his or her weight.

   1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

2. Challenge negativity in team members?
We all try to be as positive as possible and
jump in to help when things go wrong,
rather than complaining.

   1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

3. Contribute to good team morale? We celebrate
together and try to make our team a happy,
enjoyable workplace for both physically present
and virtual members.

   1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

4. Act like leaders, even when we don't have
leadership titles? We lead by example and role
model our positive expectations of others.

   1   2   3   4   5

ACCELERATOR #1 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

KEY 1: FAIRNESS

Accelerator #2. Handling Conflict

To what extent does my team:

5. Expect each person to maintain high productivity levels? We work to understand how we frustrate others and to change our behaviors.

   1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

6. Disagree constructively? We aren't afraid to speak up and give our opinions, even when they aren't popular.

   1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

7. Follow a set of ground rules that govern how we work together? We "play by the rules" and support the team, even when we don't agree with a direction or decision.

   1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

8. Work well with remote members? We make efforts to connect solidly with virtual team members to maximize productivity and achieve our mutual goals.

   1   2   3   4   5

ACCELERATOR #2 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

Accelerator #3. Improving Cohesiveness

To what extent does my team:

9. Make everyone feel included? We all feel connected to something bigger than ourselves and identify with the team.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

10. Work to achieve consensus when it's required? We know that consensus isn't required for every decision and that collaboration isn't always necessary.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

11. Cooperate to get things done? We know that our actions reflect upon others and try to make each other proud of our team.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

12. Work well with other teams or departments? We see other groups as valued members of the organization, not an enemy to be dealt with.

    1   2   3   4   5

ACCELERATOR #3 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

KEY 2: ACCOUNTABILITY

Accelerator #4. Trusting Your Team Members

To what extent does my team:

13. Question the status quo?
    We don't simply accept the
    current process as a best practice
    and are open to change.

    $\qquad$ 1 $\qquad$ 2 $\qquad$ 3 $\qquad$ 4 $\qquad$ 5

To what extent does my team:

14. Abide by mutual shared values? We are
    committed to the written core values
    and goals of the organization.

    $\qquad$ 1 $\qquad$ 2 $\qquad$ 3 $\qquad$ 4 $\qquad$ 5

To what extent does my team:

15. Take initiative to make changes?
    We make things happen quickly
    by implementing our strategies
    without hesitation.

    $\qquad$ 1 $\qquad$ 2 $\qquad$ 3 $\qquad$ 4 $\qquad$ 5

To what extent does my team:

16. Share responsibility for our
    collective results? We can rely
    on each other to pitch in on
    special projects and emergencies.

    $\qquad$ 1 $\qquad$ 2 $\qquad$ 3 $\qquad$ 4 $\qquad$ 5

ACCELERATOR #4 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

KEY 2: ACCOUNTABILITY

Accelerator #5. Accepting Responsibility

To what extent does my team:

17. Define the job responsibilities of each individual performer? We all know where we best fit on our team and understand our performance expectations, aligning team goals with organizational ones.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

18. Expect me to pull my own weight? We all work to boost our personal productivity in our behavior and performance.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

19. Use written work commitments as a part of our team productivity process? We hold ourselves accountable to published performance standards.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

20. Try to improve every day? We all believe it's our responsibility to continuously improve.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

<div align="center">

ACCELERATOR #5 SUBTOTAL: _____

</div>

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

KEY 2: ACCOUNTABILITY

Accelerator #6. Maximizing Performance

To what extent does my team:

21. Admit to our flaws and shortcomings?
We maintain a confidential environment
allowing candid self-assessment and regularly
refine our processes and procedures.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

22. Undertake regular training to better our
productivity? We understand and accept
the value of training.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

23. Encourage underperformers to correct
their issues? We are honest about each
other's shortcomings.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

24. Proactively do work that helps
other team members? We have a
great culture where people want
to work hard for the team.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

ACCELERATOR #6 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent;
3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

KEY 3: SYSTEMS

Accelerator #7. Making Effective Decisions

To what extent does my team:

25. Make decisions quickly? We make
    sure all team members are on the
    same page and on board.

            1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

26. Encourage autonomous decision–making
    for lower-level tasks? We know not every
    decision is a team effort.

            1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

27. Expect people to take initiative, rather
    than waiting for direction? We take
    appropriate initiative at the managerial,
    team, and personal level.

            1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

28. Choose not to do things that waste time?
    We don't pursue tasks with a low return
    on investment.

            1   2   3   4   5

ACCELERATOR #7 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent;
3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

KEY 3: SYSTEMS

Accelerator #8. Managing Time

To what extent does my team:

29. Prioritize our work correctly?
We all understand which tasks are
the best use of our time.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

30. Accomplish work with high value first?
We triage tasks and accomplish them
in order of importance.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

31. Recognize that people need
"non-tech time" to focus? We turn
off technology to create blocks of
time to focus on important work.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

32. Avoid wasting each other's time?
We don't interrupt or socialize
excessively and try hard to save
each other time.

    1   2   3   4   5

ACCELERATOR #8 SUBTOTAL: _____

*Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent;
3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent*

KEY 3: SYSTEMS

Accelerator #9. Increasing Efficiency

To what extent does my team:

33. Respect each other's need not to be interrupted? We devise creative ways to minimize unnecessary distractions.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

34. Work together to become more productive? We work together to eliminate time drains and areas of overlap.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

35. Try to limit the number of people involved in tasks and projects? We recognize that not everyone has to have their hands in everything.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

36. Eliminate obstacles and bottlenecks that slow us down? We talk about the inefficiencies in our systems and work to correct them.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

ACCELERATOR #9 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

KEY 4: TECHNOLOGY

Accelerator #10. Communicating Properly

To what extent does my team:

37. Use appropriate channels of communication for each situation? We deliberately match the message to the proper medium.

<div align="center">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

38. Message someone only when an urgent response is needed? We use distracting communication methods like texting and IM only when appropriate.

<div align="center">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

39. Use clear, concise, courteous communication? We have adopted simple, efficient messaging standards.

<div align="center">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

40. Not allow technology to take over our time? We use technology to save time, not waste it.

<div align="center">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

ACCELERATOR #10 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

Accelerator #11. Meeting Effectively

To what extent does my team:

41. Hold productive meetings?
We constantly strive to make
meetings shorter, more effective,
and more efficient.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

42. Conduct effective conference calls?
Our calls flow smoothly and
produce great results due to our
standardized protocols.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

43. Use video call and webcam equipment
smoothly? When we hold video calls,
they go off without a hitch.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

To what extent does my team:

44. Implement effective "standing meetings"?
We hold quick standing meetings to save
time and boost productivity.

<div align="right">

1   2   3   4   5

</div>

ACCELERATOR #11 SUBTOTAL: _____

*Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent;
3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent*

KEY 4: TECHNOLOGY

Accelerator #12. Following Protocols

To what extent does my team:

45. Follow standard guidelines for email?
We don't waste each other's
time on email usage.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

46. Leave each other excellent voicemails?
We strive for messages that are
clear and concise.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

47. Demonstrate awareness of our
surroundings and consideration
for others? We make sure we aren't
distracting others with our behavior.

    1   2   3   4   5

To what extent does my team:

48. Abide by proper texting protocol?
We use texts correctly and
appropriately.

    1   2   3   4   5

ACCELERATOR #12 SUBTOTAL: _____

Answer each question using the following scale: 1 = to no extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = to some extent; 4 = to a considerable extent; 5 = to a great extent

THE *FAST* TEAM SCORE SHEET

Copy your subtotals from the previous sections and add them up to find your grand total. See the scoring key below to interpret your score.

KEY I: FAIRNESS

Accelerator #1: Building Relationships   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #2: Handling Conflict   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #3: Improving Cohesiveness   SUBTOTAL _____

         KEY 1 TOTAL _____

KEY 2: ACCOUNTABILITY

Accelerator #4: Trusting Your Team Members   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #5: Accepting Responsibility   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #6: Maximizing Performance   SUBTOTAL _____

         KEY 2 TOTAL _____

KEY 3: SYSTEMS

Accelerator #7: Making Effective Decisions   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #8: Managing Time   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #9: Increasing Efficiency   SUBTOTAL _____

         KEY 3 TOTAL _____

KEY 4: TECHNOLOGY

Accelerator #10: Communicating Properly   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #11: Meeting Effectively   SUBTOTAL _____

Accelerator #12: Following Protocols   SUBTOTAL _____

         KEY 4 TOTAL _____

         GRAND TOTAL (ADD KEYS 1, 2, 3, 4 TOTALS) _____

SCORING

216–240: **Congratulations!** You have a deep and effective understanding of what it takes to be a FAST, efficient workplace team, with a high level of productivity. At most, all you need to do is fine-tune a bit. Keep up the good work!

169–215: **You need a few tweaks here and there.** You're on the right track! Seek improvements with your team where you scored less than a "5." Give your team credit for what you do well, and acknowledge where you can improve and become an even better, faster team.

121–168: **Average.** Your team is the "middle of the road." This isn't bad, but it *is* mediocre. You're not the fastest, and you're not the slowest. In a bell curve, you'd be in the middle, but who wants to be average? Kick up your efforts to improve productivity, so you can all produce stellar results!

72–120: **Major overhaul required.** Get serious about changing the way you handle your team and projects. Focus on improving the worst of your Keys, without neglecting the other three. Once you've whipped that one into shape, move on to the next-worst. Break your weaknesses down into sub-categories, based on the ones in the questionnaire above, and work on one item on this list every two to three weeks until you systematically improve your competence level.

48–71: **Danger!** Your team must quickly ramp up its collective productivity, because you're slowing each other down. Your FAST team skills need a jump-start, stat! If team members *all*

score very low, it may be time to involve a neutral facilitator. It may also indicate performance problems and other underlying issues. Your jobs and your organization's future may depend upon it, so start working hard on improving all twelve Accelerators, one Speed Bump at a time. Invest in any needed training, work toward a higher level of engagement, and if necessary, take the time to revamp your work processes and strategies to move toward a FAST team environment.

HOW TO USE YOUR SCORES

Compare your scores with those of each of your team members. Take turns sharing the score you gave each of the four Keys, highlighting the highest and lowest. Ultimately, you'll jointly determine which of the four Keys is the weakest link in your productive process.

Then, within each Key, delve deeper by comparing the Accelerator subtotals, thereby better understanding which topic you've expressed a weakness in. More useful still are the scores you gave the individual Speed Bumps. Those represent the best places to start working. This is very much a bottom-up method of continuous improvement. You can start anywhere—you don't have to read this book from cover to cover.

As you study each chapter, especially those where you've scored poorly, fill in your workbook pages and talk as a team about how you can improve. Let's say your weakest Key is Technology. So where do you face your greatest slowdowns: Communications, Meetings, or Protocols? Specifically, which Speed Bump was the lowest? I recommend you jump immediately to the Accelerator with the lowest score reflective of the team. Alternatively, you could make this a year-long program: each week, cover one of the forty-eight

Speed Bumps, the introduction, and conclusion, with two weeks of vacation.

Once you're happy with your new results in your targeted area, move on to another unsatisfactory Speed Bump and work on bringing it up to par. While I would normally tell you to focus on improving what you're already good at—i.e., pushing your good scores to great rather than wasting time on things you don't do well—the Accelerators are exceptions to this rule, because the low-level Speed Bumps are dragging your team down and keeping you from doing what you know you should be doing.

KEY I: FAIRNESS

Fairness is the same honest and straightforward treatment of each team member, regardless of their position on the team or in the organization. Because of its importance, we'll address it at the outset. On your mark, get set...

An individual in a client organization emailed me after a seminar and admitted that she *could* be far more productive, but she didn't feel she was being treated fairly, so she was purposefully withholding her best efforts. While you might think, "Wow, I would never do that," I think most of us can at least appreciate this sentiment. If you weren't being treated fairly, would you want to contribute at the highest level, or would you feel disgruntled and hold back? If other team members were receiving preferential treatment, would you want to give extra, discretionary effort? If it weren't for the pride many people feel in doing their best work, you might withhold yours under those circumstances. You might not contribute at the level you were capable of, because after all, why should you care?

A fair team is evenhanded and plays by the rules. Yes, there are times when someone must do more than their fair share because someone else has a family emergency, is sick, or is on vacation. But in general, everyone on a fair team gets what they need or deserve, without bias. Fairness means applying the same standards to everyone on the team and not letting favorites "get away with" things. Everyone involved tries to maintain respectful relationships, with an attitude of fair treatment. When conflict arises, it is mediated through well-established procedures in a positive manner that results in the fairest possible outcome—not just for the individuals involved, but for the entire team.

Whether you're a leader or an intern, your practice of fairness—and your team's perception of it—are extremely important to

those you work with. How fair they consider you to be can affect how willing they are to work with you and engage to the point of effective teamwork. Many workers won't complain much about working with someone demanding if they're treated fairly. Would you rather work with a tough person who treats you fairly, or a smooth talker who makes endless promises but does nothing or treats you poorly?

At the team level, the Key to Fairness breaks down into three basic Accelerators that can strengthen it:

1. **Building Relationships.** It all begins here. As a team gels, fairness enables its members to develop a level of comfort with one another. Members can trust that everyone will get what they need or deserve without injustice or preferential treatment for a few. A fair team applies standards evenly, from the leader down to the most junior member of the team. Everyone on the team works to treat one another cordially, with an atmosphere of fair treatment binding them into a coherent group.

2. **Handling Conflict.** Some level of conflict becomes inevitable when more than a few independent thinkers come together. Rather than acting as a hindrance, conflict can be useful; sometimes, the worst thing that can happen is for a team to get along *too* well. All team members should be willing to raise any objections they might have. When true conflict arises, having established protocols in place for mediating the dispute enables the team to produce the best possible compromise for both the individuals involved and the team as a whole.

3. **Improving Cohesiveness.** For fairness to really take hold, the team must bond into a solid but flexible whole made of multiple parts. Fairness really comes together when the team develops a collective identity and becomes dependent on each other in a healthy way. There may come a time when the team must split into smaller "squads," on one end of the work continuum, or

join with other teams into a larger work group to facilitate collaboration on a greater goal.

If everyone on the team works hard to apply each accelerator in this area, most people will try harder than ever to prove they've earned what you've willingly offered.

Accelerator #1: Building Relationships

Relationships at work are defined by the way in which two or more people or organizations regard and behave toward each other. The overarching mindset here is that everyone gets along. That doesn't mean you all must be best friends and go to happy hour together after work. But you should be polite to and respectful of everyone with whom you have a daily working relationship.

Let's take a closer look at four potential Speed Bumps associated with relationship-building on your team.

1. **The Same Standards Aren't Applied to Everyone.** Basically, there's no consistency in how team members are treated, partly because the team isn't self-policing.

   - Self-policing teams strengthen relationships and ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with the same standards.
   - The goal is to strengthen the team from within without the leader interfering (unless something gets out of hand).
   - Let the team sort out what needs fixing, as they, too, have learned to trust each other based on knowledge of their coworkers and their track records.
   - If the leader truly wants balanced fairness, he or she should not be immune to this process.
   - A leader may act as "first among equals," but in the best workplace teams, the team leader is still accountable to the team for not following through.

2. **Negative People:** Some people always say "no" before even considering something new. These "no people" are more annoying and useless than "yes people. "

- Helpful people won't always say "no" first. Autonegatives usually will.
- "Autonegatives" are negative or unpleasant about everything.
- How can you tell if your team members perceive *you* as an autonegative? One way is to ask. Otherwise, see how they respond to you.
- Stop and think before you say "no" next time. If the word "no" seems to pop out automatically, listen carefully.
- If a team member's request or idea deserves criticism or refusal, wait until they're done. Then explain why—and offer a solution.
- If you know no reason why something won't work, hold your tongue.

3. **Poor Team Morale:** Few things are more depressing than working in an environment where the pessimism just grinds you down.

   - Even if you aren't in your dream job, remember: with few exceptions, you choose where you work. You can also choose to be happy or not.
   - A great way to make life happier for yourself is to make life happier for others.
     Happiness is infectious and improves team relationships.
   - A great way to boost your own attitude is to decide to love your work.
   - Happy people enjoy work more, people who enjoy work are more engaged, engaged people contribute their discretionary effort, and discretionary effort makes the whole team go faster.
   - Try jazzing up common work areas or break spaces.
   - Celebrate milestone celebrations at a local restaurant, like birthdays and company anniversaries, as well as "We Did It!" celebrations.

4. **Failure to Take the Lead.** You can assume a leadership role on the team any time you're ready, even when you aren't the leader.

- People have a built-in tendency to watch the formal and informal leaders on a team, and take their cues for action from what they're doing
- Where you can, switch places in the Team Car. Take the lead and decide to ride in the front seat.
- Team members are more likely to be partners with their leaders nowadays, so sometimes we take turns in the front seat.
- If you and your team members take the initiative to continue the ride, the leader can take on a mentoring and guiding position.
- Instead of keeping your head down and languishing at your job, look for opportunities to jump out front.
- If a team member is struggling, volunteer to help. Never fear getting your hands dirty; there's no shame in hard work.

By policing yourself, treating others well, maintaining positive approaches toward getting work done, jumping in to help others, and even taking charge when things go wrong or your manager is unavailable, you can strengthen your relationships with others on your team.

Accelerator #2: Handling Conflict

As a rule, I find most professionals to be opinionated, independent, take-charge types. This is especially true in countries with traditions of self-reliance. It's no surprise, then, that in any group consisting of more than two people, someone's likely to rub someone else the wrong way, have different views of decisions or strategy, spark interpersonal conflict that comes from negative feedback, and more.

Here are the four worst Conflict Resolution Speed Bumps to keep in mind.

1. **Poor Productivity Practices:** You and your team members will inevitably experience friction, whether you serve as team leader or team member. Here's how to limit that.

   - Be a productivity role model, with an impeccable schedule, reputation, and behavior.
   - Realize you can't do it all, and prioritize your most critical tasks, culling the rest.
   - Overdeliver on the tasks and projects you keep.
   - Realize you don't know everything, and ask people for their opinions and their experience.

2. **Team Members Never Disagree:** Here are a few reasons why minor conflict and disagreement can be healthy.

   - Others may possess knowledge you lack, ands asking for their help can get the job done faster and better.
   - Discover when you're wrong. To be FAST, listen to and understand what everyone thinks; encourage a plausible solution you can all implement quickly; help clarify core values, mission, and vision; set realistic goals; and even encourage others to disagree with you. Sometimes the result shines brighter when it's shaped and challenged by others.

- Save the day now; fix the problem later. Forget what when wrong until you fix it, the dust settles, and it's out the door. Then do a project "autopsy" so you can avoid the same mistake in the future.

3. **Not Agreeing on Ground Rules:** If new team members don't know what the "rules of engagement" are, they're left to guess, and conflict inevitably ensues.

   - These are specific guidelines a team sets to ensure all team members work and play well together.
   - All teams need standard ways to diagnose, evaluate, and resolve true conflicts.
   - Ground rules define what counts as acceptable behavior, emphasizing basic politeness, teamwork, and information-sharing as well as a dedication to maintaining a smooth workflow.
   - Your ground rules should be easy to amend as circumstances change and your team grows.

4. **Not Working Well Remotely:** The days when everyone who worked for the same business or division had to congregate in the same building are mostly over. Now we must learn to work well with remote contributors and virtual teams.

   - Try to meet with each other occasionally, where and when it is possible.
   - Agree on specific rules for interaction. Make sure everyone knows who they should report to and when.
   - Make your communications very clear. Keep your instructions explicit, and remember what your schoolteachers used to say: read the whole question before you try to answer it.
   - Be flexible timewise. Teammates who are located great distances from each other but require each other's input must make efforts to compromise.

- Find ways to overcome language difficulties. It is often easier to work with team members who have a solid competency with your native language.

Most of us will eventually experience the Speed Bumps that come with individual or group conflict, which can be so jarring they rattle the Team Car apart. On the other hand, conflict can also slow us down enough to force us to consider alternative points of view.

Accelerator #3. Improving Cohesiveness

Getting everyone working toward the same goals can be a tricky process. Groups of more than four or five rarely agree on anything, even where to have lunch. Achieving buy-in almost always requires a delicate dance of ego-balancing and outright dispute as team members argue for or against specific points. We want to be fair and hear everyone's opinion, so negotiation is often the name of the game. Just remember: Once a decision is made, all team members should row in the same direction.

All that said, hammering out a compromise is often the best possible outcome, since it can help to reveal the failures and negative points of the ideas argued. Like peer review in scientific journals, it keeps one person from dominating the group. If everyone agrees on everything and simply rubber-stamps all proposals, your team is circumventing a valuable peer review process.

Avoiding the Speed Bumps will help you communicate properly with your team and your superiors.

1. **No Collective Identity:** The team is so unengaged that they are unwilling to submerge their individual identities into the collective identity of a group.

- Use some elements of the battle trance concept to merge into a more cohesive group whose members more readily "take one for the team."
- Ensure a communal experience.
- Make sure *everyone* participates, including leadership. It means you pitch in and help each other during crunch times. It means you know your team members have your back.
- Make sure everyone has what they need to feel like a full member of the team—and push the value of the team itself to the limit.

2. **Too Much Consensus:** It takes too much time to come to a joint decision on *everything*.

- Joint decisions and high levels of collaboration aren't always necessary.
- Know when to make an "executive decision" versus getting input or asking permission.
- The bigger and more significant the decision, the more likely you should ask for help or kick it up the ladder.
- As team members, we should trust our professional judgment and act upon it.
- We should also trust our colleagues' professional judgment and allow them to act upon it.

3. **Uncooperative Team Members:** All team members must engage with each other to produce the best product possible in the least amount of time.

- Encourage cohesion and teamwork.
- Realize we're all individuals with unique experiences and skill sets, who use our capabilities, viewpoints, and opinions to keep the Team Car running at top speed.
- Our actions always influence our fellow team members.

- You need to be able to work effectively toward the same goals while easily sharing your skills and expressing your opinions and perspectives in complementary ways.
- Smaller teams tend to work together best, because of communication limitations.
- Ask yourself, "What can I do to make my team wildly successful?"

4. **An Inability to Work Well with Other Teams:** Each team has its own dynamic, processes, procedures, and level of team trust, which can make it hard to find common ground.

   - Make a concerted effort to set aside your different goals, emphasize your commonalities, and engage with familiar strangers who happen to work for the same company.
   - Establish a shared methodology. Sit down with the other team and hammer out who will do what and how you'll do it.
   - Meet frequently. Everyone needs to be on the same page, so meetings are essential.
   - Meet socially. It's so much easier to work with unfamiliar team members when they aren't really strangers.
   - Ask, don't tell. If you share your goals and strategic priorities and get everyone's input, they generally will have some great ideas you may not have thought about.
   - Paint the picture in their minds. Help others see it and get them excited.

A cohesive team is willing to jump in and do the hard work of thinking, talking, and discussing. Cohesive teams start this process without hesitation or defensiveness. It may be a bumpy road, but a suspiciously smooth road raises red flags.

Fortunately, you have many tools you can use to encourage your team to join you in coming together as a close-knit group, where the members respect each other and know each other's strengths and weaknesses well enough to move forward confidently and fairly.

KEY II: ACCOUNTABILITY

What is accountability?

That may seem like an odd question, but in today's world—all of it, not just the business part—accountability seems to be something most people duck. When Hostess Brands shut down its factories and went bankrupt in November 2012, an event that became known as "The Day the Twinkie Died" in popular culture and song parodies, executives blamed rising costs and their bakers' union. But the bakers pointed out that they'd already accepted two wage cuts and given other concessions, and couldn't afford any more. The executives accepted no accountability or pay cuts; they just gave up. And then there's the famous example of AIG leadership giving hundreds of millions of dollars in bonuses to the very people who ran their company into the ground, forcing the Obama Administration to spend $180 *billion* to bail them out in 2008, because AIG was deemed "too big to fail." Ironically, most of those who got bonuses had already left the company by that point.

This begs the question: if we can't trust the people who run our country's biggest industries to hold themselves accountable for anything, then who *can* we trust? Why not just follow their example for short-term gain? They seem to get away with it.

But we can't let ourselves do that, because that way lies chaos.

So, what *is* accountability? It's a responsibility that goes beyond the individual to the team or organization, and even to your customers or end users. It's the state of being responsible to your team, and answerable for the work you've been assigned. You're obligated to report, explain, or justify something that is within your power, control, or management. Accountability consists of three basic steps:

1. **Trusting Your Team Members.** In the workplace, accountability assumes a high level of trust among everyone involved. This requires you and your team members to develop a team culture that, while questioning the status quo, believes that others have your best interests at heart. Take others at face value; when they say they'll do something, have no reason to doubt them.

2. **Accepting Responsibility.** You accept the full responsibility to do your job and help your team members, as part of an overall effort to reach your individual, team, and organizational goals. You know people are relying on you, and you trust yourself to accomplish what you've agreed to do. You and your team members recognize your places on the team without letting those places constrain you completely, or devolve you into a rule-bound productivity killer.

3. **Maximizing Performance.** Even if no one else holds you accountable to do your best (which almost never happens in a business environment), you owe it to yourself and your team members to maximize your personal performance and productivity—and to crack the whip over yourself when you seem to be slacking. Rather than emulate the arrogant high rollers deemed "too big to fail," put your best foot forward and do your best work every day.

Whether in the workplace or elsewhere, accountability assumes a high level of trust on both sides, especially the side that is owed the responsibility: the organization, the government, or the company. Individuals accept the responsibility to aid the team as part of an overall effort to reach team and organizational goals, and should not only meet the trust that other people have in them, but trust themselves to get the work done.

Accelerator #4. Trusting Your Team Members

Trust may be the most important Accelerator in this book, and the most difficult one to achieve and maintain. It's also one of the easiest to break, because as we all know, once someone betrays your trust it's hard to rebuild it. Especially difficult is avoiding blind trust, the "because I said so" type that should *always* be questioned, even if it's "Because I'm the boss and I said so."

Trust isn't something easily given, nor should it be. However, in a healthy team environment, I believe it should be assumed. If someone promises to meet a certain deadline, there's no reason to think otherwise. If later you're proven wrong, you may have to send reminders. You should trust your team members implicitly, at least until someone gives you a reason not to. Even then, you should always work to reestablish that trust, especially if you broke the trust by not doing what you said you'd do.

Avoid these Speed Bumps as you implement your team trust structure:

1. **Always Following the Status Quo:** Listen when team members offer new ideas—even when those ideas challenge the established status quo.

   - Trust your team members have the team's best interests in mind.
   - Realize that best practices don't always stay best as the world changes; sometimes, what has worked best for years suddenly isn't productive anymore.
   - Ask for "golden questions" you can use to define a new "Grand Challenge."
   - Don't just question, offer answers that will move your team forward.

2. **A Lack of Share Values:** You can't succeed without a solid foundation of shared core values.

   - Your team must be built on a firm foundation, proceeding from the bottom up.
   - You should trust that the foundation is stable before building on it.
   - The largest, most successful corporations create corporate cultures that leave little to chance.
   - Once you've built a solid structure, get together and make plans for how you'll mesh, so your workflow allows high performance and excellent service.
   - In a team, you *create* a slate of core values. You don't just stumble over them; you must get together, work them out, and take them to heart.

3. **A Refusal to Take Initiative:** An unwillingness to challenge the status quo will leave team productivity flat.

   - Many employees want to help improve processes for the better, but they aren't willing to try anything new for fear of punishment.
   - Help foster a culture of non-punitive innovation.
   - Give your people a chance to excel at something new, and engage the whole team
   - If necessary, take initiative and prove its value for the entire team.
   - Be as flexible with your team as you can—and trust them.
   - To ensure that trust develops, the manager can outline guidelines and consequences if the trust is violated.

4. **Micromanaging and a Refusal to Share Responsibility.** While workers exhibit a greater willingness and ability to

execute strategy, some managers remain reluctant to share authority.

- FAST teams know that everyone should share responsibility for collective results.
- Hugging your responsibility to your chest leads to micromanaging and fiefdom- building, neither of which are effective in this era of lean speed and agility.
- Micromanaging drives a stake through the heart of team productivity.
- It all hinges on trusting your team. When you're surrounded with competent, well-supported people and trust them to do their jobs, micromanaging isn't a problem.
- Responsibility-sharing puts you ahead and gives you a chance to fix what's not working without falling behind.

You should trust yourself and your instincts—and assume that others trust you—as you take initiative to help the team in general. Ideally, initiative should be encouraged; even if it isn't, you should take chances sometimes. But it's also freeing to be part of a team in which everyone shares responsibility for collective and individual actions. This allows you to police your team, while not necessarily stifling initiative. Without initiative, either individual or team-wide, nothing new can ever happen.

Accelerator #5. Accepting Responsibility

Responsibility is closely akin to accountability. Taking responsibility is your willingness to step forward and assume the obligation for a task, a set of tasks, or even a full team. If you're afraid you'll take the blame for problems, you may not let any responsibilities out of your sight. But to move more quickly, you may need spread some of your responsibilities among your team members. Sharing the wealth becomes a primary tool for accomplishing your team's responsibilities. You don't want to hover; however, you do need to ensure the work is accomplished according to certain standards.

Let's look at some Speed Bumps that get in the way of doing this.

1. **Not Understanding Team Roles:** We have no choice but to help each other and work cooperatively if we expect to produce quality work that gets us noticed and rewarded by our superiors.

   - Understand your unique gifts. Your manager (or a preceding one) hired you because you contribute specific skills to the team he or she wanted to build. You and your team members probably have some level of overlap.
   - Don't let your job description limit you; stretch beyond it and move up, as the requirements for any job are always changing.
   - Beyond your immediate team members, study how everyone else fits into your team or group.
   - Connect your gifts, passions, and strengths to your performance.
   - Fit in everywhere, even if you need to work on it.

2. **Low Personal Return on Investment:** Are you worth your pay?

- If your team's productivity has been flagging lately, consider the possibility that the problem could be *you*.
- Perform an honest self-reflection on your health, abilities, and skills.
- Have you been unusually distracted? Something new in your environment may be stealing from your limited amount of attention.
- Have you fallen into bad habits that slow you down?
- Are you bored at work? Have you just lost interest in your job? Do you no longer care about the work your team needs you to do?
- If you're the failure point in the team, buckle down and remove your distractions. If you have to, pay for classes and other training to maximize your personal ROI.

3. **A Lack of Written Goals and Performance Standards:** Except for high-level execs, contracts aren't often seen in the workplace nowadays. But maybe they should be.

   - Consider implementing written work commitments for your own duties, so you can evaluate how you're progressing at any point.
   - Meet and discuss goals for the upcoming timeframe. Document everything in black and white and revise until it's clear.
   - Meet on a set basis to review progress and make sure everything's on track.
   - Take stretch assignments without worrying that you lack the skills.
   - Accept responsibilities for things you've never done before
   - Get new skills as needed.

4. **Failure to Get Better Every Day:** It's your personal responsibility to improve your skills to maximize your productivity.

   - You and your team members should be clear about what your group goals are, and how you'll get there.
   - Start with individual team members. It's easier to establish team goals if team members also have personal goals to reach for.
   - Set reasonable goals that include time-based milestones and objectives.
   - Maintain a supportive, productive working environment.
   - Clear the way to the target—and give your team something to shoot for.
   - Track your team's productivity and provide meaningful feedback. You can't manage what you can't measure.

Whatever your position on the team, once again ask yourself, "What can I do to make my team go FAST?" Then accept and share your responsibilities, and get back in the race.

Accelerator #6. Maximizing Performance

While you may be able to remain in one position your entire career, and even maintain excellent productivity the whole time, it's unlikely. It's only human to want to experience new things, or move up and see what's on the other side of the next productivity mountain. While there may be limits to what you can reasonably achieve, those limits may not stay the same forever, especially if you take advantage of new processes, procedures, and technology as they become available.

Sheer desire to press onward will hold you in good stead here. With rare exceptions, I firmly believe that once you've achieved the minimum necessary competencies for your job, you should then focus on what you do best and find ways to do it even better. The military calls increased familiarity with your tasks "time in grade." As time goes on, you have an improved understanding of what can be cut or delegated. Training also helps you improve your performance at certain tasks and introduces you to new procedures and technology. Why bother? Well, whether you like it or not, you may find it necessary to assume command someday if something goes wrong.

Here are four Speed Bumps that can keep you from executing if that ever happens.

1. **Failure to Recognize Flaws:** Teams frequently fail because they refuse to see their greatest flaws. To discover your personal flaws, overcome them, and maximize your personal performance, implement these practices:

   - Set aside your ego. You are not your company, your division, or your team. Take everyone else's needs into account before making a unilateral decision.

- Pick a direction and stick with it. You can't become an expert in your field if you don't stay the course long enough.
- Seek feedback. Effective communication makes a huge difference. Get together regularly and discuss how well your actions align with your team and organizational goals.
- How else can you and your team discover its flaws? Ask your customers, internal and external. Ask a consultant. And ask your team. Talk about "taboo" topics. Discuss what obstacles keep you from being your best and leave you remaining just a "good" team.

2. **Not Getting the Right Training:** Regular training for you and your teammates is integral to productivity and profitability.

- Training improves your confidence and, therefore, performance. When you've been equipped to do your job properly, it boosts your spirits and reassures you that you can achieve levels of competency and productivity you may not have in the past
- Training saves the company money. If you're well trained, you make fewer errors and require less supervision.
- Training earns the company money. While money saved is equivalent to money earned, directly fattening your team's bottom line makes the C-suite sit up and take notice.
- Good, consistent training more than pays for itself in terms of employee confidence, performance, productivity, reduced turnover, and dollars earned on the bottom line
- Rather than viewing training as a necessary evil, treat it as a positive expense.

3. **Correct Your Personal Underperformance Issues.** Just because your team members don't bring it up doesn't mean

you're not underperforming. Hints you may be underperforming include:

- You're a jack of minor tasks, guru of none. If you never get an important project, and everything else you do could fall by the wayside with no one caring, you could be an underperformer.
- You just don't care. If you're disengaged from your job, and you treat your employer like an ATM that regularly spits out money after you go through the motions for a while, you could be an underperformer.
- You're coasting on routine. If your job looks the same today as it did two years ago, and you groan if anyone wants to give you a new project, you could be an underperformer.
- You get lots of written feedback. If your boss and team members are constantly sending you emails "trying to be helpful," you could be an underperformer.
- You're a poor fit. If you're often confused or unable to do some of your work even after a year or more in your job, you're probably an underperformer.

4. **Settling for Good Enough.** Sometimes you must shake up your team to force better performance. Stop settling and go for the gold, making yourself indispensable if necessary.

- Focus on the end result. Always remember that the benefit to your team members is in the result of *using* something, not in you *creating* something.
- Constantly increase your personal return on investment. Practice consistent improvement via continuing education, training, and learning more about all aspects of your job.
- See change as opportunity. Keep your head when faced with challenges or nonemergency crises.
- Align your priorities with your organization's. Your superiors are much more likely to view you as

indispensable when your efforts clearly push the team or company closer to its ultimate goals.

- Participate in key projects. Make sure the project you work to join really is important, not just window dressing.
- Get it done. Push yourself into maximum achievement mode.
- Be the expert in your subfield, so no one dares eliminate your job.
- Be genuinely respectful to everyone. When you honestly respect your team members, they tend to respect you back, especially if you're an achiever.

It can't hurt to make yourself so indispensable that the team can't do without you. Many observers (including me, at times) recommend against this, since if you can't be replaced, you can't be promoted. However, this may be fine if it's what you want. Presidential secretaries (like President Kennedy's Evelyn Lincoln, for example) usually don't want to be promoted; they're at the peak of their careers. They're also indispensable. But if it's possible to be indispensable and retain your ability to move up, then you'll want to do so.

KEY III: SYSTEMS

A system is an assemblage or combination of parts forming a complex whole. It doesn't have to be entirely physical; some business processes, for example, consist mostly of ideas and ways of doing things, rather than physical parts. They come down to clusters of tasks handled by one or more people, either one at a time or all at once. A system can be understood by examining the linkages and interactions between the components that comprise it. The best systems are simple and straightforward, leading from ideas to implementation in a relatively short time, with the purpose of contributing to one or more team or organizational goals.

Systems work best when each team member understands at least the basics of the entire system, and realizes that the system's efficient functioning drives team productivity. They should also understand how their work and actions impact other people and pieces. Look closely at your work processes as part of a system, and then repeatedly apply yourself toward achieving that system's goals. The better you develop your systems, the easier it'll be for you to pick up and get going again after a knockdown. You'll be able to fix things when something gets stuck in the gears and brings you to a screeching halt. In the best of all worlds, everyone on your team will know the system well enough to put it back together again when something breaks.

But beware: Many times, a system becomes a permanent fixture in an organization, and "Band-Aid™" fixes made to repair perceived problems end up leaving most of the parts, including the broken ones, in place. This often ends with an increased workload for the team. Because systems sometimes take on a life of their own, rather than blindly following your systems, always look for ways to upgrade them when possible.

Let's look at the three vital legs that support systems thinking:

1. **Making Effective Decisions.** This is the part of the process where you and your team members contribute your ideas and opinions toward fixing problems. Even if a decision doesn't go your way, you close ranks with everyone else to achieve team and organizational goals.

2. **Managing Time**. No matter how dedicated you are, you can't do everything. Sure, you can work an eighty-hour week trying, but you'll soon burn out. Instead, focus on your top priorities and complete high-value tasks first. The rest? Delegate, share, streamline, outsource, simplify, defer, or eliminate. Even when everything seems like a priority, pick and choose what to focus on, and be ruthless about filtering out distractions. Leave the "nice to do" stuff for when you can afford the time.

3. **Increasing Efficiency.** Agility and flexibility are the names of the game here. Efficiency is about generating maximum results in minimum time. Sometimes, when refining or implementing your system, there are unnecessary parts you should remove. Similarly, there are times when you should *avoid* teamwork when it can slow you down—and there are times when you're inadvertently hurting your team, instead of helping it. You could unwittingly be the bottleneck in the team workflow. How can you improve your performance so you're a motor for the team, rather than an anchor?

All team members should understand their individual and team priorities, with an emphasis on true efficiency in terms of time saved and productivity yielded. Decision-making is an integral part of the process that, when working at its best, allows all team members to contribute their ideas and opinions. In the end, everyone drives together to achieve team and organizational goals.

Accelerator #7. Making effective Decisions

Contrary to popular belief, successful organizations, corporations, and businesses of all types have never been fully autocratic. Even back in the days of kingdoms and empires, rulers rarely made decisions without heeding the counsel of advisers and courtiers.

Sometimes, you make solo decisions and execute on the spot, so as not to miss a perfect opportunity for the company to profit. You may have to ask for forgiveness later, especially if the decision isn't a good one; however, personal initiative has surely saved more businesses than it has ruined over the years. Sometimes you just don't have time for permission to make an "executive" decision. Team decision-making is predicated not only on what you think you *should* do, but also on what you shouldn't. The team as a whole and each team member should have their own NOT-To-Do lists. The team may decide to specifically avoid certain tasks or even business segments, and you'll want to include time-wasters like excessive socializing or gossiping as well.

Here's are some Speed Bumps to remove so you can help your team make effective decisions.

1. **Decisions Take Too Long.** The decision-making process can be too long. Learn to make decisions in a rational amount of time.

    -   Avoid groupthink, letting just a one or two people make all decisions while everyone else just rubberstamps it.
    -   On the other hand, don't let a search for total group consensus slow you down.
    -   Work from a template, gather all necessary information, limit your choices, and limit your debate time.
    -   Once a decision has been made, support it no matter if it was your preference or not.

- Execute the decision immediately.

2. **Waiting for Permission on Every Decision:** Don't waste time. It's often easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.

   - If the decision has a minor impact, make it on your own.
   - When you're waiting for input from others, use the "presumptive close" technique: if I don't hear from you by (x), I'm going to do (y), on (z).
   - Leave high-level decisions to high-level employees.
   - Let your own reports know they can take initiative on the day-to-day things.

3. **Failure to Take Initiative:** When workers feel not only allowed but also encouraged to own their jobs and take initiative, they take their work to heart.

   - Rather than just complaining about a time-wasting problem, do something about it.
   - For high-level issues that require permissions and consideration for the whole team, consult your manager first before you take initiative to make a change.
   - For mid-level issues of lesser importance than the above, consult your team first.
   - For anything left over—i.e., the smaller issues—just do it.

4. **Doing Things That Waste Time:** Get rid of time-wasting activities, making it easier for you and your team to be productive**.**

- Create a Not-To-Do list of things you'll no longer do or will never do.
- Practice purposeful abandonment. Drop low-level tasks you no longer need to do, and let them die. Say NO to anything that fails to meet your objectives.
- Keep communications open with your customers or users, and actively seek out anything that doesn't proven them value.
- Don't allow negativity, gossip, meetings, shirking tasks, bickering, resource hoarding, and similar selfish behaviors among your team members.

Time is money. Taking too long to make decisions, waiting for permission from your superiors, not taking initiative, and wasting time all waste money. Get these factors in hand and raze these Speed Bumps to the ground when you need to make more effective decisions.

Accelerator #8. Managing Time

When building computer applications, one technique for improving performance is using what's called a "cache." A cache stores the data you're most likely to need close at hand in the memory of the computer. Less important stuff is stored to the disk. There are three important principles to good caching: 1) The cache should never be completely empty or full; 2) effective caches have what you need most of the time—if they don't, they are costing you time, not saving it; and 3) evicting unhelpful things from the cache is at least as important as adding helpful ones. The third principle is even more important when you're near capacity.

Of course, computers are faster at calculating decisions than we are, but they're only as wise as their programmers. If you can teach yourself to think about your own workload in a similar manner—add before getting empty, drop before getting full, drop what you can't use soon—more of your decisions about what you can and can't handle become logical, more objective, and easy for others to appreciate.

In one sense, this approach encourages managing your own limits rather than managing someone else's expectations. It puts you in the position of asking what's needed and when, rather than devising a way to refuse gracefully when you're stuffed with demands. Team members rely on each other in this way to manage their collective time, stripping out what's unimportant and prioritizing the rest. You can't do everything, but you do need to figure out as a team how to do the most important things. Not everything is a priority, as some people make things seem. Some results have greater value than others.

Here are four Speed Bumps that might limit your ability to effectively manage time.

1. **Focusing on Low-Value Tasks.** Among the most important schemes of the modern office worker, and therefore those most likely to go wrong, are one's priorities.

   - Choose to focus your time on the things that matter.
   - What are you uniquely capable of and qualified to do? Where do you benefit the team?
   - Stick to the "buckets" or categories where you work best on your team.
   - Know which activities create success and help you reach their goals. Don't be too busy to focus on the game changers and ignore the low-value tasks.

2. **Not Accomplishing Tasks in Order of Importance:** Always ask yourself the question, "What is the highest and best use of my time right now?"

   - Ask your leader to help you prioritize. Politely point out that everything can't be Priority #1, and ask for help in prioritizing your tasks
   - Seek help. If your plate is too full, recruit others on your team and give tasks back as necessary. If you can't, ask your manager to reassign some of your existing "orphan" projects that don't fall in your buckets.
   - Complete the task due soonest. If outside circumstances have jammed two or more top-priority projects into your schedule unexpectedly, prioritize them by deadline.
   - Prioritize the most beneficial project. If two projects come due on the same day, do the most valuable one first.
   - Fix the urgent over the important. Urgent projects trump the merely important.
   - Stay flexible. Realize that your priorities can change in an instant, and be prepared to drop what you must when you must.

3. **An Inability to Turn Off Technology:** Know when it's time to tune out and turn off. Overcome Obsessive Compulsive Technology Disorder by:

   - Using Airplane Mode at work, so you can focus on key projects.
   - Phone jail. One of my clients created a "cubby" holder inside each meeting room, and participants are required to put their phones in there when they enter.
   - Disable alerts. You can turn off your email alerts as well and set a "rule" to receive a chime only if an important person emails you. Slip the electronic lease. Technology is your tool, not the other way around.
   - Schedule focus time. Block off sixty to ninety minutes each day of non-tech time, where you are head-down and focused on key priorities.

4. **Excessive Time-Wasters:** What things do you and your team members do to waste each other's time? Ask yourself these questions:

   - How much do I *really* get done each day? Just because you've been busy doesn't mean you've been productive.
   - Do my productivity goals align with my team's goals? Do you spend your time solving the right problems and moving the team forward?
   - Do I complete my work promptly and efficiently? Some of your team members may depend on your output to get their own work done.
   - Am I a team player? At work, the group takes priority over personal desires.
   - Do I support my team members when they need help? Do you pitch in and assist when someone waves the white flag, even if it's "not your job"?

- Do I take direction well? Can you accept others' recommendations, or instructions on how to approach a task?
- Am I committed to a productive workflow process? Do you constantly look for ways to improve a process and your contributions to it?

While it's important to maintain camaraderie with your team members, you also don't want to waste each other's time. You should be able to be honest with each other and say, "I'm just not set up now to handle this effectively. It will take me some time to adjust." You make decisions like this, in various ways, all the time. You could probably benefit from using these principles more consciously and more aggressively.

Accelerator #9. Agility: Maximize Speed and Flexibility

It doesn't matter how fast you complete a project if it's the wrong project; you must do both the right thing *and* do it right, or productivity suffers. This can be harder than you think, because it requires a steady hand on the rudder and a clear eye on the horizon. The entire team needs to be on the same page, working together as seamlessly as possible. Teamwork is the name of the game...usually. One rare occasions, too much teamwork can damage productivity, especially when the team is large.

Here are four nasty Speed Bumps to be aware of.

1. **Got a Minutes:** Some "got-a-minutes" are important—but most are just a waste of time. So how do you avoid them, and keep from causing them yourself?

   - Combine the interruption with something else, like a bio-break or a beverage run.
   - Make a little time…but just a little. Help your team member be realistic when you're asked, "Got a minute?"
   - Check to see if anyone needs something from you before you focus on your work.
   - Cut yourself off from the office or work somewhere besides your office, don sound-blocking earphones, close your email, and turn off the phone.
   - When you need to talk to someone, schedule an appointment on their calendar.
   - Leave a brief note on the door asking for a brief meeting.

2. **Not Taking Advantage of Team Efficiency.** The greatest advantage of teamwork is that it achieves what individuals

can't, through the medium of simple cooperation. Effective teamwork helps your team:

- Become faster. Many hands make light work.
- Rely on multiple skill sets. Even in specialized fields, the constant evolution of knowledge and increase in information makes it impossible to know everything about the field.
- Increase accountability. Team membership encourages a sense of belonging, which often translates to a greater sense of ownership and accountability.
- Trigger synergy**.** Cohesive, closely knit teams often prove greater than the sum of their parts,

3. **Excessive Teamwork.** The larger a work group, the likelier workers will waste time rather than get their work done. Teamwork can be counterproductive when:

- Groups are too large. The more people and communication involved, the greater the likelihood for confusion.
- When it isn't required. We often force teamwork on people and projects who don't need it.
- When multiple alternatives are needed. Brainstorming, for example, seems to work best when you do it in private and then compare your ideas with the rest of the team.
- When one person is already the expert. Let them explain the issues to everyone without unnecessary assistance.

4. **Obstacles in the Road.** As a team, you have to understand the obstacles between you and your target, and how to deal with them. Common obstacles include

- Constant griping. If you don't like your work or the way your company is run, your team members don't need to constantly hear about it.
- Bottlenecking. Other people on the team depend on you to finish your work, so they can complete theirs.
- Not communicating your needs. Tell people exactly what you want and need from them to stay on track and keep from slowing down the team.
- Using Old Technology. As much as you might prefer old ways of doing things, they can slow others down.

Keep these pointers in mind, and consider that misguided attempts at teamwork can prove hurtful. Remember: you should do the right things right, ideally the first time.

KEY IV: TECHNOLOGY

I like the old joke about the businesswoman who dragged herself home and barely made it to the living room sofa before she dropped, exhausted. Her sympathetic husband was right there with a tall, cool drink and a comforting word. "My, you look tired," he said. "You must have had a hard day today. What happened to make you so exhausted?"

"It was terrible," she said. "The computer broke down and all of us had to do our own thinking."

It's a whole new world out there. When my now-twenty-two-year-old daughter was fourteen, she joined the high school choir, where she met a boy. One week later, she received a "Relationship Request" in Facebook from him, which she accepted. Yes, instead of asking her face to face, much less calling, emailing, or even texting, he asked her to go steady by sending a relationship request on Facebook! Perhaps this wasn't the optimal way for him to ask her out, because three weeks later, she changed her relationship status back to "single," and they were broken up.

This may seem unreal, but modern business has thrived due to its eager adoption of technology. Information technology not only lets us collect and analyze huge piles of information, it helps us bring together people with different experience; links multiple offices, organizations, and individuals all over the world; and spans the world in seconds. When we finally colonize the Moon and Mars, one of the first things we'll set up will probably be a Solar System–Wide Web. How else could we get our funny cat videos?

Let's look at how modern technology affects collective productivity.

1. **Using Proper Communication.** Technological use is perhaps most heavily applied to communications within the organization. Teams should match messages to media in a way that is most efficient for the team. How often do you send someone a handwritten letter? If you're younger than thirty, the answer's probably "rarely." You type faster than you write in longhand, don't you? You're more likely to email, text, or even chat as means of communicating with team members and moving toward productively accomplishing your goals. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and similar services also tie us together.

2. **Meeting Effectively.** Face-to-face meetings, letters, and personal phone calls used to be the only ways to get together and solve problems. Not anymore. They still work, but you can also hammer out business strategy on teleconferences, video-based platforms like Skype or Zoom, and even via instant messaging. Many meetings are a combination of many of these, with team members around the world in different office configurations. It should be simple to get a group of people together and decide, right?

3. **Following Protocols.** Protocols for the in-house use of technology constantly evolve too. Do you know the proper email etiquette for your team and company? What's the right way to leave an effective voicemail message? Do you know when to send a text? Too often, we don't use technology correctly and end up reducing productivity for our team members.

A few hundred years ago, almost anyone who needed to could go out and do just about any job on their own. That's because there wasn't much variety—if you could swing a hammer, axe, or hoe, you could make enough money to get by. But teamwork was important then, too; to understand that, one only has to see how quickly the Amish can raise a barn, using old-fashioned tools, when the entire community comes together.

In the team-based jobs of today and the future, technology represents your lifeblood. You have no choice but to immerse yourself in it, becoming competent in whatever you need to do your job and improve team performance.

Accelerator #10. Using Proper Communication

The gift of language is like being your own boss, in that the good news and bad news are basically the same. In this case, the good news is we humans have the capacity to communicate more effectively than any other species on Earth (as far as we know), and we can use it for great good. The bad news? We have the capacity to communicate more effectively than any other species on Earth, and we waste it on stupid things.

In fact, it's a wonder that we ever get anything done at all, considering our tendency to warp or otherwise get wrong even the simplest of statements or orders. Sometimes just repeating something in the wrong tone of voice can cause problems, and it's far too easy for words to be accidentally added or subtracted in the communications process. All it takes is a little background noise or a failure of someone's hearing for an instant, to mess up a communication. Is it any wonder that the U.S. Navy requires its personnel to immediately repeat back the order any officer gives them, especially in combat?

Fortunately, we have so many forms of communication these days that it's easier than ever to pass information on to our team members… but it's also easier to make mistakes. In this Accelerator, we'll look at the many ways to communicate in business, and how to make sure the message received is identical to the one sent.

Here are the Speed Bumps to avoid:

1. **Using the Wrong Communication Channel:** Nowadays, many communication methods are commonly used in modern business teams.

   - Pick the correct communication channel. Because we now have too many communications options, teams

deal with the tyranny of choice—the difficulty of picking something everyone will use.
- Communicate correctly with different people and situations. With multiple methods of access to others, you need to know which method to adopt with specific individuals, especially virtual partners and managers.
- Give everyone proper training on new technologies. Before making a widespread change, invest a few hours of training so you can avoid hundreds of hours of confusion.

2. **Using Texting and IM Inappropriately:** Two of the simplest modern office communication methods are cell phone texting and instant messaging (IM). Learn the Five Fast Fundamental Cs.

- **Courtesy**. Remember that IMs and texts are highly disruptive, and use them very sparingly; Be patient, and only send one message; trust that people will read their messages and act on them. Don't send a group message, which is like a "Reply All" in email.
- **Context**. Use for critical urgent responses, yes/no questions, and sudden updates. Don't use for lengthy conversations, brainstorming, or chitchat. Alert the recipient to check email when sending an urgent email (don't get into the issue).
- **Content.** State your business directly and briefly in the first message. Make messages short and to the point. Double-check your message for spelling errors before hitting send. State how fast you need a reply.
- **Comment.** Be as responsive as possible (issues sent with this level of urgency should be worthy of an immediate reply). Never type what you wouldn't say. Don't copy messages containing internal business to a customer. Conclude with a simple "thanks" at the end.
- **Condition.** Change your IM status to reflect your actual status.

3. **Unclear, Imprecise Communication:** Keep all team goals, imperatives, initiatives, and strategic alignments as transparent as possible.

   - Be courteous when you communicate. It's hard to pick up tone in emails; use careful wording if your points might be misinterpreted.
   - Think through the most efficient communication medium before you knee-jerk. Don't overcomplicate; use the most appropriate communication method.
   - Use extreme care with escalated issues. Deal with issues at the appropriate level; go through the proper chain of command.

4. **Technology Addiction:** Electronics appeal to some of us so much that we waste time doing things we shouldn't at work.

   - Leave personal calls for the evening. Excessive personal calls reflect poorly on you and may undermine strong performance in the eyes of your manager.
   - Block out a no-tech time. Designate ninety minutes each day to work with no intrusive tech.
   - Emphasize life balance. Model your life balance expectations; if you send an email late at night, let the recipient know if a response tomorrow is fine.
   - Check email just a few times a day. Rather than responding instantly when you get an email—shattering your focus and concentration—turn off your alerts.
   - Don't live in the in-box. Answer emails promptly or turn them into action items; don't leave them in inbox purgatory.

Without proper communication, a team will fall apart. It's to your best interests to use the right form of communication with each team member, to learn to text and IM appropriately, to

communicate clearly and concisely, and to nip techno-addiction in the bud. Only when you've flattened these Speed Bumps can you really communicate successfully.

Accelerator #11. Meeting Effectively

Meetings are probably our least-loved form of communication, and we've all cursed their necessity from time to time. It sometimes seems that between all the meetings and pre-meeting meetings, we don't have time to work. Fortunately, we no longer have to stick to the old formats of face-to-face sit-down meetings, and even when we do, there are certain protocols that can yield excellent results in much less time than in meetings of the past.

To ease the pain of meetings and maximize their effectiveness, bulldoze these four Speed Bumps:

1. **Unproductive Meetings:** Most business meetings waste productive time and last far longer than they should.

   - Start the meeting on time. Don't wait for stragglers.
   - Don't start over to catch up those stragglers. They can get the meeting notes from someone else.
   - End the meeting on time so everyone can get back to work.
   - Mind your Ps and Cs: Planning, Process, Post, and Protocols, a.k.a. Calendar, Conducting, Circling Back, and Courtesy.

2. **Ineffective Conference Calls.** Conference calls combine all the disadvantages of a meeting with a phone call.

   - Limit attendees. Restrict the number of participants to no more than ten whose presence is truly required.
   - Watch the length. Work to keep calls to thirty minutes.
   - Send all info. Include the conference call phone number and PIN number with the meeting invitation, as well as the agenda and reading material.

- Test equipment. Try out your equipment days prior to the meeting. Conduct a few trials with the other locations, to ensure you can hear them and vice versa.
- Use a facilitator. Appoint someone to act as the "voice traffic controller," who is responsible for keeping the meeting on track.
- Announce your name. Remember, some people may not recognize your voice.
- Wait for responses. Silence doesn't always imply consent. Participants may be formulating questions and need another minute to chime in.
- Mute yourself. Use the "mute" feature of the phone when you're not speaking, so participants can't hear any background noise.
- Be present. Stay focused and be professional.
- No talking. Keep side conversations to a minimum.

3. **Ineffective Video and Skype Calls.** Technology has forced the evolution of a new set of rules regarding the professionalism and productivity of such meetings.

- Prep your system early to make sure everything works right.
- Dress appropriately. Even if you're in your home office, don't wear sweats or your "Han Shot First" T-shirt.
- Groom yourself as if meeting in person.
- Isolate yourself in a quiet place. It's nice to be untethered because of technology, but the local park doesn't present the most professional image, and there's too much background noise at Starbucks.
- Straighten up the viewable area of your location. Don't have laundry, boxes, dirty dishes, trash, pets, etc., where people can see them.
- Be punctual. Always log in a few minutes before the start time. Be ready to start *at* the start time, rather than logging in at the start time and making others wait.

- Introduce yourself, in case some of the people on the call don't know you.
- Put your laptop or webcam on a table or desk, and center yourself in the frame. Avoid the temptation to sit in your easy chair and put the laptop on your lap. It can make your image unsteady, and no one wants to count your nose hairs.
- Use your mute button when not speaking.
- Don't eat, unless it's a lunch or dinner meeting and everyone's doing it. Set your coffee cup away from your video pickup.
- Remain attentive, always. Don't pretend to be watching when you're really checking email.
- Maintain eye contact by looking at the camera, not the screen, when you speak.
- Don't shout. Speak clearly, in a normal tone.
- Expect delays, especially when talking with people in other countries. Give them a few seconds to respond so you don't talk over them or assume they have nothing to say.
- Don't yawn on screen. It's as demoralizing as yawning in someone's face.
- Don't smoke or chew gum.
- Limit your body movements, even if you normally speak with your hands. Don't twirl your hair or use other nervous gestures.
- Avoid side conversations.

4. **Complicated, Time-Consuming Meetings.** In the white-collar world, sitting down all day is both a blessing and a curse. Try standing meetings instead.

- Standing meetings are shorter, and get as much done as sit-down meetings.
- Stand-up meetings burn 50% more calories that sit-down meetings.

- Stand-up meetings for increased alertness.
- Stand-ups are ideal for brief, simple subjects.
- Provide stand-up desks so people can take notes.

Technology has long afforded us the option of teleconferences, where multiple people dial in to the meeting from across the world. Given the quality of our technologies and the speed of light, there's rarely a noticeable time lag. Ditto for videoconferences, if you feel the need to see your fellow conferees so you can assess their body language and expressions—a significant part of communication for many of us. As technology advances, the hardware has gotten surprisingly cheap, and it's no longer an inconvenience to prepare and take part in such calls.

You don't necessarily have to sit during a meeting. Some notable execs prefer standing meetings, because it makes people get to the point quicker and it's easier to render decisions. If your legs can handle it, you might want to try standing or walking meetings yourself. Such meetings are an average of 34 percent shorter than standing meetings, and produce decisions that are just as good.

Accelerator #12. Following Protocols

For every communication method, you have rules and protocols to learn if you want to maximize your efficiency. Politeness and clarity, for example, represent ideals to shoot for in all communication. But few other universals exist in communications protocols, so once your team has the tools it needs to get the job done, it's important to set expectations around how those tools will be used. What is a reasonable time frame to expect a reply to an email? How often should you check your voicemail? Should you be reachable by cell phone at all hours of the day and night?

It doesn't matter so much what the answers are (though in general, less is more). What does matter is that you and your team ask these questions and come up with clear, unequivocal expectations. That way, once you have the tools to be productive, you can also be sure that you're using them in a way that makes sense for your organization.

Don't let these last few Speed Bumps stall you out.

1. **Poor Email Communication and Lack of Etiquette:** With proper protocols in place, email offers invaluable benefits for team communication, whether your team works together in the same building or in locations across a continent—or the world.

   - Be courteous and use proper etiquette. Use the high priority flag sparingly, don't answer emails you're just CC'd to, check your email at least twice a day and respond ASAP, and let your recipient know if something is too sensitive to forward, etc.
   - Ensure proper formatting and readability. Write grammatically, spell correctly, review the message before you send it, and do anything else necessary to make it more readable.

- Reduce inbox volume. Don't reply just to say thanks or "my pleasure," be sparing with group emails, and don't CC others unless it's necessary.
- Write clearly and concisely. Make your emails as short as they can safely be so they're easy for others to read and handle. Use bullet points and key takeaways more often.

2. **Leaving Bad Voicemails:** This may not be the worst Speed Bump ever, but it's still terribly rattling, so proper techno-etiquette is a must to reduce or remove it.

- Don't try to make your voicemail greeting funny or cutesy: make it short and to the point.
- Productivity is about saving another people's time, too. In that spirit, make sure you respond to voicemails efficiently.
- If you're on an extended vacation and won't be checking in, set the system to roll your calls over to a colleague who can handle them expeditiously and provide good customer service
- When you leave a message, begin with your name, affiliation, and phone number, and then state your message concisely.
- Plan your message before you call so it's succinct and no more than sixty seconds.
- End messages with your name and phone number again, all clearly stated in an audible tone.

3. **Being Inconsiderate of Others Around You**. Some people disrupt other peoples' lives through sheer mindlessness. This includes inconsiderate use of technology.

- Turn down your phone's ringer. We hear enough ringing all day; no one appreciates an especially loud, strident ring.

- Keep your voice down. You don't need to speak loudly on your phone, in front of everyone.
- Turn off your beeps. No one needs to know you just got an email or Tweet but you.
- Hold conference calls in conference rooms. Don't listen to calls or voicemail in public places with a speakerphone.
- Talk on your cell phone outside or in the break room, *not* in the hall next to someone's office or cubicle.

4. **No Set Standards for Texting**. This isn't the emoji-laden, LOL silliness of the younger generation. Millennials have grown up using text messaging, and they're quite aware of how to use it professionally.

- Avoid inappropriate texting abbreviations. LOL and ROTFL may seem appropriate in some cases, but they will forever mark you as an amateur should you use them
- Precision counts. The better your grammar and spelling, the easier it is to understand your text.
- Keep an eye on Autocorrect. Sometimes your phone makes guesses about words based on similar things you've typed before. As many of us have learned to our chagrin, it sometimes picks the wrong word.
- Keep texts short, sweet, and to the point. The brevity of the form naturally poses some limits, so it's best to organize your thoughts in advance and say what you must in as few words as possible.
- Text responsibly. Texting a manager who prefers emails or phone calls is a bad idea,
- Don't text in meetings. It's rude, and you may as well yawn in everyone's face.
- Use texts sparingly. Don't overwhelm your team members with texts.

- Beware of who's watching. If you think someone might read something over your shoulder, don't text anything proprietary or secret in public.
- Avoid writing in all caps. It makes it look like you're yelling.
- Make judicious use of emoticons. Using too many may seem unprofessional to others.

Most protocols and etiquette are less subtle, thank goodness! Just start with the basic rules for politeness your mom taught you, and add a dash of the Golden Rule. That should hold you in good stead until you learn to navigate the peculiarities of the systems you find yourself faced with.

CONCLUSION

My grandmother lived in a nursing home during the last years of her life. Like most nursing homes, it had an automatic coffee machine: You know, the kind where you punch a few buttons, tell it what kind of coffee you want and what you want in it, and it shoots a cup down the little chute and makes your coffee for you.

The first time I used this machine, there was a guy in front of me in line, so I thought, "Oh good, I can watch someone else do it first." The guy took out his wallet and a buck and tried to feed the machine, but the dollar was wrinkled and the machine wouldn't take it. So, I traded him a dollar and said, "Here, try this one." It worked. Then I watched him punch hazelnut, cream, and sugar. The man stood back to watch the coffee being made as it came out.

The only problem was this machine trusted that you saw the Styrofoam cups sitting over on the counter; a cup did not

come down the little chute. Before either of us could react, we watched the hazelnut coffee, creamer, and sugar go down the drain. The man blinked, turned to me, and said, "Wow, this automatic stuff is really efficient—it even drinks it for you!"

That's a great analogy for working in a team. If you think you won't have to work, you can expect the machine will drink it for you. You can't expect things to happen on a team if you don't take the appropriate action yourself. You must take personal responsibility to help your team be FASTER TOGETHER.

What can you do to make your team go FAST?

Keep working on the Faster Together program and continuously seek to improve your collective productivity. Once you've improved an Accelerator to top quality, pick the next-worst Accelerator and keep moving your Team Car toward top speed.

Making your team faster takes time. It can be hard work, but it isn't complicated, especially if everyone on the team works together to make it happen. Even if you aren't the team leader, you can still foster change in your team by emphasizing Fairness, Accountability, Systems, and Technology. Focusing on just one or two Keys isn't good enough; you need them all to drive FAST.

Sure, you'll encounter a lot of Speed Bumps that will try to slow you down in the process, so you've got to be prepared to dismantle, tear down, raze, or bulldoze each as you encounter it. You may find some I haven't included here, as these are just the most common ones. No matter. Treat them the same as any other: get rid of them. Grind them down to nothing. You can't gain maximum speed if you must slow down every hundred feet for a Speed Bump. And you can't ignore them, either,

because they'll wreck the vehicle of team productivity if you hit them while going too fast.

Demolish one Speed Bump after another, and after a while you'll have a clear path, which will let your Team Car tear down the road like it's a runway—and then take off like a Thunderbird.

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Laura Stack, a.k.a. The Productivity Pro®, helps leaders increase team and personal productivity. For twenty-five years now, her keynote speeches and seminars have helped clients develop high-performance cultures, improve output, and save time in the office.

In 1992, Laura founded her company, The Productivity Pro, Inc., focused on helping clients achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. A sought-after thought leader, Laura writes on accelerating execution, human potential, and peak performance in her columns in *The Business Journal*, *Huffington Post*, and *Time Management*. Laura uses both high energy and high content to educate, entertain, and motivate audiences to produce greater results in the workplace. She was the 2011–2012 President of the National Speakers Association (NSA) and is the recipient of the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, NSA's highest earned designation. In 2015, Laura received the

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Laura is the author of seven other bestselling productivity books published by Random House, Wiley, Broadway Books, and Berrett-Koehler—most recently, *Doing the Right Things Right* (2016). Her books have been published in over twenty countries and translated into many foreign languages, including Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Italian, and Romanian. Laura's popular weekly electronic productivity bulletin has subscribers in thirty-eight countries.

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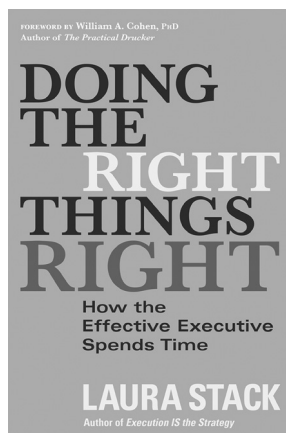
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