

Overcome Your Productivity Bottleneck

Your ***Unidentified Productivity Bottleneck*** is the main obstacle preventing you from getting everything done each day. To reclaim 10 hours of your time each week, answer the following 6 questions to dig into the root cause behind your time loss.

Check all that apply.

1. You set aside time in your calendar to work on the strategic parts of your business and:
 - a. A team member interrupts you with a question, which leads to another, and the strategic thinking time is gone.
 - b. A client calls and you drop everything to help her. I mean, they pay the bills, right?!
 - c. You jump into your inbox to answer “just one email” and before you know it, the strategic planning block is over.
 - d. Blocking time for planning on the calendar seems like a good idea, but the reality is you run from appointment to appointment with no time to plan.
 - e. You really want to use this time to think strategically about your business, but your brain is just exhausted.
 - f. You easily complete the task.

2. You have a big project due for a client, you are up against the deadline, and:
 - a. no one can do it as well as you anyway.
 - b. You knew you needed more time to complete this project at the beginning, but the client really needed a quick turn around and you didn't want to disappoint her so you said "yes."
 - c. You know you could work faster if you didn't have so much communication coming at you . . . text, Slack, email . . .
 - d. You wish you had put some "work time" in your calendar to get this project done. Trying to fit it into 15 - to 30- minute blocks wherever you have time just isn't getting it done.
 - e. Sometimes you find getting the work done is easy, other times you can barely get started.
 - f. You easily complete projects for clients.

3. You work in the evening (or on the weekend) because there is just too much going on in the office during the day to get any work done. You're distracted by:
 - a. Team members asking questions.
 - b. Clients reaching out.
 - c. Email, slack, text.
 - d. Meetings, meetings, meetings - and oh, did I mention, MEETINGS!
 - e. You just don't seem to have the mental energy to focus during the day.
 - f. You never work nights or weekends.

4. You feel like you just have too much to do and not enough time. This is because:
 - a. You'd like to delegate, but it just takes so much time to teach someone to do it that it's quicker to do it yourself.
 - b. You feel good when you help people, so adding one more thing to your list isn't that big of a deal . . . it'll only take 10 minutes anyway.
 - c. Your brain is flying in 50 directions at once . . . if you could just focus.
 - d. Each morning is an adventure. You just take each thing as it comes and hope you tackle the important stuff at some point in the day.
 - e. You are super unproductive at various points throughout the day because it just feels like you are slogging through mud.
 - f. You never feel like you have too much work to do.

5. A client calls and you jump to answer the call because:
 - a. You are the only one in your business who can help clients.
 - b. You believe in 24-7 customer service.
 - c. Talking with clients is way more fun than anything else on your to-do list.
 - d. Everything you need to do today is of equal value, so speaking with a client is no big deal.
 - e. You get energy from talking with clients - and hopefully this will help you refocus on the rest of the work on your to-do list.
 - f. You have plenty of time to talk with clients, so you welcome their calls.

6. You wake up at 2 AM and the first thought that comes into your head is:
- a. Did my team member finish the project on time?
 - b. I'd better respond to that client!
 - c. Up anyway, might as well answer some email.
 - d. What's on my calendar for tomorrow - and am I prepared?
 - e. Great - another night up at 2 AM. I'll be even more exhausted tomorrow!
 - f. 2 AM? What? I sleep like a baby every night!

Tally your answers:

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.
- E.
- F.

You may have more than one productivity bottleneck, most people do. Start with the category that has the most responses, solve that one, and move on to the next.

Scoring

Mostly A: Delegation Bottleneck

This is the most common bottleneck and solving it will give you the most time back. Here's how you can overcome this bottleneck:

- ▶ Determine which tasks are in your Zone of Genius. Everything else can be delegated to someone else.
- ▶ Look at your human resources to determine the perfect fit for each task. Often this person is sitting right in front of you - either as a current employee or someone in your network that is looking for some subcontract work.
- ▶ Create a step by step process that you can follow every time you delegate. Once you move things out of your head and into someone else's, you won't need to answer questions all day long.
- ▶ Check out [this resource](#) if you answer questions all day.

Mostly B: Boundaries Bottleneck

Setting (and KEEPING) boundaries is a challenge for you. There is a difference between being responsive to your client's needs and allowing your day to run out of control at the drop of a hat. Try these steps:

- ▶ Determine what an actual "fire" is. What will you drop everything to solve? What can you respond to at a more convenient time? Once you can identify this you can easily be proactive with your responses.

- ▶ Write down your company policies on work hours, turn-around time, and capacity. When you have these defined in black and white, it is a lot easier to tell a client, “We can get this done in five days, but not two.” You teach people how to treat you, so be clear on your expectations.
- ▶ Remember, a “yes” to one thing is a “no” to something else. Each request you say “yes” to is something else in your life you have to eliminate. It usually results in saying “yes” to someone else and “no” to yourself. Why are their needs and goals more important than your own?

Mostly C: Distraction Bottleneck

Text, email, Slack, and Voxer are great communication tools that are crucial to running a business, but they do not need to run you! Each time you are distracted from a task, it takes 17 minutes and 23 seconds to get back into the zone. Here’s what you need to do to overcome this bottleneck:

- ▶ Figure out your perfect-fit communication system.
- ▶ When will you respond?
- ▶ What messages do you need to respond to?
- ▶ How long can you go with the apps closed so you can work? You do not need to be in your email all day long - I promise!

Mostly D: Calendar Bottleneck

This means your bottleneck is an ineffective calendar / planning system. Here are the components of a good system:

- ▶ A place to gather short and long term goals
- ▶ Comprehensive accounting of all tasks and appointments
- ▶ A routine to plan daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly
- ▶ Enough white space in the calendar to think and work on big projects. [More about white space here.](#)

Mostly E: Energy Bottleneck

It is unrealistic to think that you can maintain a high level of focus and energy all day, every day. Being able to maximize your high points and minimize your low points is key in solving this bottleneck. Try this:

- ▶ Understand your rhythm of energy throughout the day and week, and schedule tasks and appointments accordingly.
- ▶ Create a routine to regularly replenish your physical, mental, and emotional energy.
- ▶ [Watch this resource](#) explaining Biological Prime Time.

Mostly F: Boss Productivity Level

Checking mostly “F”s means you pretty much have this productivity thing figured out. **Congratulations!** To fine-tune your system, look at the area that has the second-most answers.

Final thoughts

When you solve your bottleneck, your solution can't rely on working more, trying harder, being more disciplined, or having stronger willpower. It won't last.

Instead, you need a plan that depends on...

- ▶ working differently.
- ▶ leaning into your **STRENGTHS**.
- ▶ being “real” – no theoretical, hard to understand (and harder to implement) strategies.

Often, it's hard to “fix” yourself. It's OK to ask for help to quickly eliminate your productivity bottleneck.

To see if one-on-one coaching is your next step, schedule a **Discovery Conversation**. Lisa's clients routinely reduce their workweek by a minimum of 10 hours each week, without working harder, trying harder, or being more disciplined.

Lisa Crilley Mallis, Immediate Past President of NAWBO Cleveland and owner of Impactive Strategies, works with focused, successful business owners and teams who are tired of giving up their nights and weekends trying to get everything done. She provides customized, practical solutions for everyday efficiency challenges, allowing her clients to focus on taking strategic action instead of just “being busy.”

