

by Mike Hawkins  
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The corporate mantra for the last few years has been “do more with less” with the idea being that people need to be more productive and get more accomplished with fewer resources. How has this worked out? The United States Department of Labor reports that non-farm business-sector productivity rose 0.4% annually on average from 2007 to 2015 with 2015’s annual growth at 0.2%. In contrast, productivity in the late 1980’s grew at 0.7%, the early

1990s at 0.5%, in the late 1990s at 1.5%, and in the early 2000s at 1.4%. By all measures, productivity in recent years has lagged prior years with the lag being almost 400 percent less than the productivity increases of the late 1990s.

Does this mean that the current labor force is less capable? Less motivated? Putting in less effort? Or are government and corporate policies having a negative impact? All these have been speculated, but what if the fundamental goal of doing more with less is flawed? What if trying to do too much actually lowers productivity? As most can attest, trying to do too much increases stress, creates distractions, causes mistakes, and reduces quality.

What if people embraced the opposite philosophy – “do less with more”? In other words, what if people focused their resources on fewer tasks, goals, and projects? What if people spent an entire day, week, month, quarter, or year doing only one thing? Could they be more productive and actually accomplish more?

Only working on one project or pursuing one goal at a time might seem impossible. People wouldn’t get through their daily barrage of urgent requests. They wouldn’t be able to handle their daily fire drills. They wouldn’t attend their constant flow of meetings. They wouldn’t keep up with their email, texts, news, and social media updates. They wouldn’t satisfy all their stakeholder requests for reports and updates.

However, for those with more persistence, willpower, discipline, and courage, they might be able to push all their distractions aside. They might focus all their discretionary energy and time on achieving one really important goal. They might allocate all their resources toward doing one thing, doing it well, and getting it done. They might do less with more and achieve something far more important and meaningful.

Are you operating in the “do more with less” model or the “do less with more” model? If you are running on the treadmill of *busyness as usual* and not achieving your primary goal, could you be trying to do too much? Perhaps you need to refocus. You need to say “no”, delegate, defer, or put conditions on your “yes”s. You need to put more items on your “not to-do” list instead of your “to-do” list. You need to eliminate your distractions. As Stephen R Covey pointed out in his best-selling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, you may need to “put first things first”.

Busyness doesn’t equal productivity. Urgent matters aren’t necessarily important ones. Consider what is most important for you and your organization to achieve in the coming weeks, months, and year. Is it staying informed on existing offerings or creating a new offering? Is it tweaking current marketing materials or going into a new market? Is it maintaining the status quo or building something new? Or writing a book, achieving a certification, or doing something you’ve always dreamed of?

Intercept any tendency to reward yourself or others for how much work gets done, particularly if the work is done at the expense of more important and strategic initiatives. Consider what truly matters and move it from the proverbial back burner to the front burner. Rather than spreading your time, energy, and resources across many activities, focus them on a few. Or two. Or one. Do less with more and achieve something truly significant.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com](http://www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com)), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches ([www.ScopeOfLeadership.com](http://www.ScopeOfLeadership.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.AlpineLink.com](http://www.AlpineLink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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