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Slacker@Work

I'm a Slacker@Work. In all likelihood, so are you. Say it with me now: "I'm a slacker." If you haven't considered yourself a slacker before now, you'll find it's a tough mental hurdle to get over. Once you do, however, you'll be on the road to satisfaction and happiness. *continued* ▶

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AUTHOR

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ON BEING A SLACKER@WORK

We slackers represent the bright side of overachievers. Slackers are as smart, educated, talented and driven as any standard-issue overachiever you'll find. The core difference is that slackers have the gift of satisficing: we can stop at "good enough" and go home unburdened by what was left undone. Though slackers will satisfice, it would be a mistake to assume that slackers never exceed expectations. Quite the contrary. Because slackers are at their best when focused upon problems and issues that are important to them, slacker work product is among the finest in the world. Therein lies the key to understanding the slacker ethic: **slackers are best at doing what is important to them.** This knowledge is important not only to those who work with slackers, but also to slackers themselves (Slacker, know thyself!). When slackers understand why they aren't like the other kids in the office, they can begin to employ lifehacks that afford many favorable benefits. Foremost among these benefits is the ability to pursue ones own interests while simultaneously being seen as a superstar at work.

A WORD ABOUT THE SLACKER@WORK ETHIC

It is important to remember what you're about as a slacker. You are doing what you find interesting and enjoy. To this end, it is a good idea to find a job that you like. I won't presume to be your life coach here, but if you don't like your work, you might start by making some lists of your values and comparing them to locally available industries. Anyway, there are plenty of books out there that will help you beat this old horse. You just want to generally enjoy the work you do. If you don't enjoy your work, in a general sense, you really will end up being one of those do-nothing layabout slackers that give the rest of us a bad name. So do

us all a favor and find good work. *Office Space* is a great movie, and it illustrates the point I'm making here.

What follows are choice selections of lifehacks for the Slacker@Work. Consider this a starting point and use them as a spring board for your own strategies.

TAG YOUR PEEPS

Tagging precedes everything that follows. If you haven't read *The Tipping Point* by Malcom Gladwell, you'll at least need to read the attention deficit [digest version](#). You will need to identify (tag) the most influential people in your office, as they relate to your image at work. These people may or may not include your boss. Your boss's coffee buddy may be on the list, though. As might an administrative assistant, or even the guy in the mailroom. Gladwell calls these people the Mavens. They are the people that influence opinion around the office. Once you know who the Mavens are, you'll want to cultivate them. The big idea is that you want the Mavens to believe you are invaluable. Be nice to them. Do small favors. Random acts of kindness, etc. If you find it difficult to identify the Mavens, or just find it distasteful, as I do, to single some folks out, then fall back on the Golden Rule. You remember the Golden Rule, right? Treat others (yeah, all of 'em) as you'd like to be treated. The Golden Rule has stood the test of time for a reason. If you are committed to being a surly boor around the office, stop reading now. The tips that follow won't get you much traction and besides, your time is better spent polishing up that résumé.

THE HEADER/TRAILER PARADOX

The Header/Trailer Paradox is the problem slackers run into when they leave work early because they came in early, or they come in late because they intend to stay late. In either case, the risk is quite real that co-workers and colleagues, unaware of the whole plan, will begin to suspect that the slacker is keeping short hours and burdening others with extra work. Don't let this happen. The solution is a simple email to the Mavens in your office. Make sure you have sufficient work-related context for the email and send it either as soon as you get in in the morning, or just before leaving late at night. Everyone looks at timestamps on email and makes mental notes about how crazy it is to be at work at 5am—or 11pm. When the Mavens see how committed you are, you'll quickly gain "hardworker" status across the office, regardless of the hours you work.

THE FOUR HOUR RULE

The Four Hour Rule is very powerful and must not be abused. The end result of the use of the Four Hour Rule is that you get half a day off work, and impress everyone with your steadfast commitment to the job. Now pay attention, here's where it gets complicated. Early in the morning—at least a couple of hours before you need to be at work—you must call your boss or colleague and let them know you'll be taking a sick day. Don't try to disguise your voice to make them think you're really sick, just call and let them know. Enjoy a few hours around the house. Then go to work. People will be surprised to see you. Let them know that yeah, you were planning on staying home all day, but you just had to get some stuff done in the office. Go home at regular time looking like a champ. Be sure to get the order of events right on this one. If you go to work for half a day, then go home sick, you'll just end up looking like a weenie instead of a hero.

MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Don't let your sick days fall by the wayside. If you aren't feeling up to working today, use a sick day. Too many people think you actually have to be stuck in bed to use your sick days—it's a holdover from when mom let us stay home from school, but we had to stay in our room. Now you're all grown up, so use your sick days to stay healthy. But be smart about it, please. Don't make the folks back at the office wonder why you've got ski-goggle shadow after being sick. Save that stuff for after work or on weekends. Or, heaven forbid, an actual vacation day. The key to using your sick days to stay healthy is to "refresh and renew." Get away from distractions and get down with your inner self. Now, I'll freely admit that I often go surfing during my sick days. But in my neck of the woods, surfing doesn't involve getting a tan, most of the year. For me, surfing is meditative and relaxing. One good day of surfing will keep me humming for a whole week, at least. If you need additional justification for using this tactic, consider that if you use your sick days as mental health days, you may find that you actually use fewer sick days. Amazing!

STROKE IT

This is a more mundane tip, but no less important than those above. If your work requires a significant amount of time in front of a computer, you are well advised to learn the keyboard shortcuts to the most commonly performed functions. The computer mouse is a great invention (especially those cool wireless laser ones, eh?), but it slows you down. The faster you can perform functions, the more time you'll have for what you'd rather be doing. Regardless of your preferred computing environment, virtually all software has been programmed to recognize specific keystrokes that get things done without any mouse clicking. Learn them.

Especially the one that toggles between your spreadsheet and your in-progress blog post. Here are some keystroke [shortcuts for Windows](#) some for [OSX](#) and some [for Linux](#).

LIST IT. LIST IT GOOD.

One last tip. Keep lists and keep them at hand. You can accomplish this using techniques of varying degrees of complexity. Unless your work requires it, avoid complexity. If you need guidance in keeping lists, procure a copy of David Allen's very excellent book, *Getting Things Done*. You can find it at the library, but this is a book worth keeping. The reason you want to keep lists is because you want to keep those Mavens happy and off your back. List keeping will help you avoid dropping the balls that are important to other people. I use a PDA to keep my lists, but Merlin Mann has put up a great idea for replacing your PDA with [index cards](#). Be very careful with your list keeping system. It is too easy to get sucked into the vortex of complexity for its own sake. You should own your lists, not the other way around.

WRAPPING IT UP

You've got plenty of other stuff to do, and I understand that so I've kept this manifesto short. If you've seen the light and recognize the slacker in yourself, you will likely want to keep an eye on at least some of the following resources.

Browse the [bulletin boards](#) at The David Allen Company for information and tips on implementing the GTD methodology. If you see the value in the GTD methods, be sure to visit the [GTD section](#) of the Office Zealot for much more. Hop over to Merlin Mann's [43Folders](#) for a great selection of lifehacks and Apple-centric computing tips. Visit [WorkingSmart](#) for the

PC-centric tips and more GTD pointers. Finally, it's often redundant, but be sure to regularly review the [lifehacks tag on del.icio.us](#).

If the Slacker@Work rings a bell for you, I'd love to know about it. Send me an email, or drop a note in my blog somewhere. Thanks again for your attention.

THE RAZOR EDGE OF PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination can kill you. It can also be an effective, though blunt, method of separating the wheat from the chaff. Procrastination is always a gamble, though. Even if you play it right, there's no telling whether it'll blow up down the line. By putting things off yet another day, you are gambling that the day will come when that task is no longer important. Of course, the risk is that even when you think the danger has passed, your boss may come looking for just the thing you kept putting off. At that point, you'll either have to fess up, or you'll be under the gun to get it done. Neither is a good option. There is an additional benefit to procrastination that was identified by John Perry in his classic internet essay, *Structured Procrastination*. In the essay, Perry describes procrastination as a tool to accomplish tasks of lesser importance than the task being put off. He notes that you may be able to fool yourself into doing more of the lesser things by procrastinating on the bigger things. Regardless of the potential benefits to procrastination, I recommend it only as a last resort. Remember, procrastination can kill you.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A cross between satisfy and suffice, satisfice means “To obtain an outcome that is good enough.” First written by Herbert A. Simon in his book, *Models of Man*, in 1957.
- 2 Coined by Danny O’Brien <http://oblomovka.com> originally to describe tricks employed by ‘Alpha Geeks’ to be more productive.
- 3 *Structured Procrastination* by John Perry can be found at: <http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~john/procrastination.html>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brendon Connelly is a highly effective slacker. Previously an Organizational Development Manager for a Fortune 500 subsidiary, he's now a university administrator and co-founder of FinAidPro.com (<http://finaidpro.com/>). Brendon still prefers surfing, skateboarding, or hanging out with his family to working. And thus, this manifesto.

Visit his homepage at <http://bren.pintglass.org>

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NAVIGATION & USER TIPS

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Full screen/Normal screen view	[CTL] [L]	[⌘] [L]

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This document was created on October 2004 and is based on the best information available at that time. To check for updates, please click here to visit <http://changethis.com/sp-4.SlackerAtWork>

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