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### Reclaim Your Job

Key ideas from the [Harvard Business Review](#) article By Sumantra Ghoshal, Heike Bruch

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#### The Idea in Brief

90% of managers waste time and fritter away their productivity by grappling with an endless list of demands from others. Why? We assume--wrongly--that those demands are *requirements*, and that we lack personal discretion or control over our jobs. The consequence? We remain trapped in inefficiency.

But we can escape this trap--if we learn how to grasp opportunities, trust our own judgment, and methodically fulfill personal goals that tally with our organizations' objectives. The keys? Set priorities--then stick to them, focusing on efforts that support those priorities. Overcome resource constraints by attacking goals strategically, demonstrating success at every step. And develop a range of alternatives to exploit when Plan A fails.

We all want to make a difference in our organizations, as well as build satisfying careers. By understanding how we inhibit ourselves and taking purposeful, strategic action, we can seize control of our jobs--rather than letting our jobs control us. The payoff? Impressive results for our companies and rewarding work lives for us.

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#### The Idea in Practice

To reclaim your job and better support your company's priorities, apply three strategies:

##### Prioritize Demands

To achieve personal and organizational goals quickly, *slow down* and focus your time and attention.

McKinsey associate principal Jessica Spungin took on too many projects that had little connection to her skills and interests. Result? Her project teams rated her second from the bottom among her peers.

Realizing her desire to be indispensable sprang from lack of confidence, Spungin took steps to manage demands. She clarified her goal: to become a partner. Then she set long-term priorities supporting that goal. She began managing her own development; for example, choosing assignments that most interested her. And she started orchestrating her time, meeting only with people who really needed her and working on long-term projects during months when she traveled less.

Her reward? She scored second from the top in her peer group--and was named a McKinsey partner.

### Liberate Resources

To relax resource constraints and win the backing you want, attack your goals strategically. Be patient. The process can take years.

As the new head of HR development at airline Lufthansa, Thomas Sattelberger dreamed of launching Germany's first corporate business school. Knowing he needed several years to establish his credibility, he first overhauled inefficient HR processes. He then developed initiatives supporting the school, raising money for these projects by presenting compelling facts and arguments to his counterparts and CEO.

After four years of methodical work on Sattelberger's part, Lufthansa's CEO and board understood how his programs fit together. When he wrote a memo to directors requesting creation of the school before Daimler-Benz could beat Lufthansa to the punch, the board promptly approved the request.

### Exploit Alternatives

Use your expertise to anticipate--and circumvent--possible obstacles to your goals. You'll expand the scope of opportunity for your company *and* yourself.

Dan Andersson, a manager at oil refiner ConocoPhillips, was part of a team exploring Conoco's entrance into the Finnish market. Conoco decided to store petrol in tanks in Finland that Shell had abandoned. But Andersson developed contingency plans. Plan B, for instance, involved building a new facility.

His efforts paid off. When research revealed the abandoned tanks were unsuitable for petrol storage, Andersson activated Plan B. Though the new-facility target site was contaminated, Andersson discovered that Shell was responsible for cleaning the site. Once cleanup ended, Conoco built the tanks.

Conoco became the most efficient operator of automated self-service filling stations in Finland. Andersson now heads Conoco's retail development in Europe.

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### Further Reading

Articles

## **Reawakening Your Passion for Work**

*Harvard Business Review*

April 2002

by Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee, and Daniel Goleman

In "Reclaim Your Job," Ghoshal and Bruch stress the importance of defining your own professional agenda. "Reawakening Your Passion for Work" offers concrete ideas for shaping your managerial priorities.

To help your organization achieve its goals, you must be energized, creative, and committed to your job. But all of us face moments when our professional passions wane--when milestone birthdays, major life events, or aging parents cause us to ask, "Am I really living the way I want to live?" This article explains how to renew your professional passion during these times.

First look for signals that it's time to take stock of your work life. For example, watch for feelings of entrapment or boredom, the sense that you need to reassess your priorities, the conviction that you're drawn to a new mission. Then renew your passion by taking time off to reexamine your priorities or finding a professional development program to clarify your aspirations and strengths. Schedule regular self-reflection time or make small changes in your job to add new challenges. You'll revive your energy, creativity, and commitment--and your ability to inspire others.

## **Managers Can Avoid Wasting Time**

*Harvard Business Review*

May-June 1982

by Ronald N. Ashkenas and Robert H. Schaffer

This article provides additional strategies for prioritizing demands. Many managers escape into busyness (sorting through e-mail, fighting fires) because *real* managerial work--with all its vagueness, ambiguous accountability, and muddy causal connections--generates intense anxiety.

But when we succumb to busyness to allay anxiety, we neglect our primary responsibilities: improving performance, demanding more from employees, streamlining daily activities. Our companies pay the price, with too many people on the job, overly complicated structures, excessive analysis, and insufficient action.

How to replace anxiety with the confidence to tackle your toughest challenges? Break big projects into manageable pieces, selecting efforts that focus on bottom-line results. Clarify how you'll measure, report on, and review progress. And apply traditional time-management strategies: document your actual use of time, ask which daily activities are *most* important, and compare insights with other managers' to identify more effective work habits. Your reward? You'll avoid the seductiveness of busyness and invest your time where it pays the biggest dividends.

## About the Authors

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