

# MORE SALES

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# LESS TIME

Surprisingly Simple Strategies  
for Today's Crazy-Busy Sellers

**JILL KONRATH**

Author of *SNAP Selling*

**ALSO BY JILL KONRATH**

*Agile Selling*

*SNAP Selling*

*Selling to Big Companies*

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FOR TODAY'S CRAZY-BUSY SELLERS

# **JILL KONRATH**

PORTFOLIO/PENGUIN



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*May you enjoy the time of your life!*

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# INTRODUCTION

**SHORTLY AFTER I DELIVERED THE CLOSING KEYNOTE** at a big sales conference, Matt, a salesperson for a midsized software firm, approached me with a grim look on his face. “Do you have a second?” he asked hesitantly. “Sure,” I answered. “What’s up?”

That was all it took to open the floodgates. Matt started off saying he totally agreed with me that salespeople needed to be invaluable resources to their customers (the subject of my talk). I was glad to hear that. Then came the big *but*.

“But,” he said, “I’m totally maxed out right now. I hustled like crazy last year to meet my quota. Then they went and raised it thirteen percent this year. I have no idea how I’m going to make my numbers. I’m up at the crack of dawn, working my you-know-what off all day long. On my way home, I pick up my youngest at day care. In the evening, I have family responsibilities. How in the world am I supposed to get everything done and learn our new CRM and do social selling and . . . ?” His list went on and on.

I recognized the pain of not having enough time in the day to do it all. It was my pain too. Likely it’s something you’re struggling with right now as well.

My response to Matt was empathetic but not one bit helpful. “I know exactly how you feel,” I said, “but I’m not a productivity guru. I’m also having a tough time these days.” Personally, I felt like time was taunting me: “Behind again? You’ll never get it all done.” I worked harder and longer hours, sacrificing my limited personal time to stay ahead of the game. Still, it wasn’t sufficient. My work just kept expanding, demanding more of me. I could never seem to call it a day.

In my entire career, I’d never faced a sales problem of this magnitude.

While I—and Matt—dealt with this crisis of not having enough time, the entire sales field was doubling down on its obsession with sales productivity. Sales leaders wanted “more revenue per rep.” Spurred on by big data, emerging software-as-a-service technologies, seamless integrations, and easy-to-use apps, sales teams were armed with the latest and greatest tools to sell even more—and handed quotas to match that supposed new capacity.

With all these productivity-enhancing tools, you’d think we would have been able to meet our quotas with time to spare. But precisely the opposite was happening. Virtually every seller I knew worked longer hours, yet according to CSO Insights, a whopping 45.4 percent still weren’t making their numbers.

Matt’s question to me—and my own recognition of what my life had become—made me curious. Why were we so overwhelmed? Shouldn’t the development of all these technologies make it easier to get things done, not harder? What was I missing?

## THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

For my entire career, I’ve relentlessly searched for fresh strategies to address emerging sales challenges. At Xerox, where I began my sales career and led sales teams, figuring out how to beat new competitors consumed me. When I sold technology, I obsessed over finding new ways to displace the status quo. When

I ran a consulting firm, helping my clients jump-start their new-product sales was the ultimate challenge. Most recently, I've been writing, speaking, and doing workshops on the following:

- Setting up meetings with impossible-to-reach corporate decision makers (which I wrote about in my book *Selling to Big Companies*)
- More effective approaches for selling to crazy-busy buyers (I covered this topic in a follow-up book, *SNAP Selling*)
- Getting up to speed quickly in a new sales position (a skill I wrote about in depth in my last book, *Agile Selling*)

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd need to tackle the issue of sales productivity. In my mind, time management gurus were anal-retentive sorts who were preoccupied with streamlining processes and saving minutes. Being a sales snob, I was interested in more important things—like increasing sales effectiveness and driving revenue.

But at the time Matt asked me his question, I was sick and tired of being crazy busy. It was time to stop feeling sorry for myself and take action. With a vengeance, I threw myself into learning everything I could about time management and sales productivity. It was a problem begging for an answer.

I studied the work of neuroscientists, psychologists, time management gurus, cognitive behavioral specialists, psychiatrists, sleep researchers, and business innovators. Throughout the process, I kept trying to figure out, “How does this relate to sellers?”

Traditional time management strategies don't take into account the unique needs and challenges of salespeople. We have so many balls in the air—our prospect pipelines, long-term relationships, clients we're trying to close—and we need to pay attention to all of them if we're going to meet our goals. Plus, in many cases, we salespeople live on our computers. They're like appendages to us, necessary for our survival. Detaching from our devices, even for a short time, makes us nervous.

I decided to turn myself into a human guinea pig—to figure out how to stop fighting the clock and start winning again in my career. This book outlines my quest and all of the strategies and tools that I picked up or developed on that journey to becoming a more productive seller, with the ultimate aim of selling more in less time. It's my goal to help solve your problems with crazy busyness as well, without all of the hardship.

## WHAT MATTERS MOST

To be successful in sales today, you can't just be productive. You need to be smart too: a good thinker, savvy, and insightful. Someone who brings value to prospects and clients with every single interaction. To do so, you need to be strategic, creative, and agile. You need to be up-to-date on what's happening in your field and with your prospects and clients.

The quality of our thinking is a huge differentiator in our work, yet few sellers realize just how important it truly is.

Our always-on, distraction-filled work life hurts the quality of our thinking. We have a harder time learning new things, prioritizing, analyzing situations, seeing new possibilities, and solving complex problems. When we bounce from task to task, that type of thinking is unavailable to us. We also make more mistakes.

Being productive isn't just about getting more done in less time—it's also about getting the *right things* done and doing them better. As sellers, we must free up time to ask crucial questions such as:

- What's the most important thing I can get done today?
- How can I have the greatest impact with this customer?
- What will it take to get multiple people to agree to move ahead?
- Is this the best next step? Would other options be more effective?
- How can I increase my closing ratio?
- Should I invest more time in this opportunity or not?

Answering questions like these requires quiet time and deep thinking. We can't determine the best route to take if we're frenetically checking our e-mail. The reality is we're not going to get that extra time we need unless we design a different way to work—every day, every week, every month.

## DIGGING IN

I wrote this book for salespeople, account executives, entrepreneurs, consultants, sales support personnel, and business professionals. If you're responsible for bringing revenue into the company—and you're feeling overwhelmed—then you'll get value from reading this book and applying the strategies I share to your work life. My goal is to help you free up more time and do the work that gives you the highest payback.

Here's a snapshot of how this book is structured and what you'll learn:

In part 1, "Accept the Challenge," you'll discover what you're really up against when it comes to selling more in less time. This "age of distraction" is stealing our attention and destroying our ability to think clearly, creatively, and strategically.

In part 2, "Recover Lost Time," you'll find out how to save at least one hour a day by changing your relationship with e-mail and minimizing the endless, time-sucking distractions that you encounter, particularly online. You'll also find out how to recover when you invariably screw up.

In part 3, "Get More Done," you'll learn how to add another hour to your day. These strategies ensure your time is spent on what really matters, keeping mentally sharp and optimizing your schedule. For many, this requires a significant rethink of how you invest your time.

In part 4, "Make It Easier," you'll be amazed to see how a seemingly simple approach can virtually eliminate your resistance to adopting new habits. Within two weeks, you'll start seeing yourself in a whole new light.

In part 5, "Add the Secret Sauce," you'll discover numerous ways to keep yourself at the top of your sales game throughout the day. You'll be able to get more done, have better thinking, and get your oomph back.

In part 6, "Accelerate Sales," you'll read about key sales strategies that truly help you close deals faster that you can use alongside the other time management and productivity strategies I'll share in this book.

To help you make the most of *More Sales, Less Time*, I've included dozens of experiments you can do in a variety of different areas. I encourage you to become a scientist and run your own tests to find the best way *you* work. These experiments aren't meant to be hard work—they're meant to challenge and surprise

you. When you add the element of fun to any project, not only do you stick with it longer, but your chances of succeeding also increase exponentially.

If you're a sales leader, sales productivity is likely high on your priority list. Right now, virtually everyone on your team is unintentionally frittering away at least one to two hours per day. I'd suggest you read this book together, perhaps a couple of chapters each week. Set up team challenges to motivate everyone to recapture lost time. When you do, your reps will make more calls, have more meetings, and close more deals. The best part is you won't need to hire more salespeople to make your numbers. I've included a special chapter for you in appendix I titled "Leading a Highly Productive Sales Team."

Personally, I think this is the most important book I've ever written—it addresses a universal problem from a salesperson's perspective. My hope is that for you, it's both sales enhancing and life changing.

# PART 1

## ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE

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Crazy busy is a way of life for most sellers today. We have people to see, e-mails to write, calls to make, prospects to research, and proposals to prepare. With all this work to do, we definitely feel important, needed, and invaluable. But we also feel tired and overwhelmed.

Many of us wonder if it's even possible to get everything done. Truthfully, it probably isn't. We're tied to our devices, going nonstop from the moment we get up until we power down in the evening. We can't escape.

If we want to not just survive but thrive in our always-on world, we need to take a serious look at how we're actually working today. While it's often not pretty, it's always illuminating.

In this section, you'll discover the following:

- What happens when the digital world we live in collides with our very human limitations
- Fresh insights on changing habits and setting goals

Perhaps best of all, you'll discover that you're not alone. We're all overwhelmed and trying to find new ways of working. In this section, we'll start identifying solutions together.

**GOAL:** Understand the root causes of our crazy-busy existence.

1.

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## A CRAZY-BUSY CONFESSION

EVERY TIME SOMEONE WOULD ASK ME, “How’s it going?” I’d answer with a smile and a twinkle in my eye: “Crazy busy!” It was like I was wearing this as a badge of honor. In some perverse way, it made me feel important to say that.

While I might have fooled others that my life was great, I didn’t fool myself. Underneath my chipper exterior, I was struggling.

In sheer frustration, one day I decided to record everything I did from sunup to sundown. I wanted to see my life as it actually was and perhaps find a way to improve it. I was tired of the “crazy” part being so accurate.

What I discovered was pretty ugly, but I’m sharing it with you anyway. Perhaps this day will even feel familiar to you. Here it is, a typical day in my life *before* I started my productivity makeover.

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It’s 7:15 on Thursday morning. Time to get up. I immediately head downstairs to feed the cat and make a pot of coffee. While it brews, I run upstairs, get dressed, and make myself presentable for the day. As soon as I’m done, I head back downstairs, pour myself a big cup of coffee, add a little cream, plop down at the kitchen table, and pick up my cell phone to start e-mail triage.

I quickly go through all the messages that came in overnight, deleting as many as I can, as quickly as humanly possible. It makes me happy to delete these messages—now I have fewer things to do for the day. I reward myself by playing a few games of Words with Friends. I then scan my favorite news feeds to catch up on world affairs.

After a half hour or so, it’s time to get to work. I take my smoothie out of the refrigerator, refill my coffee, grab my phone, and head to my office, which overlooks the woods behind our house. This seventeen-second commute completed, I sit down at my desk and open my e-mail to read and respond to the messages I’d deemed important enough to save.

Before I know it, I’m sucked into an article from one of my newsletters: “107 Game-Changing Sales Statistics.” There’s a reference in it to some fascinating statistics, so I track the information to its source, opening that study in a new tab, which I save to read later.

Then I kick my own butt back to work, prepping for a project I’m doing with one of my clients. It’s hard work, involving multiple interviews and customizing a program tailored specifically for their reps. I review my notes, immerse myself in their case studies, and start to think about how I’ll structure the program.

As I do, I look outside and notice that it's getting overcast. I wonder if it'll rain later, so I open my weather app to check things out. Fortunately, the storms aren't rolling in until tonight. Okay, back to work.

Even as I try to get back to the project at hand, I start thinking about the meeting I have with a prospective client later this afternoon. It's a toughie. My prospect is really struggling to get everyone on board. It seems like all five people involved in the decision have totally different agendas. I ask myself, *What will it take for them to all agree?*

I head over to LinkedIn to learn more about the decision team. When I land on my LinkedIn home page, I'm greeted by a strategically placed promo for an e-book called *How I Leveraged LinkedIn to Close a \$100,000 Deal*. Of course, I can't pass this up, so I click on the link, register for the e-book, download it, and then take a quick peek. *Good stuff*, I think. But I better get back to work.

Back on LinkedIn, I review the profiles of the stuck team members, taking notes on how I can create a connection with each of these individuals. I think about the best way to handle this conversation, the questions I want to ask, and the best possible outcome. I open a tab on my browser to review the company's website.

As I do, an alert pops up about a breaking news story. I click on it to learn more. While on the news site, I quickly scroll down to see if there are any updates about the presidential election. When no fresh articles pop to the top, another headline captures my attention: "You'll Never Believe What Kim Kardashian Is Wearing Now." Much as I hate myself for it, I can't resist clicking.

After a quick look (I'm not impressed!), I notice another headline below her photo: "Mother Cat Brings Her Kittens to Meet an Unlikely Old Friend." Within seconds, I find myself watching a heartwarming video of a big dog playing with the mother cat's two teeny kittens.

Oops! I still need to prep for that meeting I have later today. It's hard figuring out the best way to get everyone to reach a consensus. After a few minutes, when nothing good comes to mind, I remember a presentation I did for a similar client a few months ago. I open it up to check it out.

While reviewing that presentation, another thought pops into my head: *I wonder if Natalie has gotten back to me yet*. I open my e-mail for a quick check and see seven new messages. *I might as well read them all right now as long as I'm in my e-mail*, I think. I respond to all the messages requiring my input.

I finally close my e-mail to focus in on that upcoming meeting again. I stare blankly at that old presentation, still stuck. I wait a few more minutes for an epiphany to hit, but none emerges. When I look at the clock, I see that it's 11:45, so I head to the kitchen to heat up a bowl of soup for lunch. I bring my computer out to the table so I can brainstorm some more about that meeting while I eat. I jot down a few thoughts, some questions to ask, and an issue I want to bring up.

As I eat my soup, I remember that I forgot to congratulate Anthony, my new client, on his recent promotion. Back into e-mail I go to jot off a quick note. As I do, I see that another message has just arrived from Ravi, who's having a billing problem. Darn. *He's an important customer*, I think. I better take care of it now. I send off a message to my assistant. I also see an e-mail from CeCe. She has some questions regarding the recent proposal. Yup. I need to tackle that one now too if we want to close the deal this month.

Before I know it, it's time for my afternoon meeting. I head back to my office for the call, which lasts nearly an hour. It goes okay, but clearly it's going to be tough to reach a consensus on our direction. I'm smart enough not to fool myself about the likelihood of success. And I can't help but consider how much time I've already invested with this prospect. I briefly wonder if I could have done anything different to prepare for the meeting. When no new insight strikes, I decide to check e-mail instead.

I then take a quick look at my to-do list. Argh. There are a few prospects I need to connect with today; I can't put that off any longer. I dash off a few e-mails and make several follow-up calls.

Thankfully, no one answers the phone, so I leave messages.

When I look at the clock again, it's 4:30. I need to contact a friend about a birthday party we're throwing together. I also want to check in on my mom, as she's been having some health issues.

Before I know it, the "official" workday is over—but I'm not done. I barely made a dent in the client project I started working on that morning. I don't know how I'm going to get it done. Seriously. Clearly, I'll have to dig in later tonight and try to make some progress. I don't have any choice, actually. It's what people pay me to deliver—and I don't disappoint them.

Except now I feel further behind than I did starting the day. After cooking my favorite chicken stir-fry recipe (which is quick to whip up) and having dinner with my husband, I drive to the grocery store. While waiting for the stoplight to turn green, I check my e-mails. At the store, I quickly stock up on the essentials. Then, as I wait impatiently in a long line to check out, I take a look at my e-mail again.

During the course of the evening, while watching a bit of TV and working on that project, I'm on and off e-mail a few more times. I manage to pull together an initial workshop outline but it still needs fleshing out. I play a couple more rounds in my Words with Friends game, hop onto Facebook to see what's happening there, pop over to Twitter to see if there's anything new I should be aware of—and check LinkedIn again too.

I then go upstairs and get ready for bed. Before I shut down for the night, I check e-mail one last time. Don't ask me why—I'm certainly not going to reply to anyone at that hour. Maybe I just like to end the evening deleting one last message from the next day's stack.

I feel like I'm a rat on a treadmill who's not allowed to stop. But that's how I've been working for the past few years.

I wouldn't be surprised if your day resembles what mine used to look like.

To find out if distractions are hurting your productivity, take this mini quiz.

## DISTRACTION QUIZ

Mark an X on all those that apply to you. Be truthful!

- 1. I keep checking to see if any new e-mail messages have arrived.
- 2. I frequently bounce from one sales activity to the next (e-mails, research, phone calls, CRM updates, proposals, social media).
- 3. Being "crazy busy" is exhilarating. I love, love, love it.
- 4. Even if no one interrupts me, it's hard to stay focused on a task for more than half an hour.
- 5. I sit at my desk staring at screens for long periods of time during the day.
- 6. Thirty-plus minutes can easily disappear due to following interesting links.
- 7. I'm under lots of pressure (self-imposed or management) to get results.
- 8. My to-do list feels like it's never ending.
- 9. I get irritable or bored when I can't check e-mail or go online.
- 10. When working on something tough, I catch myself going online whenever I get stuck.

Count up your Xs. If you only have one or two, you might be a bit distracted but doing fine. But if you've checked many boxes, it's increasingly hard for you to sell more in less time.

Before we get into tackling the many problems of working this way, however, we need to understand why we behave the way we do—and what factors, internal and external, contribute to this crazy busyness.



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## AGE OF DISTRACTION

**EVERY DAY THE CYCLE REPEATED ITSELF:** Up early, work straight through the day with lunch at my desk. On and off e-mail, in and out of LinkedIn, before stopping for dinner—and then back at it for another round before bedtime.

Working nonstop was exhausting, but I couldn't figure out how to get it all done if I didn't. And all that time wasn't adding up to phenomenal work either. I was losing my oomph. My focus was fragmented, my thinking second-rate. I had trouble starting new projects and finishing existing ones.

In frustration, I'd ask myself, *How could a reasonably productive, creative human being have deteriorated so badly in such a short time?*

I took solace knowing I wasn't alone. A recent Center for Creative Leadership study found that smartphone-carrying professionals (like salespeople) report they're interacting with work a whopping 13.5 hours every workday. When you add in weekends, they're working a total of 72 hours a week.

That's our life! We work more hours than ever, striving to reach our ever-increasing sales goals. Ironically, the very fact that we put in so many hours is actually one of our biggest problems. John Pencavel, Stanford economist, found that people's productivity dropped sharply after fifty hours per week and fell off the cliff after fifty-five hours.

All those extra hours we put in don't lead to better results. We're not actually getting more done. It's like we have this built-in work-o-meter that says, "I can handle fifty-five hours max. Any more and I'll slow down, putz, and dawdle. I'll look busy . . . but I won't get more done."

In fact, there's a good reason we can't do it all, despite our desires to the contrary. And when we come to realize how our bodies function, we can stop beating ourselves up for not getting everything done—and find ways to deal with these very human limitations.

## WIRED FOR INSTANT GRATIFICATION

Sales today is a thinking profession. To be effective at it we need to research customers, search for trends, analyze data, extrapolate needs, solve complex problems, build consensus, develop strategies, and create new approaches. When we're doing this work, our brain's prefrontal cortex is running the show. This highly evolved, reflective part of our brain is the center of our deeper thinking. It's what makes us really good at sales and keeps us focused on doing what's most important.

When we're online, our amygdala—a very primitive part of our brain—can easily take over if we're not careful. Its role is to constantly scan the environment for stalking predators or any changes that might signify danger. From the amygdala's perspective, anything new that pops into its view is worthy of our undivided attention—at least momentarily.

Each time we spot something new, our brain rewards us with a shot of dopamine, a feel-good hormone. This dopamine surge is highly addictive, which is why we keep going back for more of any activity that gives us that high. In essence, we're wired for this instant gratification. We want to read that new e-mail or text message—now. We want to find answers to questions that pop into our heads—now. We have to click on the “Genius Wine-Opening Hacks You Haven't Seen Before” link—now, even though it never entered our mind until two seconds ago. Hooked again.

The cycle continues and we spend more time chasing dopamine-boosting links online, which prevents us from getting work done, stresses us out, limits our engagement with others, and, in general, adds nothing to our feelings of well-being. While it can be thrilling for a while, ultimately it's a recipe for burnout. As Nicholas Carr, author of *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, writes, “The net is designed to be an interruption system, a machine geared to dividing attention. We willingly accept the loss of concentration and focus, the division of our attention and the fragmentation of our thoughts in return for the wealth of compelling or at least diverting information we receive.”

Is it any wonder that we're glued to our devices too? A recent Deloitte study showed that the average person looks at their smartphone forty-six times per day. That's nothing compared to the research conducted by Internet analyst Mary Meeker. She reported that people check their phones an average of twenty-three times a day for messaging, twenty-two times for a voice call, and eighteen times to get the time. We don't even realize that we're doing it. One minute we're working on something, the next we're checking our phone for no apparent reason. We sometimes don't even know how it got into our hands. Personally, I think we salespeople look at our phones more often than most professionals, hoping to find messages from our best prospects and existing customers.

## **HOW THEY HOOK US**

What makes it worse is that we're easy prey for the savvy marketers and app designers who've mastered ways to commandeer our attention and steer it in their direction. They study what makes us tick and click, then feed us an endless stream of irresistible temptations.

In *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*, Nir Eyal describes how companies hijack our brain and direct it their way. It all starts with a trigger, a cue that prompts us to take action with little or no conscious thought, like notifications, tweets, or “click to read” links. The companies want us to take action on this trigger. The easier they make it to open an app, push the Play button, or keep on scrolling, the more likely we'll succumb.

Once we act, we get a reward. Our natural one is a rush of dopamine. It could also be recognition, acceptance, the thrill of the hunt, or even mastery of a game or system. The best rewards are variable, meaning you don't get the goodies all the time. This in itself is incentive to keep playing. Finally, we're expected to make an investment, giving up something of value (e-mail, time, suggestions) in anticipation of future value.

The pull of these well-designed distractions is strong. It's really easy to be led into temptation when we're bored, tired, discouraged, or facing a tough challenge. Unless our guard is always up, this brain-hijacking cycle takes control of our day and impacts the quality of our work.

## **THE HUMAN SIDE OF SALES PRODUCTIVITY**

Once we're hooked, we can't think straight—and we don't even realize it. Instead, we spend much of our day on superfluous, though intense, decision making. Every link and e-mail message requires us to stop, scan, and evaluate whether it's worthy of our attention.

The good news is we get better at this over time. But that doesn't mean it's good for us. We're all overtaxing our brains—even the digital natives who are significantly speedier than their older counterparts. When we're hooked, it's increasingly difficult to determine what's relevant or not. We have a harder time learning new information or skills. We're less inventive in our sales approach, repeating the same old strategies that give us the same old results. Even worse, we're constantly feeling overwhelmed, which prevents us from getting out of this destructive cycle.

Dr. Ned Hallowell, coauthor of *Driven to Distraction*, coined a phrase to describe what we're facing: attention deficit trait (ADT). Most people who have it feel rushed, distracted, and in a hurry, even when there's no need to be. They constantly hop from task to task, screen to screen, idea to idea. They have a tough time keeping their attention focused, even when they try. They feel guilty about not getting everything done but blame themselves for their inadequacies.

While not every seller struggles with these issues, many do. The onset of ADT is subtle and insidious too. It sneaks up on you gradually, until one day you feel like you're crazy busy all the time and you'll never catch up. Hallowell says, "I've witnessed the vaporization of attention, as if it were boiling away, while people tried valiantly to keep track of more data than even the most adept human brain could handle."

I knew exactly what he meant. It's how I felt every single day. I was doing my best to stay on top of my game but finding it increasingly difficult.

## **THE END OF TIME MANAGEMENT**

Traditional time management strategies don't stand a chance in this built-for-distraction digital world. Most of them tell you to spend less time online. For a salesperson, that's not going to happen. E-mail dominates our working hours as we read, write, and send messages to existing or potential clients. It's nonstop, coming in at all hours of the day. Plus, we have to be online doing research and learning too. It's part of our job.

Yet the more time we spend in an environment that gives us quick hits of seemingly vital (but likely irrelevant) information, the harder it is for our brains to do the kind of creative and strategic thinking that is so necessary in sales today.

We need to stop being mindless consumers of content that keeps us occupied from dawn to dusk and clouds our best thinking. To regain control of our time and mind, we need to prevent our distraction-prone amygdala from running the show. Only then can we set up a way of working that will truly allow us to sell more in less time.

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## TIME FOR A CHANGE

**THE FIRST STEP TO STOPPING THIS CRAZY-BUSY MADNESS** is to recognize that the way you're working isn't serving your own best interest.

Changing isn't easy though. I'm not one of those profoundly disciplined people who can make a decision to change and then stick to it religiously. My willpower doesn't last very long—sometimes not even a full day. Telling myself, “Don't go online” or “No, you can't check e-mail” only makes me feel deprived. It becomes all I can think about. Before I know it, I'm back to my old ways, even though I know they're not serving me well.

In the past few years, my everyday habits had deteriorated to the point where they were running me ragged. Clearly I needed new, better ones. When I started my personal productivity makeover, I wasn't sure what those habits were quite yet; that would come later. My initial focus was on trying to figure out how in the world I was ever going to change since I'd been so resistant in the past.

As I studied habit formation, I found it ironic that my hyperdistractable brain also has a very rigid side that hates change of any sort. The basal ganglia's job is to constantly search for repetitive behavior patterns that can be systematized into a habit. Once the basal ganglia create the new habit, they go on cruise control, freeing up our brain to think about more important things. Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*, states that 40 to 50 percent of what we do every day “feels” like a decision but is actually a habit. We think we're thinking, but actually, we're just doing what we've always done.

## CHANGING OUR RAGING HABITS

To complicate matters, our basal ganglia rebel when we try to change. They don't like being forced to pay rapt attention to a process they've already systematized. They warn us that we're off track and raise alarms that we're likely to fail. They want us to go back to the “right way”—the way they're used to functioning. And the moment we stop paying attention, we default to that setting. That's why it's so challenging to integrate new behaviors into our life.

Doing things differently is hard work; we're going against our natural inclinations. It's even worse when we try to make a revolutionary change—like my annual resolution to lose fifteen pounds. Or my current desire to stop my crazy busyness.

I'm not the only one who struggles with this. Only 8 percent of people achieve their New Year's goals, according to John Norcross, a University of Scranton psychologist. His research showed that people who succeeded had an action plan. They invested time creating a system that made it easier to engage in their targeted behavior change. They also avoided situations that could entice them to revert to

their previous ways. In other words, they ensured their short-term urges couldn't trump their long-term plans.

Speaking as one of the 92 percent who typically fail, I have to admit that my action plan was often nonexistent. Mostly I tried to drive change through sheer willpower alone, which I discovered was completely unsustainable. I also realized how hard it would be to keep on task since I was being fed a steady diet of appealing distractions every time I went online. In other words, I'd be virtually set up to fail from the outset. I didn't want that to happen.

According to psychologist Art Markman, author of *Smart Change*, another major reason I had trouble was that I focused primarily on "stopping" behaviors. I wanted to stop spending so much time on e-mails. I wanted to stop feeling so distracted. I wanted to stop being overwhelmed. Stop, stop, stop. That's all I could think about. It turns out that our brain needs positive actions to complete instead of more temptations to resist.

## ONE STEP AT A TIME

Behavioral experts will tell you that when you want to change, you need to start with a goal—one that's specific enough to be measured. My goal was clear to me from the beginning: *I wanted to sell more in less time*. Initially, I didn't get more specific with that goal, because I was in a learning stage and I was okay with that.

Heidi Grant Halvorson, author of *Succeed: How We Can Reach Our Goals*, says that it's essential to ask ourselves, "Why is this important to me?" before tackling any initiative. Knowing "why" keeps us going when times get tough, which they invariably will. Personally, I wanted to spend more time with the important people in my life, have more fun, and work on some world-changing initiatives. Your "why" for wanting to sell more in less time is probably entirely different. You may be aiming for a promotion, a lifestyle upgrade, or more time with your kids.

You'd think a good "why" would be enough of a driving force to lead to everlasting change. It isn't—especially if you try to make too many changes too quickly, without a plan for success. That's why I was floundering. As I observed my own failures and got discouraged, I discovered the work of B. J. Fogg, a behavioral researcher from Stanford University. He says that many people don't even attempt to do things differently because the magnitude of the change seems just too overwhelming. That's why Fogg suggests implementing "tiny habits," which are simply the littlest possible step you can take to get moving in the right direction. Pretty soon, these changes worm their way into your life and you've changed with virtually no pain.

He's right. It helps to start small, taking positive actions and concrete steps that lead to achieving your overall goal. With each small success, you build your habit-changing muscles, enabling you to tackle bigger changes as you move forward.

It was obvious to me that I needed to tackle distractions first. They were killing me. My new goal was to reclaim one extra hour per day. If I could do that, I'd have breathing space. My plan was to do the following:

1. Immerse myself in distraction-prevention strategies and tools. I wanted to know what was working for other people.
2. Experiment with various approaches. Being a rigid disciplinarian doesn't work well for me. By staying open to discovering the impact of new ways, I'm much more likely to succeed—and have

fun in the process.

3. Implement what worked best for me in increments, not in one fell swoop. Just one change at a time, so I wasn't overwhelmed.
4. Deal with the bumps in the road. I knew I'd screw up. I was prepared for it. I was ready to address setbacks because I refused to accept that I was incapable of adopting new habits.

It wasn't a complicated plan, but it was a workable one for getting started. After six months of step-by-step improvement, I wasn't so frazzled anymore. I was getting more work done and it was of higher quality. But I was still working too many hours.

## LEVELING UP

It was time for the next step. I wanted a new goal that would challenge me for an extended period of time but not overwhelm me. I was ready to pick one that would make me gulp. I'd look at it and think, *What was I thinking?* It was an experiment designed to get me to look at my work differently. After serious deliberation, here's what I came up with:

My goal this year is to maintain my income while working thirty-six hours per week.

Only thirty-six hours per week? Am I crazy? No—I'm inspired. I have enough revenue coming in but not enough time. From the moment I set that goal, something inside me changed. I could feel the wheels start turning in my brain. I could also feel decisions being made that I wasn't consciously making—like, *Well, I guess I won't be checking my news feed any longer.*

Also, I'm not persnickety about *when* I do the work. In today's world, it doesn't always matter. While meetings, phone calls, and workshops take place during the standard eight-to-five schedule, the rest of my work doesn't have to. What matters is that I try to stick to the thirty-six hours. If I can close more sales while working fewer hours, I'll be a winner.

## YOUR TURN

What would it take to make you a winner? Clearly you'd like to make more sales in less time. But why? And what will you do to turn that into a reality?

Knowing your specific goal right now isn't essential, but think about it as you dig into the upcoming pages. As you read, highlight the ideas and strategies you'd like to implement. Take notes on approaches you'd like to try. Be willing to experiment.

Most importantly, don't try to transform yourself overnight. As an overachiever, you probably have that tendency, but honestly, it's a setup for failure. Instead, think in terms of steps you can take. Accomplish one, then move on to the next. Put together that action plan too. Remember, change is a process, and there are no miracle cures—there's only continuous improvement.

Hopefully by now, you're ready to get going. I'm excited for you to discover a world on the other side of crazy busy, a new way of working that enables you to be more successful working significantly fewer hours. It can be done.