

PRODUCTIVITY - A STATE OF MIND AT WORK

A COLLECTION OF INSIGHTS FROM SURGE OPTIMISM



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INTRODUCTION

The following pages house the results of an industry-wide virtual collaboration.

SURGE Optimism assembled association professionals from across the globe to harness collective knowledge, through a virtual conference focused on transformative ideas and designed to maximize social learning.

Attendees could not only hear from speakers, but converse with them in real time and contribute their own thoughts. We have now assembled some of the best insights from these conversations into a body of knowledge for the benefit of the entire association community.

This eBook delves into the session, *Productivity - A State of Mind At Work*. It includes themes from the speakers' conversation, snapshots of ideas from guest speakers, contributions from attendees, links to further resources, and more.

Thank you to all who participated – and if you missed it, go to the **SURGE Optimism** [event page](#) to watch all the sessions for free, at your leisure

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01

FEATURED SPEAKERS



Holly Duckworth
CAE, CMP, LSP

CEO Leadership Solutions Intl.

Holly Duckworth, CAE, CMP, LSP is a trailblazing keynote speaker and mindful advisor to business leaders and social change makers. As a contributor to the New York Times and multiple meetings and association industry publications, she works with stressed-out meeting professionals to create, peace, presence, and profits. Our world has become mind less. Thru mindfulness training Holly works with people to know what mindfulness is, what it is not. Then apply those mindfulness techniques to produce more productive and profitable meetings. She is the host and the producer of Everyday Mindfulness Show on iTunes and The New Thought Channel online watched by loyal of viewers each week around the world.

Holly's awards include Meetings Today 2018 Trendsetter and 2016 Smart Meetings Woman of the Year. Holly's current book Mindful Leadership: The Stress-Free Guide to leadership is a best seller and her award-winning book Ctrl+Alt+Believe: Reboot Your Association For Success has won two national awards. Holly believes mindfulness builds leaders and organizations that work for everyone.





Lauren LeMunyan PPC

Executive Coach, The SpitFire Coach

Lauren LeMunyan is a professional certified life and business coach based in Washington, DC. As The SpitFire Coach, Lauren works with business owners and executives to tap into their inner passion, rebuild their motivation, and create self-care strategies that make them unstoppable. Using core energy coaching and her extensive experience built in association management and the fitness industry, Lauren pinpoints blind spots and blocks to success and develops strategies to help her clients love what they do at work, home and beyond.

When she's not coaching for clients in associations, startups, and established corporations, Lauren hosts a weekly podcast, The SpitFire Podcast, and raps in a DC-based Americana band as JRSY FRSH. Lauren is also the author of the newly released book, "Spitting Fire: Your Guide to Reignite and Maintain Your Passion at Home, Work and Beyond."





David Elliott
**Social Learning and Innovation
Facilitator, Consultant NA**

David E Elliott, Social Learning and Innovation Facilitator, Consultant - My role is to serve as a process facilitator. Using a collection of tools taken from adult learning, diffusion of innovation, coaching and design thinking, I help individuals and groups to reflect, share, co-create, experiment and innovate to seize opportunities.

My work is grounded in over 15 years of experience, continuous lifelong learning and formal education. I am a graduate from the University of Guelph (BSc 1996 and MSc 1999) and St Francis Xavier University (Adult Education Certificate, 2007). In 2011 I earned my Certified Training and Development Professional (CTDP) designation through The Institute for Performance and Learning (I4PL). Since 2016 I have volunteered as the I4PL Ottawa-Gatineau Chapter chair, leading a team of dedicated volunteers who help provide local professional development opportunities. In 2017 I earned my Foundations in Design Thinking certificate from IDEO-U. Over the last 20 years I have worked and volunteered in Canada, Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Italy and Vietnam.





Tracy Vanneman CAE

**Partnership Sales Manager,
Council of Engineering and
Scientific Society Executives**

Tracy Vanneman, CAE, is Partnership Sales Manager for CESSE, the Council of Engineering and Scientific Society Executives, where she is responsible for building and growing relationships with the organization's many industry partners. Prior to joining the CESSE team in 2018, she worked at SIOP, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, for 10 years, most recently as Senior Manager - Business Development. Through Tracy's efforts in partnership development, SIOP was honored as the recipient of the 2018 ASAE Gold Circle Award in the category of Sponsorship/Exhibits/Advertising Campaign.

Tracy, a newly-minted CAE, is an active association professional who has presented at industry events and is a contributing author and volunteer with the American Society of Association Executives and the Ohio Society of Association Executives.

When she's not geeking out on all things associations, Tracy enjoys traveling with her family (northern Michigan and Disney World are favorite destinations), biking, golfing, hiking, and enjoying some combination of coffee, wine, and dark chocolate. She lives with her husband and their four children in Bowling Green, Ohio.



02

7 SMALL STEPS TOWARDS MINDFUL PRODUCTIVITY

Try these small tricks to help you grow your mindful productivity

BY HOLLY DUCKWORTH

Productivity is using your pro-activity to focus and attain your goals. Start out with a clear set of intentions and then align your thoughts, beliefs and actions to become productive. How do we integrate personal and professional productivity?

Begin with personal self-care. As the mindful leadership guide, my work is helping people understand that they have one life. Once you realize that, you discover that *everything is everything*. **However you are at work is how you are at home and vice versa.** There is no separation. What are you choosing?

Try these small tips and tricks to help you grow your mindful productivity:

Center and be present

You can not be productive when your energy is spinning. Every morning when you get to your desk, before diving into emails take a moment to breathe in, breathe out and center. **Arrive fully where you are.** This applies to when you arrive home after work too. Being present where you are can allow you to be a little bit more productive.

Check you mindset

Where is your mind set? Is it mindless or mindful? Are you asleep at the wheel or awake and paying attention to the moment? I've worked with thousands of association leaders and often their mindset comes from a *lack* point of view - not enough time, not enough money, not enough resources. **It is done unto us as we believe.** If we believe we're only going to find challenges, we're never going to be productive, we will find only challenges.

Face to face matters or pick up the phone

Don't forget the power of face-to-face interaction and that magical thing called ***picking up the phone***. Sometimes we lose productivity by emailing back and forth and waiting 12 hours for a response. The phone helps to connect us on that human to human level and solve the problem in front of us, rather than dragging it out in email land. A lot can be solved when hearing tone of voice of the person on the other end rather than assuming the energy of the sender or receiver.

Meetings on the go

Create ways to mindfully move. Invite your coworker out to get coffee and you have a chance to **discuss work while getting fresh air and a change of scenery**. Give yourself permission to take those micro recharge moments. Some of them will be private, while some might involve grabbing a colleague and taking a walk down to the park. Move your body, move your mind, move your life.

Transform your commute

Is your car your stress zone or your ashram? You choose. When you get in your car or on the subway, is your mindset already preparing for it to be super stressful, or **can you reframe your commute as a time to relax and let your mind wander?** Build up small recharging practices so that when times are tough you don't get overwhelmed, and can roll with the ebbs and flows of life. My car is a place of rejuvenation yours can be too when you choose that mindset.

Say no, stay focused

No is a complete sentence that invites us to the greater yes. Even if it means “not right now”, saying it opens up space for greater productivity and possibility. Know your path. Is this my work to do? Listen to that small voice within you. Does this feel like a yes? Does it bring me joy? I respect that there are association professionals that will have things delegated to them that they have to do. When that happens, how are you going to find a way to bring the joy? Try looking at it as a learning opportunity, or doing it for ten minutes a day.

Activate airplane mode

Airplane mode works even when you’re not on an airplane. I started playing with the practice of **putting my phone on airplane mode for 10 minutes** in the morning or at lunch, then increased it gradually when I could.

Find moments to turn off the culture of the world that says bigger, better, faster, more and give yourself 10 minutes on airplane mode, literally or figuratively. You can realign your focus and figure out how you feel about things without background noise. **The world will still be there when you turn it back on.**

Leading organizations today is not for the faint of heart. You must take care of your mind, to take care of your mindset so you can productively do your work in the world. Give mindful productivity a try with one of these practices this week. Let me know how it goes at holly@hollyduckworth.com. **Mindful matters and so do you!**

From the Chat - Taking Control to Improve Productivity

How are people embracing the factors in their control?

"I think multitasking is the worst enemy of productivity."

— *Meena Dayak* —

"I recently mentioned to someone that throughout my career -- all my jobs -- I had worked long hours. She responded, "that's YOUR choice ... that's about YOU ... YOU'VE set that pattern, not your employers." She was correct."

— *Bruce Rosenthal* —

"Why is the Siesta not established yet in Western culture? It's been proven over and over to have massive benefits."

— *Emery Wolfe* —

03

HOW SETTING BOUNDARIES CAN ENHANCE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

Be realistic about your abilities to avoid burnout.

BY LAUREN LEMUNYAN

Productivity is an evaluation of how effectively you are able to get things done (or not). If you're productive, you are able to produce, complete, show up and show out. What's the cost of this productivity? If I am productive at work and people there think I'm a go-getter, what's happening in my personal life? Am I taking care of myself by resting or am I a monster going back to my cave to recharge?

The perception that being busy means you're being productive is often untrue. **Busyness is viewed as a badge of honor** and it deflects the obligation to take on more work. When you say, "I'm so busy", it's another way of saying, "Leave me alone. I have too much going on."

When a company essentially owns your time for eight to ten hours a day, they want to maximize the space you have. If you're the person that delivered a final product in four hours, you've still got four or five hours to go. The company is going to do find something else to do with your time. This culture puts the incentive on the employee to create this distraction of being busy so they don't get overwhelmed.

From my experience with traditional associations, there is this idea that you are doing the things that need to be done, and if someone sees you not working then you're an available resource that someone can use. If you are an association leader who sets the tone and you find yourself jumping in when someone's not busy to fill their plate more, ask yourself: what are they working on? What is the role of this person and your expectations of them?

The biggest piece with productivity is to understand and communicate your boundaries, whether that's by saying, "I'm working on this project", or "I need these resources." Overwhelm arises when we're not able to express what we need or the extent of our availability. We assume that people will swoop in to help us or understand what we're doing, when in reality, we need to be proactive and clear about sharing our workload.

Who and what do you want your life to be about? Maybe when the elevator doors close as you leave the office, that's your boundary. Often we'll leave the office and our phone is still going off with emails and texts when we're in the car. If you decide one of your values is family time, or taking care of yourself, being healthy and having free time, that dictates the boundary that **after five o'clock, you're done until eight o'clock the next morning**. It's best to avoid any gray area, or a bleed-through happens in our boundaries, opening a can of worms that we can't close.

We train people how to treat us. If you are the manager or director who's emailing your team at nine pm, that's leaking into their boundaries. They feel anxiety about whether or not they should respond. Does not responding make them not a productive worker?

Managers have so much going on that when they have an idea, they don't want to lose it, and this can lead to them emailing their team at all times of day and night. If this sounds familiar to any managers reading, why not try another tactic? Write that idea down, put it in your notes section, hold onto it and harness some patience. It can almost definitely wait until the morning. **Indicate that process to your team and let them know you'll only get in touch outside of working hours if it's urgent** (it's up to you to discern what falls into that category).

The circumstances that create this pressure to respond to a manager at all times is where burnout happens. At first, it might seem like a great opportunity to prove that you're a team player. But once that expectation is created, people are pushed further and further until they have nothing left to offer.

In the immortal words of Guns N' Roses, "All you need is just a little patience." Before you jump to begin or assign a new project, reflect on whether it is necessary. Is it doable for me and my team? Can it be delegated to another department? What would you have to give up to have time to make the best of this idea? **Deploy patience as your secret weapon.**

Not all of us have the autonomy to create our own culture and choose our own hours, but I will leave you with this piece of advice: **just because you can, doesn't mean you should.**

From the Chat - Productivity as a Team Effort

The importance of communicating your needs and boundaries with those around you.

"I love the idea of sharing "safe hours", when staff are okay to work but not expected to reply to others. Especially when it comes to volunteers. Sending late-night messages to volunteers can often be detrimental, making them think that you are working too hard!"

— Peter Doherty —

"My wife keeps trying to teach me the game of "Above the line/below the line." As in "Boss, these five things are above the line priorities for me right now. If you give me a 6th things, you have to help me pick one of the original five to move below the line."

— Tim Parsons —

"Staff should be enabled to make offers of help if someone is overloaded. It removes silos people tend to create when becoming territorial about their space. At the end of staff meetings is an opportune time."

— Rick Rutherford —

04

**WHAT MAKES YOU
MORE PRODUCTIVE
AT WORK?**

Take time to work out your own best strategies for producing high-quality work.

BY DAVID E. ELLIOTT

When AssociationSuccess.org gathered feedback from the SURGE community about what organizational problem keeps them up at night, the most common challenge expressed was that people have more work to do than they have time. Many associations work in a context where financial and human resources are limited, or at least perceived to be so. Self-imposed to-do lists and requests from members seem never-ending. How can we function successfully with too much to do in too little time?

There's a big difference between filling up your time and providing value, and to me that is the difference between quantity and quality. People can get lost by asking if their day or week is full, mistaking a busy calendar with productivity. I see two contrasting paradigms at play. Some managers and employees see a salary as a tool with which to purchase an employee's time. This is understandable given hourly rates of pay. In contrast, I see a salary as compensation for adding value. Exploring how you and your workplace view salary can be your first step in exploring your relationship with productivity. **Does your organization own your time or do you own the value that you bring to its table?**

It requires continuous effort to have a better relationship with productivity, and if you ever get it figured out, you have to maintain it in a healthy way. I have tried various tactics to make my work time more intentional and productive. I used to leave work with a lot of information spinning around in my head. I started using a centering activity where, I would picture the elevator doors of my office closing, marking the end of the work day as I left the building. It helped to clear my mind and return the next day more refreshed and energized to produce. Small activities like this can make a difference.

In the past few years, **we have seen some [labour laws enforced in Europe](#) to set boundaries around work time.** To avoid employees becoming burnt out by working or being on-call 24 hours a day, legal steps have been taken to limit the times of day when emails can be sent.

I like the idea of not being interrupted outside of working hours. At the same time **many ideas come to me at times I don't expect, outside of traditional work hours.** It feels good when work happens organically. We should give ourselves time in which ideas can percolate subconsciously. Things come to you more easily and creatively during these times than when you try to force your work into a structure.

Be proactive and take time to find out what helps you get more quality work done. **Take control of the situation instead of letting the situation control you and stay focused on adding value, rather than just being busy.**

From the Chat - Perceiving Productivity as an Essential Quality to Foster

Looking past productivity on day-to-day tasks.

“What gets measured gets managed. As association executives, we need to be much better at measuring productivity!”

— *Ted Smith* —

“Productivity ... short-term vs. long-term. Producing a product for members today is short-term. Learning, improving skills, participating in SURGE Optimism is long-term. Both types of productivity are important.”

— *Bruce Rosenthal* —

05

**ARE YOU
PRODUCTIVE, OR
JUST BUSY? ONE
WORD CAN HELP YOU
FIND OUT**

To get things done, first get to the root of the task.

BY TRACY VANNEMAN

To work is to use resources - time, talent, expertise, energy, or a combination thereof - to create a new output. What makes work *productive* is when our effort has transformed resources into new output of *value*.

If we spend half our waking hours leasing our personal resources to our employer, productivity is worth the pursuit, knowing that our efforts have created value through improving a situation, solving a problem, or anticipating a future need within our association and the members and industry it serves.

How do you know if you are creating value? In some careers, the answer might be clear and present. Firefighters observe that they have been productive when they successfully extinguish a fire. Surgeons know their work has been of value as they watch a patient's once-broken leg heal to its prior healthy state. In association management, however, we might need to dig into abstraction. Have we improved, solved, or anticipated, or have we simply remained busy?

It is easy to choose or accidentally arrive at "busy" without necessarily being "productive". Without a raging house fire or cracked femur before our eyes, the best application for the resources we have to offer can be difficult to determine. We seek feedback from our members, volunteer leadership, and coworkers, but our response too often is an attempt, good-hearted but nevertheless short-sighted, to alleviate the pain point without first gaining a true understanding of its root cause.

Let's say an association has declared, "We are tired of our tech woes. We simply need a new association management software (AMS)!" The IT staff identifies vendors, the finance staff crunches numbers, the membership staff develops stars in their eyes over the potential within a shiny new system while simultaneously losing sleep over the impending data conversion. **Associations**

can easily jump into action, even on a massive project like an AMS transition, based solely on surface-level issues. Their work to come is likely to keep them busy, but not necessarily productive.

A helpful tool from the Lean / Six Sigma space is The Five Whys. **Simply put, to fully understand a problem, you need to ask the question “Why?” five times.** Doing so may initially feel childish or obstinate, but it is a useful exercise to ensure that resources are being devoted to *productive* work.

Like any skill, mastery of The Five Whys takes practice, but **little effort is needed to see its potential.** Let’s revisit our colleagues who are neck-deep in AMS transition preparations and deploy The Five Whys.

“We simply *need* a new AMS!”

Why? (#1)

“Our membership reports always have discrepancies. We just need something new and better.”

Why? (#2)

“When the membership department runs the reports on lapsed members, current members, etc., they get one set of data. But the accounting department reports different numbers. Nobody really knows our membership counts. Everyone operates under different assumptions.”

Why (and also, **YIKES**, but let’s press on...)? (#3)

“The membership department defines a ‘lapsed member’ as XYZ, but the accounting department defines a ‘lapsed member’ as ABC. The variability is high based on who is running the report and for what purpose.”

Why? (#4)

“The two departments use different report date parameters and filters. There is no knowledge sharing across departments.”

And, finally, why? (#5)

“Each department is convinced that their method is correct. If we change how we define our membership statuses, then everyone will have to redo their projections and adjust their historical data. We don’t have the resources for that.”

Phew!

Who would have guessed that asking the same one-word question a few times over would be so exhausting, yet so illuminating?

In just about 200 words, we’ve learned the following about this association:

- They have unrealistic expectations about software’s utility to solve all their problems.
- Departments operate in silos, without a method for and culture around sharing information.
- Data accuracy is not highly regarded if operating under different data assumptions is permitted.
- They lack a set of agreed-upon standards in their membership reporting.
- The staff is reluctant to change perspectives and processes around membership activities.

If the association simply launches into the new AMS project without sufficiently asking “Why?”, the same or similar problems are likely to resurface, and the project will have been an exercise in business rather than productivity. **It’s worth taking the time to ask “Why?”**

The resources required to create value are precious and finite. Respect them by having confidence that you are addressing the right situation, solving the right problem, or anticipating the right future need, and then **your work will assuredly be productive, and your output valued by the members and industry you serve.**

From the Chat - Productivity and the Quality of What's Produced

Being bombarded and overwhelmed doesn't seem compatible with good work.

"In reality, if someone tries to handle multiple program areas, chances are they only do a couple of those projects really well; the other program areas don't get done properly or fall by the wayside."

— Bruce Rosenthal —

"I always find getting away and returning to something gives new perspective."

— Emery Wolfe —

"There's a direct link between clutter and depression... so maybe there's a one between minimalism and productivity?"

— Tim Parsons —

06

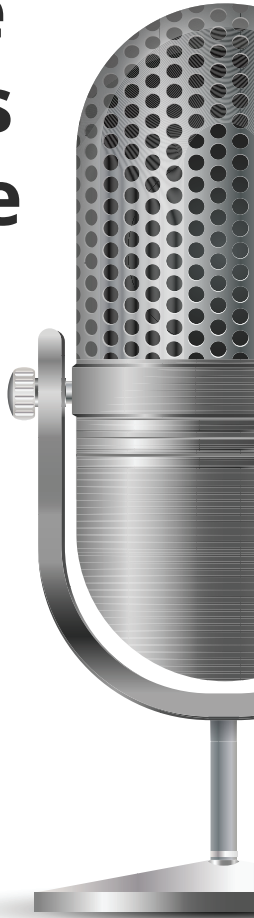
FURTHER RESOURCES

During the live chat, speakers and attendees alike chipped in with their tips for further reading and resources about productivity. We've compiled them into a list here.

- [Book](#): Everyday Mindfulness: From Chaos To Calm In A Crazy World - by Holly Ducksworth
- [Book](#): Spitting Fire: Your Guide to Reignite and Maintain Your Passion at Home, Work and Beyond - by Lauren LeMunyan
- [Article](#): Ask 'why' five times about every matter.
- [Society](#): Montessori Prepared Environment
- [Inspiration](#): The Minimalists
- [Website](#): Lean Enterprise Institute
- [Book](#): Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity
- [Book](#): Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear
- [Article](#): The link between clutter & stress
- [Article](#): What Is Mine to Do?
- [Article](#): 5 Minimalist Approaches to Cut the Clutter and Gain Clarity in Your Career Read
- [Article](#): The Rock, Pebbles, and Sand Analogy for Time Management
- [Productivity software](#): Boomerang



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