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The 5 Choices

The Path to Extraordinary Productivity

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Every day brings us a crushing wave of demands: a barrage of texts, emails, interruptions, meetings, phone calls, tweets, blogs—not to mention the high-pressure challenges of our jobs—that can be overwhelming and exhausting. The sheer number of distractions can threaten our ability to think clearly, make good decisions, and accomplish what matters most, leaving us worn out and unfulfilled.

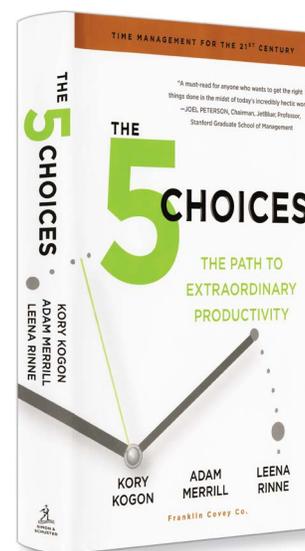
Now, FranklinCovey offers powerful insights drawn from the latest neuroscience and decades of experience and research in the time-management field, to help you master your attention and energy management through five fundamental choices that will increase your ability to achieve what matters most to you.

The 5 Choices is time management redefined for the 21st century: it increases the productivity of individuals, teams, and organizations and empowers you to make more selective, high-impact choices about where to invest your valuable time, attention, and energy.

The 5 Choices will not only increase your productivity, it will also provide a renewed sense of engagement and accomplishment. You will quickly find yourself moving beyond thinking, “I was so busy today; what did I achieve?” to feeling confident, energized, and extraordinarily productive.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- New ideas on how to be more productive.
- How to get clear and focused on the things that matter to you.
- How to increase your capability in decision management.
- To recognize that you have the ability to do extraordinary work.



by Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill,
and Leena Rinne

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE 5 CHOICES

by Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill, and Leena Rinne

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Introduction: Feeling Buried?

It has never been easier in human history to accomplish great things. A big part of that is the dramatic increase in the power of technology to make us more productive.

With advances in interconnectivity, processing power, and wearable technologies that measure everything from the temperature of our skin to the flow of our blood, the interaction between how we live and think and the technologies we use becomes more inseparable each day.

Yet, paradoxically, these same technologies can make it harder than ever to accomplish the things that are important to us.

People feel overwhelmed like never before. They feel buried in things to do and simultaneously drained of their capacity to do them. They feel agitated and anxious, stressed when they are working and stressed when they are not. It is a semipermanent state of worried restlessness that pervades our culture and drains us of confidence and joy. This is the widespread human cost of the *productivity paradox*, and it will only become more challenging for people who do not know how to tame the paradox and turn it to their advantage.

The productivity paradox revolves around three critical challenges: we are making more decisions than ever, our attention is under unprecedented attack, and we are suffering from a personal energy crisis.

Everyone has the capability to do extraordinary work. Everyone has the potential to go to bed at the end of each day feeling satisfied and accomplished. However, in order to do this, you will need to directly address the three challenges. You will need to increase your capability

in three areas: decision management, attention management, and energy management.

The good news is there are 5 Choices that, when consistently made, will help you do this. They are proven and they work. ●

DECISION MANAGEMENT

Choice 1: Act on the Important, Don't React to the Urgent

In a knowledge-work world where we are paid to think, create, and innovate, a primary tool for creating value is our brain. Before we go further, let's gain a little understanding about how our brain works. We will simply talk about two basic parts of the brain: the Reactive Brain and the Thinking Brain.

The Reactive Brain is the lower part of your brain. It is the source of the fight-or-flight response and is also where we process our feelings and emotions. Most of these processes happen automatically, before we have time to think about what's going on. Scientists say the Reactive Brain was built to ensure our survival as far back as prehistoric times.

In contrast, the upper part of our brain, the Thinking Brain, is the place where we make conscious and very intentional decisions. It is often called the *executive function*, because it is where we can consciously direct and override other impulses from the Reactive Brain. It is where we act rather than react. It is where we choose to pay attention to something in a deliberate, thoughtful way.



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The good news from neuroscience is that, with practice, we can actually rewire our brains to be more thoughtful and discerning about our choices. It is in those discerning choices that we determine the quality, joy, and happiness of our lives.

On Being Intentional

In order to be truly productive, we need to gain the habit of being conscious and intentional about everything we do. In today's world, we can't just go on "I have a busy life" autopilot and expect to end up where we want to be.

To be truly productive and make those high-value decisions, it helps to have both a framework and a process. FranklinCovey's Time Matrix provides the framework, and Pause-Clarify-Decide (PCD) provides the process.

The Time Matrix model illustrates that people spend their time, attention, and energy in one of four quadrants, depending on how urgent and important their activities are.

The Time Matrix™

Visualizing it as the top left quadrant, Quadrant 1 (Q1) is the *quadrant of necessity* and contains things that are both urgent and important. It is filled with crises (like a hospital visit), emergency meetings, last-minute deadlines, pressing problems, and unforeseen events. If you spent a lot of time in Q1, you may feel productive and energized, but if you spent too much time there, you may also burn out. Although it is often necessary to be in Q1, it is rarely where we do our best, most creative, and highest-value work, even though it may feel like it at the time.

In investment terms, you usually get out what you put in. It's essentially a break-even quadrant for the attention and energy you spend there. In the overall scheme of things, it's not a solid foundation for enduring success.

Visualizing it as the lower left quadrant, Quadrant 3 (Q3) activities are urgent but not important. This is the *quadrant of distraction*. Because things here are urgent, they feel like they need to be done now, but really, there are no serious consequences if you don't do them. Here you find needless interruptions, unnecessary reports, irrelevant meetings, other people's minor issues, unimportant emails, tasks, phone calls, status posts, and so on.

In terms of the time and energy you invest here, you get less than you put in. It's a negative return on your attention and energy.

Visualizing it as the lower right quadrant, the things in Quadrant 4 (Q4) are neither urgent nor important. We call this the *quadrant of waste*. We really shouldn't be here at all, but we often get so burned out fighting the battles in Q1 and Q3 that we go here to escape. This is where

we let our brains go completely unconscious and fill our time with excessive relaxation, television, gaming, Internet surfing, gossip, and other time-wasters.

Visualizing it as the upper right quadrant, Quadrant 2 (Q2) is the quadrant of extraordinary productivity. Activities are important but not urgent. This is the *quadrant of extraordinary productivity* because here is where you take charge of your own life and do things that will make a real difference in terms of accomplishments and results.

Unlike the other quadrants, where things come at you, you have to consciously choose to be in Q2. You have to use the thinking part of your brain to discern the things of highest value and act on them.

Time spent in Q2 reduces the crises and problems in Q1 because you will intentionally spend time planning, preparing, and preventing. You will lower your level of stress because you'll intentionally decrease the amount of time you spend in Quadrants 1, 3, and 4. Most important, you will know that you are making progress on the things that really contribute and add value to your work and life every day.

Bottom line: The time and energy you invest in Q2 generates returns that are much higher, even exponentially higher, than that which you put in. That's why it's the quadrant of extraordinary productivity.

The Essential Skill for Getting Into Q2: Pause-Clarify-Decide

The key to getting into Q2 is to pause your Reactive Brain long enough to clarify what is coming at you, then decide whether it is worth your time and energy. We refer to this vital process as Pause-Clarify-Decide (PCD).

Our ability to do this comes into play in the moment of choice when we consciously decide whether or not we will do something. Using PCD basically means that we take a brief instant to ask the question, *Is it important?* This simple process helps us get the return on the moment we desire.

Again, this is not how our brain is naturally wired to react. With an understanding of the Time Matrix, you have a framework to help you clarify whether or not something is important. When something comes up, you can ask yourself, *Which quadrant is this in?* Then you can make a better decision about what to do with it.

To sum up, we should remove any self-imposed activities in Q1, Q3, and Q4, reclaiming that time to invest in Q2. We can create a Q2 culture by speaking the language of importance and improve our ability to focus on Q2 together. ●

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Choice 2: Go for Extraordinary, Don't Settle for Ordinary

With all the challenges of life and all we have on our plates, it's a legitimate question to ask why we should set the standard at extraordinary. Extraordinary means going to bed at the end of each day feeling satisfied and accomplished. It's about accomplishing those things that add the most value to your work and life.

What Are the Most Important Roles in Your Life Today?

Roles are where life happens. Roles are so fundamental to human identity that when we ask people to tell us about themselves, they always answer in terms of roles: "I am an engineer." "I am Jane's spouse." The trick is to keep them all in balance. The way each of your roles plays out in life affects all your other roles.

Our brains naturally organize information in categories like roles, so organizing your life in terms of roles makes a lot of sense. One of the most effective Q2 things you can do is to narrow your focus. Take the time to identify the few most important roles in your life today; evaluate how you think you are doing in each of them; then define what success looks like in each role. This will give your brain the targets it needs to greatly enhance the decisions you make every day.

Making Your Roles Extraordinary

Now that you have identified and evaluated your most important roles, how do you transform them into something that will guide you and help you make better decisions about where you invest your attention and energy every day? The key is to determine your vision of success in each role. You can accomplish this by doing two things:

- **Anchor your purpose and passion in a Q2 Role Title.** Take a few minutes, and think broadly and deeply about one of your roles. Really go to town on what a vision of success could look and feel like. Capture it in the title of that role. For example, change the title of "Housemate" to "Supporter," or "Photographer" to "Visual Artist." If you like it, then keep going with your other roles.
- **Craft a Q2 Role Statement for each role.** For each role, craft a brief statement that articulates the outcomes you are after and the essential activities or methods that will help you achieve them. You are not looking for a goal; you are looking for a combination of outcomes and activities that will guide your goals, plans, and decisions. A formula that can be helpful is,

"As (role title) I will (extraordinary outcomes) by (activities.)"

In addition to connecting to the motivational centers of our brains, clarifying our roles and goals taps into the deepest purposes we have in our lives. Our roles embrace our most significant relationships, our most profound joys, and our highest contributions and aspirations.

The Q2 time you take to think deeply about your Q2 Roles and Goals will help you tap into these deeper wells of motivation and high performance. ●

ATTENTION MANAGEMENT

Choice 3: Schedule the Big Rocks, Don't Sort Gravel

There is a big difference between thinking about what is important and actually accomplishing it. If we don't have robust planning disciplines and processes in place to execute what is important, then our Q2 Role Statements and Q2 Goals are merely wishful thinking.

The Big Rocks and the Gravel

In this comparison, the Big Rocks represent the important Q2 priorities in our lives. These are the activities that come from our Q2 Role Statements and Goals. These activities are in contrast to gravel, which represents all the little things that fill up our lives—email, phone calls, laundry, less important priorities, and so on. These things take time and attention away from the Big Rocks.

You can never get ahead by just sorting through the gravel faster. Decide what is most important, and get those activities "in the bucket" before the week begins.

A Critical Pre-Planning Tool: The Master Task List

In the 21st century, the Master Task List is probably one of the most vital tools we can use to keep our attention focused on Q2. The purpose of a Master Task List is to keep things in a single trustworthy tracking system so that you can get them out of your brain and stop worrying about them.

The basic rule for using a Master Task List is this: When something comes up that you might need to do, it goes either on the floor or on the list, but not in your head. This means you use your discernment skills right away and decide what to do with it, but don't leave it floating in your consciousness, taking up valuable working memory.

Without a Master Task List, you are more prone to have sleepless nights, tossing and turning as all the things you

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need to do and haven't written down run through your mind like a broken record. You also feel the pressure of knowing that tomorrow a whole new slew of decisions and demands are coming your way and that you have nowhere to put them.

Q2 Planning and the 30/10 Promise

If you spend 30 minutes each week and 10 minutes each day in Q2 Planning, you will dramatically increase your ability to be and feel accomplished at the end of every day.

Q2 Planning is a process where you take some time to quiet your mind and work from the Thinking Brain to consciously and intentionally load the Big Rocks into your weeks and days *first*, to make sure they get accomplished.

When you take some time to reduce the noise, get centered, and plan from a more thoughtful state, you will have an entirely different experience when you ask yourself, *What is most important?* The answers you get will be clearer and more accurate.

The 30/10 Promise will transform the time you spend everywhere else and dramatically increase your ability to feel accomplished at the end of every day.

Weekly Q2 Planning

Find a quiet place, and take at least 30 minutes *before* your week starts to

1. Review Your Roles and Goals. Take some time to consciously connect with the vision for your life that you captured in your Q2 Role Statements and Q2 Goals. Don't skimp on this step. It will rekindle your deepest passion and highest motivations.

2. Schedule the Big Rocks. Ask the Big Rocks Question, *What are the one or two most important things I can do in this role this week?* When it comes to Big Rocks, you should only pick the top one or two most important things for each role. There is only so much you can do, so set the bar high, and pick the ones that will really make a difference.

3. Organize the Rest. With the Big Rocks securely in place, you can calendar other important things that need to be done—things that aren't critical, but need to be taken care of, like the laundry!

These three steps to Weekly Q2 Planning will ensure that your week is productive.

Daily Q2 Planning

To plan your coming day, find a quiet place, and take at least 10 minutes to review the day you just completed, and

1. Close Out the Day. Look back at your tasks you scheduled. Is everything done? If not, then reschedule the unfinished items at some other time on your calendar, delete them if they are no longer important, or leave them on your Master Task List. The idea is to be accountable to yourself each day.

2. Identify the Few “Must-Dos.” A must-do is something so important that you probably wouldn't end your day without getting it done.

3. Organize the Rest. Organize everything else around your must-dos. ●

Choice 4: Rule Your Technology, Don't Let It Rule You

Our current technologies—from sticky notes to personal computers, from email to video conferencing, the Internet, the cell phone, text messaging, wireless networking, wearable devices, eBooks—can provide such immediate responsiveness to our actions that we can be caught up in responding to texts and tweets, thinking we are being productive, when in fact we are only being distracted.

Of greater concern, we may be missing the really important things like building strong relationships, collaborating on important problems, or doing some thoughtful and focused work. In the end, these things are far more important.

Swordlessness and the First Principle

Sometimes we get caught up in the idea that if we just have the right tool—the right software, the latest gadget, and so on—then all our problems will be solved. No external device can replace our own minds.

When we embrace the idea that no tool will automatically save us, we act from what 16th-century Japanese sword master Yagyū Munenori called the “first principle,” which is to be independent in every possible way and to keep your presence of mind in all circumstances. The notion is that when we get stuck on a particular tool, we create an attachment in our mind that keeps us from moving fluidly and responding appropriately to different circumstances as they arise. This is important, because the tools and technologies change all the time, but the first principle of conscious choice does not.

The first thing we need to do is get all our information organized. Basically, there are four kinds of information you need to manage—two of them you can act on; the other two are information that you file away for future reference.

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- **Appointments.** Things you need to do at specific times.
- **Tasks.** Things you need to do that are not yet scheduled.
- **Contacts.** Information about people you interact with.
- **Notes/Documents.** Other information you want to keep track of that does not fall into one of the other three categories.

We call these categories the *Core 4*. The first task to bring order to the chaos is to learn to see incoming information so you know exactly where and how to access it anywhere, anytime. How you do that will depend on the system you use, but as a guideline, use the *Rule of One*.

This means having one Master Task List, one calendar, one contacts list, and one system for your notes or documents. This can be personalized, as long as you stay true to the principles managing the Core 4. You can design your system to be all paper, all digital, or a combination of both.

The 3 Master Moves

These are 3 Master Moves that can help you leverage the features of your technology systems to dramatically increase their effectiveness as you deal with the incoming and organize your Core 4.

Master Move 1: Win Without Fighting. Win Without Fighting is based on the principle of automation. The goal is to confidently automate as many of these decisions as possible so that our brains do not have to use up energy on the mundane, useless, or unnecessary.

One of the most powerful ways to automate your incoming email is to master the rules or filter functions of your email program. Rules or filters can automatically put many of your emails where you want them to go before they ever hit your inbox!

Of course, you should be aware of any corporate guidelines that govern how you handle and delete email. But by taking some Q2 time to set up these rules, you can save thousands of hours later on.

Once you set up your rules or filter system, continue to be intentional about keeping it current. Continue to discern your new messages through the eyes of the quadrants. Look for patterns to automate and opportunities to prioritize. When you see one, take just an additional second or two to make a rule for those messages; then they will be handled smartly from that time forward.

Master Move 2: Turn It Into What It Is. The goal of this move is to eliminate any additional Q3s and Q4s from your inbox that rules and filters did not handle, then effectively manage the Q1s and Q2s.

To understand Master Move 2, realize that every email is really only made up of one or more of the Core 4. When you look at each email with this new pair of glasses, you realize that the information in the email already has a place set up in your Core 4 system where such information should go. Once you've identified each of the Core 4, then *immediately* Turn It Into What It Is, and get it out of your inbox. The basic rule here is to touch it once.

Having an uncluttered inbox gives you an uncluttered mind. There is nothing more peaceful than seeing your number of messages reduced to just a few and knowing that everything is where it belongs.

Master Move 3: Link to Locate. Have you ever been late for a meeting because you were scrambling to find all the resources you needed? When you are busy looking for stuff, which quadrant are you in? Generally, it's a self-imposed Q1. We have higher-value uses for our time, and that is what Master Move 3: Link to Locate helps you solve.

The paradigm shift for this move is to see the relatedness of information and to proactively connect resources among the Core 4 as much as you can ahead of time so you don't have to search for them later.

Even though many search functions have become quite effective for digital information, the more key information you have organized and linked, the lower your risk of not finding what you need, the greater your confidence, and the sooner your attention can be focused on the important work at hand.

Linking can be done by

- Inserting the actual file.
- Inserting an active hyperlink.
- Creating a text-based link.

The number of links you add is entirely up to you. The point is not to get obsessed with links, turning this into a Q4 activity, but to proactively create some well-chosen cross-references that will help you connect different items ahead of time.

In the end, the most important asset in any conflict is a calm and undisturbed state of mind. This allows you to act fluidly and with discernment in the moment of choice. While the skills are important, even more vital is your own ability to transcend your natural impulse to respond to every beep and buzz, and to consciously act from a centered, clear-thinking Q2 perspective. ●

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ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Choice 5: Fuel Your Fire, Don't Burn Out

We have targeted the brain as the number-one asset and tool that must be optimized. To be extraordinarily productive, we need to create a way of life that is intentional, consciously making the highest-value decisions virtually every waking minute of the day.

Our mode of life today—constant stress, poor diet, lack of exercise and sleep—leads to what scientists call *exhaustion syndrome*. The rest of us call it burnout. We continually push through each day, postponing the renewal time our brains and bodies need. By contrast, extraordinarily productive people consistently recharge.

Five Drivers of Mental and Physical Energy

To maintain your ability to carry out your great purposes and make the day-to-day decisions that get you there, you need the sustainable physical energy that comes from a well-cared-for and well-functioning body to fuel the brain with lots of oxygen and a constant flow of glucose.

The 5 Energy Drivers are

- **Move.** It's not just about exercise. Your body was meant to move. Take brain breaks periodically throughout the day. Get up from your chair at least every 90 minutes to walk around, even if it's just to the beverage area.
- **Eat.** Just as you don't put dirt in your car's gas tank, you shouldn't put poor-quality food in your body. The idea is that when you fuel your brain with the right amount of whole, natural foods in regular intervals throughout the day, you provide your brain and body with a steady supply of glucose and other nutrients that help you function at your best.
- **Sleep.** Getting a good night's sleep is not just enjoyable, it is vital to extraordinary productivity. One study indicated that individuals who had gone 17–19 hours without sleep performed like someone with a .05 percent blood-alcohol level. Showing up at work sleep-deprived is like showing up drunk.
- **Relax.** Learning to turn off the stress responses in our brain and act from a more centered, relaxed state can have a tremendous impact on our performance. Recovery strategies are as unique as the individual, and sometimes the right strategy is to reduce the load of work or even take some significant time off. Recovery and relaxation might be as simple as a 15-minute break to change your surroundings.

- **Connect.** Spending time building and maintaining meaningful relationships is actually nourishing to our brain. We may not think of relationships as a way to increase mental energy, but they are. Not only is the brain wired for movement, but it is also an inherently social organ.

Each of these 5 Energy Drivers is powerful in its own right. If you invest time in even one of them, you will get a quick and clear benefit. However, the real power comes when you have a regular pattern of life that honors all 5 Energy Drivers. When you have a healthy pattern of movement, eating, sleeping, relaxing, and connecting, you are strengthening yourself as a complete human being. ●

Conclusion: Your Extraordinary Life

More than anything, extraordinary productivity is a question of being conscious in the moment. And it doesn't take much to change the equation. It's taking small steps each day to cultivate this habit in our own lives. It's being aware of our surroundings, the people we work with, and the opportunities for high-value decisions about where we spend our time, attention, and energy.

When we live our days this way, we find they are much more rewarding and fulfilling. We know that we have been involved in things that matter and have done them well. We can feel accomplished at the end of every day. And in the end, we may be surprised to find out that a series of extraordinary days has given us an extraordinary life! ●

SPECIAL SECTION: BEING A Q2 LEADER

What Leaders Can Do

A culture is particularly sensitive to the actions of its leaders. Almost by definition, they have a disproportionate impact on how a culture feels and what people do. But leadership is not just a position; in fact, some of the most powerful leaders in the world held no real formal position of power (think Mother Teresa or Gandhi). By this definition, leadership is a choice, not a position.

The suggestions here are ideas about how you can exercise leadership in each of the 5 Choices to create a Q2 culture among those you work with.

Choice 1: Act on the Important; Don't React to the Urgent

- Share your commitment to a Q2 culture with those around you. Be explicit about what you are trying

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to achieve and how it can help everyone feel more accomplished at the end of every day.

- Allow for strategic pauses. Create an environment where it is safe for people to press the pause button and make good decisions about where they are spending their time, attention, and energy.
- Reward Q2. Rewarding heroics is part of the corporate DNA. Nurture the higher-return Q2 culture by seeking out those accomplishments that get at root causes and prevent Q1s or projects that are completed on time and on budget without a rush.

Choice 2: Go for Extraordinary; Don't Settle for Ordinary

- Share your own leadership Q2 Role Statements and Q2 Goals with others. By articulating your priorities to your team, it helps them calibrate their own efforts to make these things happen. As a leader, you cannot (and should not) try to do everything.
- Ask others to define Q2 Role Statements and Q2 Goals. If you are a formal leader and can do this, ask people on your team to come up with the contribution they want to make in their role and share it with you. The conversations you have can be both illuminating and motivating.
- Use the *From X to Y by When* formula when setting up organizational goals. Build on the current brain science when formulating your goals. The specificity of this formula will help you and everyone else make better decisions around where to spend your time, attention, and energy.

Choice 3: Schedule the Big Rocks; Don't Sort Gravel

- Create organizational Q2 Time Zones. As a leader, you should be involving others and looking months, quarters, and even years into the future. If you are not, then you are not doing your job.
- Do Q2 daily huddles. The principles of Q2 Planning can apply in a variety of settings once you have the Q2 mindset and language.
- Get good at what you do a lot of. Spending Q2 time with your team to set up a good process around your most vital and repeatable work can help everyone in your organization stay focused in Q2.

Choice 4: Rule Your Technology; Don't Let It Rule You

- Create an organizational Q2 manifesto. As a leader, take the initiative to set clear guidelines and protocols

about how to handle email, texts, and so forth. Help your team know how to prioritize communications from you and those they sent to others.

- Get your technology right. Pick technologies that help people organize the Core 4. Give them the necessary tools and policies to make critical information available when and where they need it.

Choice 5: Fuel Your Fire; Don't Burn Out

- Take care of yourself. Being an effective organizational leader takes all kinds of mental and emotional energy. Take time to take care of yourself. You will be a better leader if you do.
- Provide healthy food options. This one is sure to be a hit at the office. Start providing healthy options for people at work. When you see people alert and working rather than in sugar comas during afternoon meetings, you will see that it is money well spent.
- Create brain breaks. When you can see that a meeting has gone on too long, recommend that everyone take a brain break. Get up and walk around. Take a moment for humor and fun. These things provide a bit of renewal in your work and enliven the culture.
- Encourage and foster an ethos of health and energy in your culture, versus the tough-guy, work-all-hours-hero, make-it-happen culture that we often cultivate to get things done. Sure, there are times we choose to work long hours. That's reality. But if the culture celebrates strung-out, bleary-eyed, I-worked-all-night-again patterns of behavior, you are setting yourself up for crises, and what's worse, you are draining your culture of the creative energy you need to discover the next innovative idea that takes you to the next level or lifts you above the competition.

Instead, celebrate people who choose to bring their very best energy to the workplace—they are the best employees you have. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The 5 Choices*, you'll also like:

1. ***The 80/20 Manager* by Richard Koch.** Learn to be much more efficient and effective by applying the 80/20 Principle—just 20 percent of our time, effort, and key decisions generate 80 percent of our success.
2. ***Extreme Productivity* by Robert C. Pozen.** Pozen explains how to determine your highest priorities and match them with how you spend your time.
3. ***The Age of Speed* by Vince Poscente.** Poscente illustrates why harnessing the power of speed is the ultimate solution for those seeking less stress, less busyness, and more balance.