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## 5 Tips for More Productivity in 2009

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Posted in: [Management](#)



I think we can all agree: There are too many ideas in the world, and not enough action. As we usher in a new year during difficult economic times, we must question the way we manage our projects and our time. **We must be willing to question conventional wisdom when it comes to the burdensome, bureaucratic stuff that we do "just because."** As leaders of small businesses and growing teams, we must challenge ourselves to boost not only our productivity but the general productivity of our teams.

As a team focused on helping people and companies boost productivity to make ideas happen, we obviously have a lot to say on this topic!

For starters, our years of research have caused us to question the status quo of everyday productivity and project management. We question the traditional approach to projects. We believe that too much time is wasted on "filing stuff" and organizing, and too little time is spent on actually taking action. And we have discovered that the emotional and social aspects of managing projects (like the power of nagging, transparency, and design) are critical to a productive work environment.

***So, consider the following five "tips for more productivity" and how they might help you and your team...***

### 1. Actions should be kept separate from email.

Email can kill productivity, because the actions you must take are buried in regular communication. An inbox full of email - even well-filed emails - still forces you to dig through every communication to find the hidden task. Tasks to be completed, or "Action Steps," should be kept separate. Consider labeling all emails with "Action Required" and then simply listing the action steps - each

one starting with a verb. And AVOID the “summary” section of a meeting in these emails. Truth is, very few people read it.

## **2. Good design is great for productivity.**

Seeing through all of the elaborate systems for productivity we witnessed in our research, we realized that the most effective systems are distinguished by their design. Whether you use paper folders, post-its, or some sort of technology to stay productive, spend more time on how you design it. Yes, even little features like color, texture, and font will help keep you focused on taking action. It’s very simple: If you can make action stand out in a system that is attractive, you are likely to stay loyal to it.

## **3. Darwinian productivity: The “nag” and natural selection.**

As great as you think you are, nobody can nail prioritization 100% of the time. The truth is that the “importance” of a particular action step is sometimes demonstrated by how badly other people need it done. We have found that nagging plays an important role in productivity – the forces around us help determine which action steps are most important. Nagging should be a formal part of project management. Rather than discourage people from pushing each other, foster a culture where people can openly discuss the moving parts of projects and the shifting level of urgency. If you have an acceptable way for people to nag each other when necessary, the team will be able to better prioritize what needs to get done.

## **4. No more email-chains – make it a real discussion!**

Ideas that are discussed via email often become cut-up, convoluted, and lost. These infamous “reply-all” emails also fill up our inboxes and consume our time as we try to parse it all out. If you could start a discussion at any moment – share it with anyone in the world – and organize it within your own projects....well, the world would be a happier place. Technology now enables us to start, track, and search discussions online. It is time for people to crack down on the discussion-via-email phenomenon. Use wikis, discussion threads, and other solutions to free up the inbox for actionable communication.

## **5. Actions are only truly “delegated” when they are accepted by others.**

While many collaborative tools support “to-do lists” that multiple people can see, true accountability is never achieved unless the designee chooses to accept the action step that he/she has been given. As such, develop ways to get people to publically accept their tasks. At the end of a meeting, consider having each person quickly state the action steps they captured during the meeting. When you send around “Next Step” emails, have each person reply with a confirmation. Also consider online tools that require the recipient to actually accept an action step that is delegated to them (full disclosure, Behance developed “[Action Method Online](#)” to support this behavior).

## **And if nothing else...ACTION ACTION ACTION**

In meetings, too many people focus more on taking notes than on capturing action steps. We focus more on communication, storage, and organization of information than on the one thing that actually moves us forward: ACTION. So, as a new year’s resolution, commit yourself to living and working with a bias-towards-action. When in doubt focus on just capturing and completing actions steps. I can assure you, you will be among the top 5% of productive professionals if you can JUST get through your action steps.

*\*\* [Behance](#) articles and tips are adapted from the writing and research of [Scott Belsky](#) and the Behance team. Behance runs the [Behance Creative Network](#), the [Action Method project management application](#), the [Creative Jobs List](#), and develops knowledge, products, and services that help creative professionals make ideas happen.*