

FASTER TOGETHER

***ACCELERATING
YOUR TEAM'S
PRODUCTIVITY***

LAURA STACK



Praise for *Faster Together*

“Laura Stack is on a roll! In *Faster Together*, she applies hard-earned experience toward helping your team function more effectively at work. Discover how to tweak your team’s business processes toward greater productivity.”

—**Deanna Cauley, Vice President, Talent Management, Red Robin International, Inc.**

“Feeling trapped by an unreasonable work-life balance that barely leaves you enough personal time for meals and sleep? Grab Laura Stack’s new book, *Faster Together*. Though at first glance it’s all about productivity, Laura’s advice helps you save time in all aspects of your work and life, so you actually get to enjoy the ‘life’ part as well as the work.”

—**Montague “Cosmo” L. Boyd, Senior Vice President, Financial Services**

“In today’s market, agile speed is a must. The business arena is changing more rapidly than ever before, which requires workers and leaders who can stop on a dime and shift direction on a moment’s notice. *Faster Together* is the ultimate guidebook for rapid, efficient productivity in the modern working world.”

—**Mike Howard, Chief Security Officer, Microsoft**

“Do you really understand how fairness, accountability, systems thinking, and technology affect the speed of your team’s work process? Laura Stack does, and she knows how to help you maximize every aspect of all four. In *Faster Together*, she shows you how to rev the engines of even the most efficient work process.”

—**Andrew Lawrence, Vice President, Enterprise Learning and Personal Development, SCL Health**

“If you think ‘fast’ and ‘quality’ are mutually exclusive, think again. Laura Stack’s *Faster Together* gives team members all the tools they need to speed up their processes and change their mindset about accountability, systems, and technology. To make a quantum leap in productivity, you’ll want to buy a copy for all team members!”

—**Dianna Booher, author of *Communicate Like a Leader* and *What More Can I Say?***

“No one understands and teaches quick, efficient productivity as well as Laura Stack. In her latest book, *Faster Together*, she demonstrates to leaders and team members alike how they can improve their work processes and achieve success faster. A must-have for the ambitious work team!”

—**Jeremy Eaves, Senior Director, Employee Relations, DaVita**

“Laura knows how to make anyone more productive. In *Faster Together*, she shows how teams can work together seamlessly and efficiently and address any ‘speed bumps’ on the road to success. Highly recommended for any manager or team member looking to accomplish more in less time.”

—**Laura Vanderkam, speaker and author of *I Know How She Does It***

FASTER TOGETHER

Other Books by Laura Stack

*Doing the Right Things Right:
How the Effective Executive Spends Time*

*Execution IS the Strategy: How Leaders Achieve
Maximum Results in Minimum Time*

*What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks,
Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day*

*SuperCompetent: The Six Keys to
Perform at Your Productive Best*

*The Exhaustion Cure: Up Your Energy
from Low to Go in 21 Days*

*Find More Time: How to Get Things Done at Home,
Organize Your Life, and Feel Great About It*

*Leave the Office Earlier: How to Do More
in Less Time and Feel Great About It*

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LAURA STACK
MBA, CSP, CPAE



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Faster Together

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I make use of many lists and protocols throughout this work, because they’re an important core tool to make your team faster. Lists help a team maintain focus and stay organized, drive clarity and action, and provide tools to the four Keys that will help make your team go faster. You’re free to adapt these lists and protocols for your team, if the words “Excerpted from *Faster Together* by Laura Stack © 2018” are included in the document.

To my incredible team,
without whom all would slow to a crawl.
Thank you for proactively seeking ways
to increase our collective productivity
and help us go faster together.

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PREFACE

The idea for this book came to me at a leadership team meeting of forty global supply chain leaders, who collectively oversaw ten thousand employees. I was scheduled to present a three-hour workshop titled “How the Effective Leader Spends Time.” About thirty minutes before the meeting started, as people were entering the room, chatting and getting coffee, a man came up to me—to introduce himself, I thought. Instead, without even giving me his name or shaking my hand, he leaned in close to me and spoke in a hiss: “I’m really glad you’re here today. I could be so much more productive if it weren’t for all these *people*.” He looked pointedly at a few in particular, nodding toward them as if to call them out.

“Ah, this is *really* why they brought me in,” I thought.

I’m the proud daughter of a retired U.S. Air Force colonel and grew up on the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I have two brothers, one a year older and one a year younger. Not having a sister, and with relatively few girls in the neighborhood, I grew up somewhat a tomboy. I wore Toughskins hand-me-downs from my older brother. (Remember those? We really did grow out of them before the pants wore out.) I could shoot BB guns with great accuracy,

climb trees, build forts, and win wrestling matches. I loved anything that went fast—the Thunderbirds (a performance team of F-16 Fighting Falcons) flying over our heads, trains, and *cars*. Especially cars.

For as long as I can remember, I wanted a Corvette. I remember seeing one as a little girl and asking my father what it was. I loved the “swoopy hood,” as I called it. But since I live in south Denver now, a car like that is rather impractical, as it can’t be driven for much of the year and would just sit covered in the garage.

In July 2015, when I was honored to be inducted into the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame by the National Speakers Association, my husband John surprised me with the gift of a Corvette. Not just *any* Corvette—a red convertible 650hp Z06 loaded with all the options, with a black racing stripe and a black and red leather interior. She has a custom Colorado license plate emblazoned with ZORA, which is the name of the Belgian-born American engineer whose work at Chevrolet earned him the nickname “Father of the Corvette,”¹ and which also happens to rhyme with Laura. Obviously, I love that car—she’s a dream come true.

Because I was raised in the military, I am quite the rule follower, so I followed all the manufacturer’s rules. I didn’t take Zora over 4,000 RPM until after her 2,000-mile break-in period; I got an oil change at 500 and 2,000 miles, and then she was ready to *really* drive.

However, I didn’t really know how to drive her. Oh, I *thought* I knew how to drive her—until I attended a two-day “Corvette Owners School” at Ron Fellows Performance Driving School at Spring Mountain Motor Resort in Pah-rump, Nevada. Then I learned how shockingly little I knew about my car’s capabilities.

They gave me a Z06 to drive that was identical to mine in every way, minus the convertible top. Before I got behind the wheel, I rode shotgun with the instructor for a demo ride—and promptly left my throat on the starting line as we went from 0 to 60 mph in 2.9 seconds. I had *no idea* the car could be driven that way. On several occasions, I honestly thought we were going to crash as he roared into the hairpin turns, but the car just sat down and hugged the track.

I was so excited that I whooped and hollered at the end of the run. I couldn't wait to drive! I spent the next two days unwinding how he did that, and by the end of the course, I was driving less like a grandma on a Sunday outing and a little more like my instructor. (Not to brag, guys, but I was the only woman in the class, and my times were better than all the men's except one!)

Until I learned how to enter turns, hit the apex, accelerate out of turns correctly, understand oversteer and understeer, and use proper speed, braking, paddle shifting, and torque, I wasn't very effective as a driver.

So why am I telling you all this? Because it's the same with your team. You have at your disposal what I consider to be the most powerful productivity machine in existence. You may think you know how to drive your "Team Car" correctly, thank you very much. But until you *really* understand the capabilities of the people around you, you won't be the most effective and efficient worker you can be.

That's why I wrote *Faster Together*—to put *you* in the driver's seat of your Team Car, and teach you and your team members how to accelerate your team's productivity on the track to success. Obviously, four people can't ride in a Corvette the way the cover jokingly illustrates, but you're all in it together.

Circling back to our meeting, the leader who talked to me

had it exactly backward—he was successful *because* of “those people,” not despite them. Even the best single person can’t succeed alone, not even you. By the time the seminar ended, it was clear *he* was one of the biggest problems. Individual productivity is just the beginning of business profitability; the real winner is team productivity. Despite how highly that leader thought of himself, the team was much faster together. By the end of this book, you’ll truly understand the abilities of your team. So, rev your team’s engine, and you’ll soon be roaring down the track together!

FASTER TOGETHER

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INTRODUCTION



All seven of my previous books have focused on improving personal productivity at some level—for individuals, employees, and leaders. I still believe every professional should strive to improve his or her own productivity levels. But after twenty-five years as a productivity consultant and speaker, I've realized just how hard it is to improve *your* productivity if you're on a team of people who don't care about improving *theirs*. When you're surrounded by slow-moving individuals, you're stuck in a traffic jam of sorts.

Wouldn't you love it if everyone hopped into the FAST Team Car and raced away? That's why I've shifted my primary focus from helping team members become more productive individually to helping teams become more productive collectively, which is a hugely important distinction.

Throughout the book, as a valuable member of a team, I will encourage you to continually ask yourself questions such as:

“What can I do to make my team go FAST?”

“How can I personally remove the speed bumps that are slowing my team down?”

“In what ways can I take personal responsibility to save time for my team?”

“How can I help my team go FASTER TOGETHER?”

Think of this as the workplace version of President John F. Kennedy’s famous statement: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Imagine how efficient your team would be if everyone on it adopted this mindset! Over time, team culture would change so that everyone would always be looking for the fastest way to help each other. This attitude emphasizes the reciprocal, collaborative nature of time. You work to save everyone else time, and they work to save you time.

WHAT IS A TEAM?

What one person calls a team may be different from another’s definition. I define a **team** as a group of people who work cooperatively and collaboratively to achieve goals. The best teams are tight-knit groups of individuals who each have well-defined functions, ideally with a slight amount of overlap so that the team won’t fall apart if one or two people go missing temporarily.

A team is distinguished from a work group in that a work group is more loosely defined, usually larger, and generally made up of individual contributors who coordinate their independent efforts; a team shares a common purpose and its members are reliant on each other to achieve their goals. The best

teams possess a high level of morale and camaraderie, but they are willing to disagree if that disagreement ultimately shapes a stronger decision. All members of the team then work together to execute the decision.

Teams typically have a leader, though they can be self-contained. They don't always work in a single location; with modern communications, they can be distributed or virtual, with members all over the world. Teams may be large or small, but in the workplace, the best teams contain no more than twelve to fifteen members. Some authorities, like Amazon's Jeff Bezos, would argue that they should be smaller. Large teams become unwieldy because there are too many points of communication, which break down more easily.

By this definition, a two hundred-strong department overseen by a VP is not a team; rather, the department would consist of multiple teams. Some people would be members of more than one team. For example, the VP and her directors, a director and his managers, and a manager and her direct reports—all are teams. In this case, the directors and managers would belong to two teams each.

WHY BOTHER WITH TEAMS AT ALL?

In the modern office, workers deal weekly with hundreds of emails, constant communication, and seemingly endless meetings. These can be managed efficiently, or they can be a huge time drain. It all depends on how the team approaches them. The team can get the job done more quickly together than can any Lone Ranger. Yes, some sports teams have standouts who pull the team's ranking upward—Peyton Manning, Mia Hamm, and Stephen Curry come to mind—but they couldn't do their jobs without everyone else on the team supporting them to the best of their abilities. If you want your business to