



## A Better Way to Work?

Imagine working entirely from home, with no e-mail, no schedules, and without ever meeting your colleagues. Could such a workplace be effective?


Yes, according to Scott Berkun, who describes such a workplace in *The Year without Pants: WordPress.com and the Future of Work* ([www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)). The founder of WordPress asked Berkun to join his company, Automattic, where employees work wherever in the world they wish, have an open vacation policy, and are encouraged to express themselves freely and creatively.

Working remotely, Berkun says, mellows everything out, dropping the intensity of both the highs and the lows of a “real” workplace. “During my year at Automattic, I was never in a meeting that made me angry or want to storm out,” he says.

Although e-mail was available to workers, it was almost never used. E-mail has many disadvantages, including the fact that it’s a closed channel. There’s no way to see an e-mail if you’re not on the “to” list, forcing work groups to err on the side of including everyone. Only a fraction of e-mail has direct relevance for any individual. Getting rid of e-mail eliminates the turf battles, approval seeking, and grandstanding that dominate many miserable e-mail threads.


Instead of e-mail, employees use internal blogs, Skype, and Internet Relay Chat (where they go when they want to talk in discussion groups or seek help). Internal blogs sidestep the problems of e-mail; they’re easy to skim, easy to reference with an URL, available to all forever, searchable, and easily pushed into different reading tools.

There are no formal interviews for positions at this forward-looking company. Instead, prospective employees are given real tools and work on a real project. If they do well, they’re hired.

A completely virtual organization won’t work for everyone. But many of the strategies described in this fascinating book are well worth considering if you want to be part of the future of work. 

## Five Steps to Creative Problem Solving

Do you block important answers by failing to use the power of your entire mind? Increase your performance by understanding how your subconscious mind works. Once you know how, you can tap its power to meet challenges—both large and small.

1. **Define the problem.** Write it down. Be clear about what you need to resolve.
2. **Gather data.** Consult with experts. Research written material. Browse the Internet. Don’t spend a lot of time on this step. Find the input you need as quickly as you can.
3. **Work on the problem using your conscious, rational mind.** Ask yourself, “Is there a black and white solution here? Are there options I can look at? What are they?”
4. **Take a break.** Give your conscious mind a rest. Go shopping, play golf, head to the health club, go fishing. Sleep on it. Turn it over to your supraconscious mind. Let your inner mind go to work for you. Tell it you need the best solution.
5. **Wait for results.** When the time is right, the best answer will be there. No bells will ring. The answer will come forth in a “blinding flash of the obvious.” You may find yourself saying, “Now why didn’t I think of that sooner?” 


— from *Beyond The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, [beyondthepower.com](http://beyondthepower.com)

## Rise above the Noise with Your Message

A SPIKE (“Sudden Point of Interest that Kickstarts Exposure”) is a span of time during which your organization is thrust into the public eye. This can be the result of an external story, instigated by someone else, or can be carefully planned to promote your organization. In either case, *Spike Your Brand ROI* ([josseybass.com](http://josseybass.com)) explains how to make the most of such moments to appeal to stakeholders.

To be successful, you need to create targeted messages that rise above the noise. Tips include:

- **Say the message on your Web site out loud.** Is it something people would actually say? If not, change it.
- **Do a focus group.** Ask people to repeat what they know about your organization after giving them your messages. If they can’t remember the information, go back to the drawing board.
- **You should have no more than three to five** clear, concise, repeatable messages.

Poorly managed marketing campaigns can do untold damage when they go viral. How you respond to events, and the timing of a response, will make or break your organization’s reputation. By planning ahead, you can achieve maximum effectiveness when your organization’s moments of fame emerge. This book demonstrates how. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler


## Tell Me a Story, Please!

Stories are like lighthouses in the storm, noise, and chaos of the digital age, points out David Casullo in *Leading the High-Energy Culture* (McGraw-Hill Books, mcgraw-hill.com). The best stories are the ones you tell about yourself. Use storytelling to let people know what you stand for and what's important to you.

As you create your story, cast yourself as a learner, not a hero. Consider a story from your experience that focuses on one of the following categories:

- **personal challenges**, difficult decisions, obstacles you've faced in your life or career
- **startling events**, major changes, turning points
- **embarrassments**, awkward situations, dumb ideas, failures
- **places you've been**, things you've discovered, events you've witnessed, inspiring people you've known.

As you tell your story, remember these communication keys:


- **The more critical the message, the closer you must be** to your audience.
- **Reinforce group communication** with constant individual communication.
- **Always start your message** by focusing on what your audience cares about most. 

## Questions to Change Your Life

Good questions trump easy answers, as Andrew Sobel and Jerold Panas show us in *Power Questions* (published by Wiley, wiley.com). Their 337 questions are sure to reap illuminating answers.

For each question, the authors provide follow-up questions. They also offer real-life examples of how asking the right question can change lives—and how great the costs can be when someone forgets to ask a crucial question.

Here's a sampling of powerful, thought-provoking questions you can ask of yourself and others in your life:

- **What makes today** different?
- **How will this further** your mission?
- **What did you learn** from your most recent experience?
- **Why do you do** what you do?
- **What do you wish** you could do less of? What do you wish you could do more of?
- **Why do you want** to do that? What is your plan?
- **Can you tell me** more?
- **What question** haven't you asked yet? 




## The Responsibility of Power

For more than 60 years, Noam Chomsky has been clarifying the use of words for us, including how authority figures often obfuscate language to justify acts of dominance. In *Because We Say So* (City Lights Books, citylights.com), Chomsky reveals the language U.S. government officials use to justify attempts (often successful) at political hegemony. This lingual manipulation is done in the name of the people of the United States, simultaneously perpetrating it against these very people.

The essays in *Because we Say So* highlight such thought-provoking topics as the world view of the U.S. as the greatest threat to peace—something you won't hear or read in U.S.-based media of any type. How the rest of the world views the U.S. is important to a nonprofit sector that is so deeply in association with the government. It's particularly important as more and more U.S.-based nonprofit organizations recognize the borderlessness of their work and build alliances with NGOs elsewhere.

Verbal manipulation by the state can greatly impact trust, not only with foreign organizations and populations but even with those who bear the brunt of campaigns of disinformation in our own nation. If there is distrust between people, it affects the ability of organizations to work together to resolve critical issues.

Nonprofit organizations in the U.S. enjoy enormous privileges, many of which are due to the nation's powerful global position and conveyed to nonprofits by association. These privileges sometimes cause us, as nonprofits, to forget the consequences of power. As Stan Lee penned, "With great power comes great responsibility." We have a responsibility to build trust with stakeholders and prospective stakeholders, which means not only being transparent but being civil toward each other. Civility includes listening to and respecting (even when not agreeing with) the perspectives of others, and not presuming our position is the only valid one.

Chomsky helps us understand how trust—or the lack of it—and civility are affected by language that is used in our name. As representatives of our stakeholders, our role as nonprofits includes not merely working in cooperation with the state: It also involves making sure government represents the people honestly. As mission-driven organizations, we're obliged to make certain we actually benefit the people we represent, and not assume our actions are beneficial simply because we—or our government officials—say so. 


—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

## The End of Team Building Training

If you're looking for team-building seminars, don't ask Steve Chandler to lead one. Such training was once his specialty, but he no longer provides it.

If people aren't performing and communicating with spirit, it's not a team-building issue, he says: It's a leadership issue.

In *The Hands-Off Manager* (Career Press, careerpress.com), he and co-author Duane Black offer tips for creating a culture in which teamwork will simply grow. Here are a few:

- **Mentor employees** toward success in their work instead of trying to impose productivity.
- **Learn to know yourself.** Take time to reflect. Ask yourself how you can best contribute to the overall good of your organization's mission.
- **Become a neutral negotiator.** Never get so attached to a particular outcome that you can't move to a better opportunity. Learn the power of being neutral, in which it doesn't matter if things work out exactly as you planned and you have no position to defend. You're not attached to any "win" except for the highest good.
- **Find ways to reduce your stress.** If you're not at peace with yourself, anyone you mentor will be contaminated by your unease. Address one stressful situation at a time. For instance, if you're getting too many phone calls, let your calls go directly to message for awhile to give yourself a chance to center yourself. If you're worried about an upcoming speech, do some deep-breathing exercises.
- **Remember that the people with whom you have the hardest time relating are your best teachers.** Spend time listening to them and learning from them.
- **Notice your thoughts.** Which ones bring you down? Which ones lift you up? Realize that it's your own thinking that creates your feelings. If you want to change the energy around you, change your negative thoughts into positive ones.
- **Don't focus on what you fear might happen or on what people are doing wrong.** It's by concentrating on what people do well that they improve. Likewise, focus on your own strengths rather than your weaknesses. 

## Provide Red-Carpet Treatment to Solidify Support

Making everyone involved with your organization feel special — going that extra mile for them — is the way to inspire loyalty and build rock-solid bonds. Here are a few ways to show appreciation to your stakeholders (from *501 Ways to Roll Out the Red Carpet for Your Customers*, published by Career Press, careerpress.com):

**Birthdays and holidays present easy ways** to create special moments for people. Rather than sending traditional cards, do something different, such as recording a short video to send to your donors or other stakeholders.

**Find out the most important days** in the eyes of your supporters — an anniversary, birth of a child, or other milestone — and recognize them on social media.

**Create a hashtag** for your organization. Post it on your social channels and other communications. Monitor the hashtag, thank those who use it, and share relevant posts, giving credit to the original poster.

**Treat all your organization's employees** (including volunteers) as valued customers. Happy employees are vital to your organization's success. Invite employees to events outside of work to build team spirit. Offer classes on topics such as health (Zumba or dance), empathy (de-escalating angry callers), and life skills (budgeting and finance). Host lunches with the boss for different employees several times a month. Celebrate every success with food — pizza, pancakes, a catered lunch — whatever your employees most enjoy.

**Every day, hand-write a thank-you note** to someone — an employee, donor, or other organizational supporter. 

## Make Your Meetings Count

If you tallied the true cost of meetings — the hours that each meeting attendant could have used to accomplish something else — you would want to make every second of every meeting count. *Productivity Driven Success* by Eric Bloom (Manager Mechanics, managermechanics.com) describes ways to enhance the quality of your meetings:

**Send an agenda at least two days** before the meeting. On the agenda, include a start time and purpose for each item. For example:

- Topic 1: 2:00 p.m. Looking for your input
- Topic 2: 2:10 p.m. Decision to be made
- Topic 3: 2:25 p.m. Update of project status
- Meeting adjourns: 2:30 p.m.

**Always start** the meeting on time. If a key player is missing and needed for the first agenda item, reorder the agenda, but keep the same amount of time you originally allocated for each topic.

**If someone talks too long**, politely interrupt, thank them for the great information, and offer to continue the discussion with them after the meeting. Then move to the next topic on the agenda.

**At the end** of the meeting, quickly recap the decisions made and actions assigned. Be sure each action is assigned to a specific person and has a specific due date.

**Always end** your meeting early or on time. 

