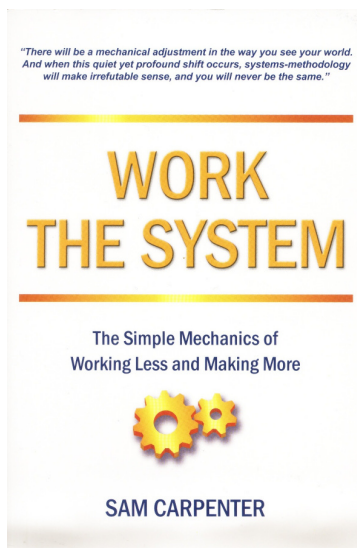


Work the System

The Simple Mechanics of Working Less and Making More



Written by: Sam Carpenter
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About Sam Carpenter



Telecommunications expert and successful entrepreneur Sam Carpenter is President and CEO of Centratel (www.centratel.com), the number one telephone answering service in the United States. Sam has a background in engineering, publishing, and journalism. He is a telephone answering service industry consultant, writer and speaker, and has served as president of several regional and national answering service organizations.

Sam also founded and oversees Kashmir Family Aid (www.kashmirfamily.org), a 501c3 non-profit that aids surviving school children of the Northern Pakistan and Azad Kashmir earthquake of October 2005.

Sam and his wife, Linda, are soon launching a major Internet startup site that promotes communication between absent adults and their children and grandchildren.

■ The Big Idea

There is nothing mystical in *Work the System* – no airy-fairy platitudes, no feel-good, unsupportable theories of reality that offer little more than immediate comfort. This book is not about right or wrong, religion or politics, or about turning our world upside down. Instead, it aims to give its readers simple and dispassionate direction for finding freedom and wealth in the world they inhabit.

For small business owners, corporate ladder climbers, and nine-to-fivers, it's a boots-on the-ground blueprint for breaking free.

<http://workthesystem.com>

■ Why You Need This Book

This book will help you make a few simple but meaningful adjustments to the way you approach your job or your business – and experience the freedom and wealth that come from working less and making more.

■ Changes in Your Life

Because this isn't a mystery novel, and because preparation is at the heart of the *Work the System* method, here's a two-part summary of how it will affect you and what it asks:

First, here are four general points about how the *Work the System* process will impact you personally:

- 1. You will undergo an elementary yet fundamental shift in perspective.** This will come to you as an awakening in a moment of time rather than as a long, drawn-out learning experience.
- 2. There will be no turning back.** You can't go back! So point two is a warning of sorts. Because of the obvious truth of it, this "systems-perspective" is something you won't be able to shake.
- 3. You will not be swallowing unsupportable theories of reality.** It's just a matter of tweaking your perception of life's mechanical workings.
- 4. There is some heavy lifting.** It's a superb investment, though, because the result will be freedom, a relaxed persona, and plenty of money. It could be the best investment of time and effort you will ever make.

Here's the second part of this nutshell-summary, the three steps of the *Work the System* method:

- 1. Documentation:** Creating written goals, principles, and processes that are guidelines for action and decision-making. This is one-time heavy lifting. It won't take long.
- 2. Separation, dissection, and repair of systems:** The satisfying process of exposing, analyzing, and then perfecting personal, work, and relationship systems. This effort includes creating new systems from scratch as well as eliminating those that are unnecessary or are holding you back.
- 3. Ongoing maintenance of systems:** Greasing the wheels. This is easy because the positive tangible results of the *Work the System* method are motivating.

■ The Six Steps to Working Less and Making More

1. STOP "DOING THE WORK."

The reason a successful business owner can work a few hours a week, or an efficient department manager can take an extended vacation without stress, is because he or she has created systems, implemented written procedures, and has learned to delegate.

Successful people don't work harder; they work smarter, so focus on what needs to be done to make your business or department successful, and delegate the "work."

Lose the "I'm superman" attitude and focus on finding people who can take the weight off your shoulders. Plenty of hard working, disciplined, honest people are out there, quietly looking for a fair shake so they can put themselves on the line and show what they can do. And when they perform well, they want to be rewarded.

You just need to find these people and then give them black and white instruction, good pay, and the promise of a bright future.

So transform these great people into great employees. Make it possible for them to shine by providing a forum for their innate skills and high motivation. Give them opportunity, and turn them loose.

You may be like the majority of managers who dislike delegating because they believe the delegated task will "fall through the cracks" and never happen, or it will be finished, but not properly. By holding on to tasks, all you do is cause more stress while you lead others to believe you don't trust them or don't want them to take on new responsibilities.

So delegate. And do it in writing so the job being assigned is clear and detailed, has a due date, and can't slip through the cracks.

And don't delegate an assignment and then leave it up to the other person to make sure it is completed. Follow up to make sure the job is in progress or near completion. Consider making Microsoft Outlook's task feature your best friend.

2. USE YOUR TIME WISELY.

Prime time is about maximizing productivity during the period brainpower is at peak capacity. It has two components. The first has to do with your most effective time of day due to biological makeup. It's called Biological Prime Time or BPT. The other component has to do with what you do with your time. This is Mechanic Prime Time or MPT.

Understand this: People function at maximum effectiveness only about six hours out of a twenty four-hour day. It is important to determine precisely when your personal time prime time occurs, and then use that time period wisely.

Six hours each day is not much, so, presuming you wish to reach your goals sooner rather than later, it is best you perform the tasks that contribute most to your success ("mechanical prime time") during your biological prime time hours. Protect those hours from interruption.

Here is the crux of Prime Time: Enormous advancement comes from spending the most alert periods of the day doing the most important system-building tasks.

When you are not in BPT, if you feel like it, it's OK to focus on MPT tasks – the tasks that have to do with improving and growing your business and your life. High energy or low energy, keep your work activities pointed toward primary business-building or career-advancing activities per your critical documents. In your day, stay in MPT as long as possible, but remember you must be balanced in order to avoid burn-out.

3. CREATE WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION.

Over 50 percent of small businesses fail in the first year, and 80 percent fail within the first 5 years, according to the U.S. Small Business Association. The single, major difference between a small, floundering company and a large, successful company is this: The large, successful business employs documentation.

It's a simple equation: Documented procedures equal freedom and profit. If you already own a small business, and you don't have documentation, carve out time today and begin developing a Strategic Objective for your business. It should define overall goals, methodology, and prescribe action. It should give direction for major and minor decisions. It will be like a mission statement, but punchier and more specific.

Once you have the Strategic Objective, move on to your General Operating Principles. This should be a two to four page collection of "guidelines for decision-making." And, third, you need written Working Procedures – instructions describing how the individual systems of the company or the job are to operate. You should have a written procedure for every recurring action that takes place in your work environment, including how to answer the phone, handle a complaint, make a deposit, or call for repair of the copier.

The potency of documentation is that it is tangible. If you can garner the self-discipline to create your Strategic Objective, you will find new strength as you hold the single-sheet document in your hand. You have direction! And once you have tangible representation of who you are, where you are going, and how you will get there, you will find it uncanny how the physical world aligns itself with what you have written.

4. APPROACH YOUR BUSINESS AND LIFE FROM A "NON-HOLISTIC" VANTAGE POINT.

See the elements of your world as separate, linear systems. Separate subsystems can be perfected, one-by-one, by examining and then repairing their simple and uncomplicated structure. Understand that by perfecting a primary system's sub-systems, the primary system will be perfected. Although you are taking a non-holistic approach, the end product – your business or department – will be a highly efficient, entirely holistic, "Primary System."

In the last 30 years, the terms "holistic" and "global" have inserted themselves into the fabric of our culture, supposing, "We're all in this together," and "If we do this over here, it will have consequences over there, so let's be careful," etc. These generalizations create a paralysis in which we identify a problematic primary system, assume the entire primary system is faulty, and then try to force an overall solution – without examining the sub-system components.

For instance, if someone is unhappy, they visit a psychologist, are diagnosed in the first session as “depressed,” and are prescribed an antidepressant that will affect their entire mental and physical being. If a nine-year-old boy is rambunctious in school, the child psychologist wants him to take a “prescription stimulant.” These drugs are a shock to the child’s entire physiology.

Too often we go after a holistic, bumper-sticker solution when it would be more sensible to simply examine the primary system’s context and fix a faulty component. In any case, it is difficult to dictate an overall solution to a problematic primary system and expect great results all around. We can’t take a fix-it pill, legislate social mores, or repair the car by washing and waxing it.

If there is a problem with a primary system, we must go inside to root out and fix one or more faulty sub-systems. Do that, and because of the increased efficiency of the contributing component parts, the end result is a cleaner working and entirely “holistic” primary system.

5. ELIMINATE TIME-WASTERS.

Your mission is to work hard but not long, to reduce the workweek by 95 percent, and to make more money than you require. If you have a job, the goal is to quickly ascend the management ranks until you can call your own shots. But no matter your situation, if you are going to work, then work!

Turn the radio off, get your feet off the desk, stop the pointless babbling with a coworker, and put your head down. Get in, do the work, and get out! Devise polite techniques to keep pointless conversations short. And, what about staff meetings? Are they a waste of time? Yes, if you don’t have an agenda.

Here are two cognitive strategies for when the internal battle of procrastination rages:

First, rise above it and visualize laziness as an object, something tangible that is outside of you. Once the mechanical laziness is observed – most often it is temporary indolence cloaked by some lame excuse such as “I’m too busy right now,” or “I’m too tired” – just ignore the seduction and get moving without a second thought.

Second, when you “lean toward loiter”, it’s a bit of twisted psychology that rattles the cage and causes a passionate reaction. Of all the human failures, perhaps cowardice is the most abhorred.

Procrastination – the lack of quiet courage – will ruin your life if you let it.

6. WORK FOR 98 PERCENT PERFECTION.

Time and money wasted is time and money gone forever. And a waste of time and money means some other positive thing that could have happened, didn’t. Apply a “good enough” rule to your work.

For instance, a 100 percent flawless document that took forever to create carries an imbedded imperfection: The extra time spent creating the masterpiece – the extra 2 percent – is lost forever, therefore the finished product carries an imbedded taint, and catch 22 – you can never call it “perfect.” Your work and your written procedures should be “good enough.”

So, make your procedures detailed but don’t make them too detailed. They should be good enough so the desired results are consistently produced, and so someone “off the street” can execute them, but no more.

See it this way: In putting your procedures together quickly, you are reaching a kind of perfection – the perfection of a useful product created without waste.

■ A Vision to Cultivate

Most of us have at least one process at which we excel. For you, what is it and why are you good at it? It’s probable that when you are in the midst of performing this process, you experience a delicious taste of precision and confidence. What you do well is your passion and you take every opportunity to do it. It’s a positive addiction.

Leaving aside the chicken-or-the-egg question, and while continuing to hone your particular passion, now extend that fire to the mechanical workings of the other facets of your existence.

Get visceral about it. Wallow in it. Enjoy the flow of it.

Be outside the events of your day and treat those events as elements of an overall game, a game that your proper management will make perfect.

That game, of course, is your life.

Few people understand the magnificence of the systems around them – but now you do. From this point forward you will reject escapism as you appreciate the here and now for the miracle it is. You will find control and freedom because you understand the mechanisms that determine the events of your life.

You will never go back.

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