

Chapter 1

The Always-Connected World

QuietSpacing™ can produce impressive results. In early 2007, a good client asked me to work with one of their young up-and-coming professionals whose personal life had recently become tumultuous resulting in lowered job performance. Working with her was very fruitful as she truly wanted to regain control of her professional and personal lives. Implementing the QuietSpacing™ method resulted in an increase of nearly 100 additional productive hours over nine months! Plus, she \felt back in charge of her career and happy to be in command of her work instead of enslaved by it.

The Always-Connected World

Is frantically frenetic redundant? Maybe—but it nonetheless succinctly describes the modern workday. Peter Drucker’s “knowledge workers” have become victims of near-constant interruption and distraction. Whether it’s the ping of new e-mails hitting your Inbox, the squawk of your phone notifying you of a new call, or your BlackBerry vibrating across the desk, your day reverberates with sound. Added to the external mayhem is the persistent inner voice reminding you of what must get done: “Gotta do this” ... “Gotta do that” ... “Oh yeah, gotta do that thing, too.” Never mind the cacophony that clients, colleagues, and co-workers add to the mix. All this *stuff* produces a deafening amount of *noise*.

The result of this clamor is reduced productivity, marginalized responsiveness, and lowered effectiveness, accompanied by increased stress and dissatisfaction. The more mired in the noise you become, the less you get done and the more the pressure mounts.

The Culprit

Technology is the culprit, of course. Desktops, laptops, cell phones, and PDAs deliver a constant flow of e-mails, documents, spam, requests, and to-dos of every stripe over high-speed and wireless networks 24 hours a day. It is all part of the symphony of modern life.

The problem, though, lies not with the technology itself but with how we integrate it into our lives. Technology does nothing we don’t ask of it. It is merely a tool we can use productively or wastefully, as are the processes surrounding it. Because technology changes so rapidly, we mere mortals tend to lag behind in harnessing its value. As a result, we become enslaved by it, never quite finding the time to master the functions or properly integrating the available tools into a productive workflow management system.

A Solution to the Quandary

Enter QuietSpacing™—a revolutionary way to facilitate your daily productivity. This increased productivity is accomplished in four steps:

- **The Architecture.** Chapter 2 describes a new, simplified workflow management model that reduces the noise in your day. It provides solutions that leverage your physical and electronic tools so you can get a better handle on your stuff.
- **The Setup.** With a new understanding of how simple workflow really is and the best way to manage it, Chapter 3 provides you with step-by-step instructions on how to set up the QuietSpacing™ methods.
- **The Implementation.** New systems require people to rebuild the way they interact with the world by changing their behaviors to achieve the benefits of the new model. Change is hard, especially when it involves work habits. Chapter 4 offers a roadmap that explains how to best make QuietSpacing™ work for you.
- **Interacting with your stuff.** The final chapter of this book provides a set of tips and tricks that my clients have found to work well for them in their daily interactions while using QuietSpacing™. These hands-on pointers are organized around (1) your interactions with your electronic stuff, (2) your interactions with your physical stuff, (3) your interactions with others, and (4) your interactions with your mobile technologies. Each can increase your effectiveness and provide you with a better sense of control.

Return On Investment

Here's some quick math to demonstrate what a little extra quiet can mean for you.

If you capture just six additional minutes of productivity each workday, the aggregate effect is impressive:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 6 \text{ minutes/day} \\
 \times 5 \text{ days/week} \\
 \times 48 \text{ work weeks/year} \\
 \hline
 24 \text{ additional hours/year}
 \end{array}$$

That's *three days of* increased productivity. Imagine what you would get done if you could work for three days without an interruption! Think of how much stress you could eliminate from your life and how much command you would have over your workload. Silence is indeed golden.

QuietSpacing™ Tenets

The foundation of QuietSpacing™ is constructed on three simple pillars. These tenets have been carefully articulated to offer an elegant framework through which you can improve your performance and increase your control and sense of satisfaction in your chosen field.

However, one caution is advisable here. Understand that performance and balance are results achieved; they are not given. To effect the goals of this program, you need a compelling reason to change your behavior. That's what the math above should do. Another critical success factor is making it easy to adopt and maintain the new behaviors. Accordingly, take a moment to carefully consider the tenets listed below. Then, when working through the QuietSpacing™ program and the related exercises in this book, look for how one or more tenets are being integrated into your world.

Practice Tip:
Remember that each captured 6-minute increment drives 24 hours of additional production... per year!

- **Productivity is about focus.** What do you do when you *really* need to get something done? Most people close their door, turn off their phone, or go to a completely different work area. That's because they need to focus on the work at hand. Today's working environments are littered with interruptions and distractions. Thus, people are forced to take extreme measures (and, many times, behave in unprofessional manners) to accomplish the immediate priority.

The underlying architecture of QuietSpacing™ is designed to allow you to focus better on what needs doing right now. The workflow method and setup instructions described in Chapters 2 and 3 are based on the use of reminders versus to-do lists. Chapter 4 gives you two distinct ways to get QuietSpacing™ implemented. Finally, the chapter on inter action tips and tricks, Chapter 5, helps you optimize your working environment by further reducing the disruptions and distractions that cripple your day.

- **Life flows like a river.** Demands on your time and the need to be productive are lifelong endeavors. We all move inexorably through time like a river that is forced by gravity to flow downhill. Historically, we have constructed artificial barriers to define the outside boundaries of our responsibilities at any moment in that time continuum. Most people call these barriers to-do lists, and they come in many forms—actual lists on paper, thousands of e-mails in your inbox, piles of files stacked about (the author's personal behavior of old), or even boxes filled with stuff languishing in the corner.

To-do lists are a lot like dams in rivers. They stem the raging current, allowing it to collect into a more manageable state. If releasing water through a dam is a voluntary act that produces a desired result, then choosing which task to accomplish next is its equal in the world of productivity.

Those to-do lists have served us well over the millennia. Unfortunately, modern communication technologies are streaming information to us at ever-increasing rates. In fact, the flow of delivery is so fast and the volume of content so large that the humble to-do list is simply overwhelmed; water is flowing over the top of the dam. In the time it takes you to update your list, five more e-mails have hit your inbox! That carefully crafted list is incomplete almost instantaneously.

Removing the dam from the river and working with the water's flow as you experience it provides you a much better opportunity to manage your working environment. A river guide uses small pulls on the oars to adjust the attitude and direction of the raft well before reaching the impending whitewater. So, too, can you manage modern workflow using QuietSpacing™. But first you must strive (and, in many cases, mightily) to let go of the old to-do list mindset and its attendant behaviors, which produce now-obsolete barriers and result in a constant sense of overwhelm. You must adopt a less rigid notion of working with the current of time and work as it happens via a triage-like process.

Do not underestimate the strength of your convictions to the antiquated to-do list methodology. You are paid to be “in charge” of your work. This notion has a physicality to it: the ability to wrap your arms around what needs to be done.

Today, much of what you deal with has no such physicality—e-mails, PDFs, etc.—so the idea of wrapping your arms around it is not tenable. Instead of getting “in charge” of your work, you must view yourself as “working with” its flow, constantly adjusting your expectations and actions to ensure maximum productivity.

Letting the “control” construct go as it relates to your work will be scary, but it is a necessary step in successfully improving your productivity and career satisfaction.

- **Adopt, Adapt, and Reject.** Every aspect of Quiet-Spacing™ was constructed through my work with clients. Consequently, each piece can stand alone or be integrated into the whole in personalized ways. When considering the suggestions in this program, work with them in this order:
 - **Adopt:** Can you adopt a suggestion into your workflow? Try it for a day or two and see.
 - **Adapt:** If a particular suggestion isn't fitting into your regimen but you like the concept behind it, adopt the concept and adapt a method that achieves the intended benefit.
 - **Reject:** If you can't adopt or adapt a suggestion, reject it and move on to the next one. You will only need one or two from the dozens included in this book to capture 6 additional minutes of productivity a day.

QuietSpacing™ is designed to be manageable by reducing productivity to its basic elements.

A Test-Drive Exercise

Still skeptical? Try this simulation exercise: Turn off your computer and cell phone/PDA, put your office phone on Do Not Disturb, close your door, and move all the files and other piles off your desk (preferably out of sight). Now, take one file, place it on your desk and work on it for 30 minutes or until you have completed the next step in that project. Go ahead. I'll wait...

Pretty amazing what you just accomplished in that brief time, eh? Now, let's get into the details of the QuietSpacing™ program so you can accomplish even more!