

[Free download] Slack: Getting Past Burnout, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency

# Slack: Getting Past Burnout, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency

Tom DeMarco

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**Tom DeMarco : Slack: Getting Past Burnout, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slack: Getting Past Burnout, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Tom Demarco gets it rightBy Chris CraffordWhile some folks have felt that Tom did not go into enough depth on the many topics he covers, he does enough on each topic to give you

some good starting points for managing your work and projects, and most importantly the folks that will be doing the work. I have long believed the drive to long hours with people working under the gun and advocating multi-tasking in business is fundamentally flawed. Tom shows good basics and data to clearly illustrate why these practices can get you into trouble if not managed. Kanban usage in software was not in vogue when Tom wrote this book, but it is a good methodology to help put many of these ideas into practice. If you manage software teams this is a MUST read in my opinion.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good concepts, little evidence. By Lance C. Hibbeler. In "Slack," Tom DeMarco (of "Peopleware" fame) takes on a lot of old management practices that apparently are still in use today, with the precept that so-called "knowledge workers" need to be managed differently than traditional factory workers. DeMarco plays fast and loose with logic, relying on anecdotal summary evidence from his consulting experience (take my word for it) rather than giving the actual evidence or citing previous studies to back up his claims. If you can get past that, and have an interest in better managing "knowledge workers," then this book might be for you. It's not that the theories espoused by DeMarco aren't solid; they just lack bona fide proof (and so are better labeled as hypotheses). There are fundamental differences between a building full of factory workers and a building full of code monkeys, engineers, accountants, etc....duh. DeMarco asserts that current management practices don't really account for this, namely that at crunch time you can push the laborers harder but "thinking" jobs occur at a fixed rate. A little free time, or slack, for all employees is in fact a good thing, because it allows for beneficial change to happen, or certain tasks to occur right away. Standing over a cubicle with a stopwatch won't help the worker or the organization. Laying off a full time secretary and splitting another half-time between two departments because she was timed to be busy only 50% of the day is a bad idea, because then the secretary is then always busy and you then have six-figure salary workers wasting their time making photocopies. The whole idea of slack is also useful when looking at risk analysis and planning, and many other aspects of corporate life. While I certainly don't agree with everything DeMarco presents, a lot of the ideas do seem very well founded in reality and are just plain all-around good concepts. I think it's worth a read and discussion with your colleagues if you manage people in polo shirts or neckties, but I don't think this is the end-all of management books.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Well thought out, well written book. By Christopher R. Travers. In this work, DeMarco covers two important and interrelated topics: overcommitment and risk management. His basic thesis is that a fully efficient firm cannot change direction, and has very little flexibility. I do wonder, however, why he chose a magic square (without any explanation) as his example in the intro to part 1..... Was it a hidden point about uniformity? For knowledge work, I generally agree with his main points, and I have gained some inspiration in some other areas as well (for example, some specific cases where matrix management might actually be optimal). However, some other reviewers have misunderstood DeMarco's main point. Efficiency and flexibility are opposite ends of the spectrum. If you want real agility, you have to give up some efficiency, and the opposite is true too. This isn't a matter of work less and get more done (aside from issues of long-term overtime, where it is a valid point) but rather work a little less and regain some capacity to change direction. The second point though is that without slack, one cannot adequately manage risks. This slack not only gives you the ability to change direction to avoid risks, but it provides you with extra resources to overcome temporary and unexpected challenges. In general, I think these are important points and I think that most companies would do well to at least consider these two points.

To most companies, efficiency means profits and growth. But what if your "efficient" company—the one with the reduced headcount and the "stretch" goals—is actually slowing down and losing money? What if your employees are burning out doing the work of two or more people, leaving them no time for planning, prioritizing, or even lunch? What if you're losing employees faster than you can hire them? What if your "super-efficient" company is suddenly falling behind? Tom DeMarco, a leading management consultant to both Fortune 500 and up-and-coming companies, has discovered a counterintuitive principle that explains why efficiency improvement can sometimes make a company slow. If your real organizational goal is to become fast (responsive and agile), then he proposes that what you need is not more efficiency, but more slack. What is "slack"? Slack is the degree of freedom in a company that allows it to change. It could be something as simple as adding an assistant to a department, letting high-priced talent spend less time at the photo copier and more time making key decisions. Slack could also appear in the way a company treats employees: instead of loading them up with overwork, a company designed with slack allows its people room to breathe, increase effectiveness, and reinvent themselves.

In three short chapters filled with creative learning tools and charts, you and your company can learn how to: make sense of the Efficiency/Flexibility quandary; run directly toward risk instead of away from it; strengthen the creative role of middle management; make change and growth work together for even greater profits. A innovative approach that works for new- and old-economy companies alike, this revolutionary handbook will debunk commonly held assumptions about real-world management, and give you and your company a brand-new model for achieving and maintaining true effectiveness—and a healthier bottom line. From the Hardcover edition.