

SUPER COMPETENT



The Six Keys
to Perform at
Your Productive Best

Laura Stack
The Productivity Pro®

Praise for *SuperCompetent*

“The Productivity Pro, Laura Stack, should be known as the Productivity Doctor. This book is like a medical clinic for those seeking to become more productive. I know it has helped me, but more importantly, the remedies offered by Laura have benefited the people I coach in my professional life. These people keep asking, ‘Jeff, how do you know how to solve my productivity problems?’ My secret weapon . . . this book.”

—Jeff Bettinger, Director Talent Development,
Fluor Corporation

“This content-rich book is a must read for even those who thought they were productive. Laura Stack delivers specific strategies that will definitely boost your performance and productivity. Her relevant ideas will take you beyond good to SuperCompetent. This book will change how you think about yourself, your time, your use of technology, and your time with others.”

—Lisa Ford, Author of a number one selling training series,
How to Give Exceptional Customer Service

“Ask executives which employees are most valuable to the organization, and they will almost invariably respond, ‘The people whom I can point to a problem or opportunity and know that they will get the job done every single time.’ These are the SuperCompetent people—who are in control of their work—not the other way around. Laura Stack teaches us how to stress less, get much more done, and have more fun while doing it. Reading this book will make a positive impact in your work and your life. Fabulous!”

—Joe Calloway, Author,
Becoming a Category of One

“Laura is a master at her craft and offers innovative ideas on how to squeeze the most out of our daily lives. Productivity is more than just staying busy; it’s about achieving success and significance in everything you do. She unlocks the secrets to how we can all do more, be more, and have more each and every day.”

—Dr. Nido Qubein, President, High Point University;
Chairman, Great Harvest Bread Co.

“Laura Stack knows how to get things done and in short order! Her latest book offers a great work-life-mind balance, which is the key to going from good to great on a personal basis. Read this book and soar.”

—Tim Sanders, Author,
*Love Is the Killer App: How to Win Business
and Influence Friends*

“HEY YOU! That’s right, you, the person wondering if a book about being SuperCompetent is worth the investment or has any relevance to your life, career, or company. Haven’t you heard? Simply being competent is for wannabes. The *heroes* actively manage their performance and productivity to achieve the results they want and need. Isn’t that you . . . or at least the you that you want to be? *SuperCompetent* is that rare book that combines ideas you can implement immediately with thoughtful truths to keep you focused on what is really important. So what are you waiting for? Buy this book. Study and apply its lessons. And, give yourself an edge in your career and your life.”

—Randy G. Pennington, Author,
*Results Rule! Build a Culture That
Blows the Competition Away*

“Every CEO should make this required reading for every employee. After 20 years of turning around the results of companies, I only wish I had this on my recommended reading list for clients earlier. Uncommon sense that will turn any organization into a Thank-God-It’s-Monday Results Rule workplace!”

—Roxanne Emmerich, CEO,
The Emmerich Group, Inc.;
Author, *Thank God It’s Monday!*

“Become more aerodynamic. That’s what Laura Stack helps her reader to do with her tremendously practical book *SuperCompetent*. Consider the racing industry. In all of its various forms—cars, bikes, humans, horses—the principle of aerodynamics rules. Some of the smallest design changes can elevate performance monumentally. In my work with high-performing, high-potential leaders, I have found time and again that increasing effectiveness is almost singularly hinged upon decreasing interference. Simple? Perhaps. Easy? Not so much. Effective? Without a doubt. Using Laura’s Six Keys, a leader can identify, diagnose, and understand specific sources of interference. Using the numerous practical tips Laura provides with each of those Six Keys, a leader can then work ruthlessly to reduce each source to perform at his or her productive best.”

—Catherine Stewart, SPHR,
High-Potential Program Developer and Manager

**SUPER
COMPETENT**

Also by Laura Stack

Leave the Office Earlier: How to Do More in Less Time and Feel Great About It (2004)

Find More Time: How to Get Things Done at Home, Organize Your Life, and Feel Great About It (2006)

The Exhaustion Cure: Up Your Energy from Low to Go in 21 Days (2008)

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The Six Keys
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Your Productive Best

Laura Stack



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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Stack, Laura.

SuperCompetent : the six keys to perform at your productive best / Laura Stack.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-470-59915-0 (cloth)

ISBN 978-0-470-87579-7 (ebk)

ISBN 978-0-470-87581-0 (ebk)

ISBN 978-0-470-87582-7 (ebk)

1. Employees—Attitudes. 2. Self-management (Psychology) 3. Labor productivity—Psychological aspects. 4. Performance. 5. Success—Psychological aspects. I. Title.

HF5548.8.S687 2010

650.1—dc22

2010027045

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my SuperCompetent son,
Johnny Stack,
who always gives his best and goes over and above.
Your creativity and intelligence inspire me.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One can't be SuperCompetent without the help of a lot of people. My thanks go to my husband, John Stack, for his love and unfailing support. I couldn't ask for a better life and business partner. To my children Meagan, Johnny, and James: you are the inspiration for all I do. I'm grateful for your understanding as I spend countless hours in front of the computer and for your prodding to get me away from the computer.

My life is made easier by my amazing mother-in-law, Eileen Stack, who blesses me with the gift of time, helping me and our family in countless ways. My personal assistant and office manager, Becca Fletcher, is the PROductivity PROtégé and my right-hand woman. They both go over and above the call of duty to keep life running smoothly, and I wouldn't be able to do what I do without you both.

The National Speakers Association (NSA), of which I will be national president in 2011–2012, has provided me with a wealth of resources and a fellowship of speaking colleagues, many of whom have become close friends (and wrote endorsements for this book). Through you I have found an extended family.

My thanks go to Matt Holt, publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., for believing in me and bringing me on board. My appreciation goes to my editor, Dan Ambrosio, whose insights always improve my work. Thanks for partnering with me to create a great manuscript.

My literary agent and friend, Robert Shepard, stands firmly by my side on our fourth book together. Thank you for your continued tutelage. I rest easy under the umbrella of your wisdom, which allows me to focus on writing and know all else is covered.

I am grateful to my angel mentor Dianna Booher, CSP, CPAE, for her love, patience, and guidance. Blessed is the person who is suddenly faced with a question or dilemma and can pick up the phone and get an answer. Your presence gives my life peace.

In addition, my gratitude goes to the many thousands of seminar participants I've met over the years, for sharing your success stories with me and validating these concepts. I am humbled by the gift of your time and attention and privileged to be able to help you in some small way. My thanks also goes to my corporate clients, who recognize the significance of this material in helping high potentials reach their goals and your companies succeed. Thank you for your confidence and partnership.

To my best friend, Darla Sanborn (and her husband Mark Sanborn, CSP, CPAE—who wrote the foreword to this book), for reminding me to play, breathe, walk, smile, love, laugh, and have fun. I thank God for the gift of you both in my life.

Most importantly, I thank the Lord Jesus Christ, for blessing me with the above people and for showering upon me the many gifts in my life.

FOREWORD

I wonder how many little boys or girls wanted to be Superman or Superwoman.

Maybe you put on a cape and ran through the house pretending you were flying. I don't recall doing that myself, but I did want to be a super hero (the Green Hornet was my idol).

What makes us want to be super *anything*?

Most people want to excel. We want to be better than average, above normal, and certifiably great at something. (One poll shows 90 percent of people think they are in the top 10 percent of performers. If you can't be exceptional, at least believe you're exceptional.)

By the time you're old enough to buy and read nonfiction books, you're probably off the superhero track. You are, however, a reader looking for ideas—ideas that will make you better as a person and possibly *super at something*.

I don't know your specific aspirations, but I commend you if you're honest enough to admit you are pursuing a superlative way of living and doing business. You are among those who want to be more than competent. Perhaps you've not thought of it this way, but you are aiming to be *super* competent, or as Laura coined the single word: *SuperCompetent*.

Abraham Lincoln famously said, "Whatever you are, be a good one." I'd like to think he was suggesting you and I ought to be SuperCompetent.

The question is: How to do it?

The answer is in this book by Laura Stack, the Productivity Pro[®].

I've known Laura for years, both professionally and personally. I respect her work. She is an expert in how to get more done in less time. I also respect her personally, because she only preaches what she practices. My wife Darla and I call her the Energizer Bunny. I don't know of anybody who is able to squeeze more accomplishment into less time than Laura.

In other words, Laura is an expert and credible guide for you in how to become SuperCompetent.

However, no matter how many good ideas Laura shares, they won't do you any good unless you consistently and correctly apply them. You'll need compelling reasons to keep you on your course.

So consider: Why might you want to be SuperCompetent? The easy answer is that now is a great time to be SuperCompetent. Unemployment has reached new highs at the time of this writing. People are out of work and opportunities seem scarce. Being SuperCompetent is a good hedge against finding yourself unemployed or at an advantage over other candidates should you be looking for a new job.

There are no guarantees in life and no magic formulas, but when it comes to employability and success, being SuperCompetent stacks the odds in your favor. Even SuperCompetent people can lose their jobs for reasons beyond their control, but in most organizations, the SuperCompetent have a far higher survival rate and longevity.

Of course job assurance and success aren't the only or necessarily the main reasons to aspire to be SuperCompetent. Being exceedingly competent—being *good* at what you do—is something you should aspire to for its own sake. The game of life is short—we are told—so play hard. Doesn't it make sense that we also work hard? Shouldn't we make the most of our professional and personal opportunities and thus be maximum contributors to the overall good in the world?

Once you have the motivation to be super at what you do, you then need the methods.

Competency is learned. No baby is born competent. The baby learns the skills it needs to be competent at living. Likewise, the skills of competency are learned. In this book, Laura Stack shows you exactly what those skills are. She provides you a detailed map and list of suggestions and tactics for becoming a superlative

performer and maximum producer, no matter how you make a living. You will have to invest the time to read and learn what she suggests, but you'll find the application of her suggestions straightforward and simple.

You'll be pleasantly surprised to learn just how easy it is to go from being simply competent to *SuperCompetent*.

It's too late to become a superhero. But it is never too late to become SuperCompetent.

—Mark Sanborn

President, Sanborn & Associates, Inc.
An idea studio for leadership development

INTRODUCTION

My husband John and I have three children: Meagan, 15; Johnny, 10; and James, 8. Lately, we've been trying to teach James the importance of competition and hard work. We've tried to stress to him—with the prices of college tuition, food, gas (just about everything) skyrocketing—that schools and employers will only select and keep the best and hardest workers. So you have to do your part and work hard at school to learn. Easy enough, right?

Well, apparently he'd overheard John and me talking about this book and had gotten a little confused. As I was packing to leave for the airport one evening he said, "Mommy, I'm sorry I haven't been doing my chores and working as hard as I should. I can do better!" I said, "My goodness honey, what a grown up thing to say! That sounds wonderful to me," as I kissed the top of his head. He started to walk out of the room when he turned and quickly added, "Mommy, if I work harder, will you and Daddy not get mad at me?"

I said, "What in heaven's name are you talking about, honey?!"

"Well," he said, "Daddy said you were going to talk to some people about being good so you don't get fired. And I don't want to be the one who has to go!" After I explained I was talking about businesses and not families and reassured him with hugs and kisses, John and I had a good chuckle over it.

I am unusually excited about this book, because what I have to share with you today may indeed save your job *and* help you achieve your greatest potential.

I've been counseling CEOs, managers, professionals, and entrepreneurs since 1992, and I have to tell you it has been a long time since I've seen C-suite executives straining under the kinds of stresses we're seeing right now. I know I don't have to tell you about it; you know firsthand. The pressure is peaking at all-time highs. It seems everything that should be going up is going down, and everything that should be going down is going up. Hiring freezes, budget cuts, productivity quotas, globalization's heavy footsteps hot on your heels . . . it all points in a single direction:

Success will come to those who can accomplish more in less time and consistently perform at their productive best. The people who achieve their fullest potential are not *simply* competent; they're *SuperCompetent*.

After all, competence is simply expected and the minimum standard to stay in the game nowadays. You want to be one of the High Potentials identified by your organization as someone positioned to move up. Are you ready?

Consider this: If you gave notice you were leaving the organization, would leadership fight to keep you? If this doesn't describe you, does it apply to someone with whom you work? Why do some people succeed at every challenge they undertake? Are they superhuman? No, they're not perfect; however, they are skilled and capable enough to master almost any task. Are they natural leaders? No again. Competence isn't the same as leadership; in fact, in my opinion, it's something much greater. We've all seen people in positions of leadership who fell short the moment they were faced with unfamiliar conditions. So, are the SuperCompetent exceptionally brilliant? Again, no! You can be a raving genius and yet not be nearly as capable as the person seated in the next cubicle.

A dictionary defines *competence* as "having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, or experience for some purpose; properly qualified; adequate but not exceptional."

Blah. Doesn't that sound a bit . . . boring? Although it's good and necessary to be competent, it's no longer enough to be *only* competent. After all, you probably wouldn't be impressed by someone who is simply "a competent professional." Simply competent people don't stand out in the current environment, where the difference between merely having ability and being exceptional may be the difference between keeping your job and losing it. SuperCompetent people take it to another level: They possess a consistent, all-encompassing ability to be good at everything they do, no matter how general or specific. Scientists actually apply this same principle to the study of what they call competent and SuperCompetent cells. Competence is the ability of a cell to take up DNA; SuperCompetent cells do it far more efficiently.

I've written *SuperCompetent* for two primary groups of people:

1. Those who are *already* SuperCompetent. These people are generally seen as High Potentials in their organization and have been identified in Leadership Development Programs or formal succession planning as someone to watch. This book will help them achieve peak performance and work at their productive best. Because they are typically Type-A personalities who tend to work incredibly hard, they often put in long hours. Organizations need to retain these individuals and help them accomplish more in less time so they can better balance work and life.
2. Those professionals who want to *become* SuperCompetent and fill in the blanks on their skills. These people are perhaps competent in their current situation, but know they could be SuperCompetent if they received the right coaching. This book will help them learn to *think* like a SuperCompetent, so they can grow and eventually be seen as a High Potential in their organization. Fortunately, being SuperCompetent in life isn't a matter of DNA. Anyone can master the six keys to becoming SuperCompetent.

Your job reading this book is to learn all you can to reach your full potential; my job writing this book is to inspire you to grow and give you the skills to succeed.

Each chapter concludes with a summary and worksheets to use in book clubs or Leadership Development Programs. You'll also receive a web site address to obtain a bonus MP3, the SuperCompetent key assessment questions, a summary, and the action-planning worksheet in Microsoft Word format. To start a book club, visit www.theproductivitypro.com/SCBookClub to purchase discussion guides.

Consider a woman I met recently at an event where I was the keynote speaker. She sat at my luncheon table and regaled me with stories of her eight-month-old baby. She admitted that at 40 years old, she was probably a less-energetic mother than she would have been at 20, and yet she said she wouldn't change a thing. She explained she'd waited to have a baby because she had a successful career in the financial services industry and later in pharmaceutical sales. She had spent years criss-crossing the country to visit her clients. Her baby's arrival prompted her to take a job in the travel industry where she could handle corporate travel accounts from home. I instantly knew she would succeed at that, too; I had a pretty good idea she'd already turned out to be a SuperMom. In fact, I told this woman—named Caroline—that I believed she could succeed at anything she set her mind to. Although she was flattered, that wasn't my intention in telling her.

As a corporate consultant for the last 18 years, I can identify the performer I would hire in any position. I can tell when a person would do a fine job, even without much experience. How? All these professionals have mastered the six universal traits Caroline clearly possessed: the keys to becoming SuperCompetent. If you want to achieve success in any area of life and across any area of work, you'll need to master them too. Luckily for your memory skills, they all begin with the letter *A*—for *A+* performance, of course! (Okay, it's a little hokey, but hey, it's *memorable*.)

SuperCompetent people are better in the following areas than everyone else:

KEY 1: ACTIVITY SuperCompetent people are driven by intense focus on priorities and have a clear sense of direction.

Value determines priority; priority determines goals; and goals determine activities.

KEY 2: AVAILABILITY SuperCompetent people control their schedules, so they can make time for important activities. They know they can't be available to everyone every day, so they learn how to control their time and protect it.

KEY 3: ATTENTION SuperCompetent people are masters of focus and concentration. They develop the ability to pay attention to the task at hand and tune out distractions that aren't related to their work.

KEY 4: ACCESSIBILITY SuperCompetent people are well organized. They have systems in place to find what they want when they want it and can quickly locate the information needed to support their activities.

KEY 5: ACCOUNTABILITY SuperCompetent people possess self-discipline and self-control. They eliminate time wasters, strive for constant improvement, and don't blame other people when things go wrong.

KEY 6: ATTITUDE SuperCompetent people get the requisite skills and training when they lack ability. They have the motivation, drive, and can-do positivity to make things happen. They're proactive, decisive, and fast.

These principles are fundamental to the study of productivity and are evergreen, regardless of the technologies and changes in the workplace. In a nutshell:

You'll always have to:

1. Determine what you should be working on.
2. Make time for it.
3. Focus on those tasks.
4. Organize the information needed to complete it.
5. Be responsible for your results.
6. Never give up.

These traits are interconnected, so I'll dissect each and describe how to attain each in the following sections of this book. The good news, as I stated before, is that SuperCompetence isn't a genetic

quality; rather, it's something you can learn. Transforming yourself into a SuperCompetent isn't about mantras, but mind-sets. Looking at your actions is an important part of understanding your capabilities, but it's just one part of understanding how to unlock your potential. The most important part is transforming the way you *think*.

Your mind has a tremendous capacity to change your life; the way you think determines your next actions. Because you can choose your mind-set, you can also choose to change it, which is what SuperCompetents do to make themselves the best they can be. In this book, I'll show you how to do what they've done, working on each of the Six Keys to transform the way you think.

This book contrasts the zero thinking of the simply competent with the hero thinking of the SuperCompetent professional. It describes how each thinks when faced with similar situations. When learning how to be SuperCompetent, you'll consider how you need to think to achieve the best results. Often, you'll have to dispense with your old mind-set and adopt a new one—maybe even faking it a bit until this new way of thinking becomes second nature. By repeatedly, purposefully acting in a different manner, over time, you'll change your mind-set right down to its core. Old thinking will evaporate, altered thinking will materialize, and new, SuperCompetent behavior will follow.

So, what *is* the mind-set of the SuperCompetent person, and what if you don't have it yet? Placing yourself in a new frame of mind requires stepping back, soul-searching, rethinking priorities, possibly defeating old personal roadblocks, and developing entirely new thought processes you can apply in all sorts of situations. This is what will add up to the fully fleshed out, newly SuperCompetent mind-set. You can use this book to help yourself, your company, and even those around you—not just momentarily—but all the time.

Implicit in this is the idea that even people who don't intuitively possess the Six Keys can learn them. My goal is for this book to help any decently capable but perfectly ordinary person achieve SuperCompetence without becoming a superhero. In fact, we're all endowed with an amazing capacity for mastery. It's a shame some of us realize this potential while many more of us fall short. The traits that so often cause people to squander their competence actually aren't traits at all—just bad learning or thought processes that can be unlearned once they know how.

Bottom line: We can *all* learn to be SuperCompetent!

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT

How close are you to being SuperCompetent already? Take the following quiz, and you'll figure out exactly what you need to work on. You don't have to read this book from beginning to end; you can jump right to the section you need most and start your program there.

NOTE TO READERS: Leaders and HR managers may want to use this book to identify traits of potential Super-Competents within the organization or as a coaching aid for High Potentials.

Scoring

- 1 = to no extent
- 2 = to a little extent
- 3 = to some extent
- 4 = to a considerable extent
- 5 = to a great extent

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT

ACTIVITY demonstrates value and reflects importance.

1.	I know exactly why I work hard and what I'm trying to achieve.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I know what to do, when to do it, and why.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I create systems to perform tasks more efficiently so that I can leave the office on time.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I regularly rest and recharge my batteries in order to be productive and creative when I return to work.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I accomplish the day's most profitable and valuable tasks.	1	2	3	4	5

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 1–5:

THE SUPERCOMPETENT ASSESSMENT

AVAILABILITY is driven by Activity.

6.	I refuse requests when appropriate and know how to say no graciously.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I set appropriate boundaries and protect my time from others.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I push tasks down to the lowest level of responsibility, trusting others to do their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I schedule my day realistically according to my key activities.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I weigh the results of attending each meeting against the alternative results I could produce instead.	1	2	3	4	5

SUBTOTAL YOUR ANSWERS 6–10: