

Productive Holiday Activities

by [Steve Brown](#)

Goodies are showing up in offices everywhere for the holidays. We love that about this time of year and particularly enjoy home baked treats. Along these lines, we found a story that had to have involved some very serious home baking, as a Guinness World Record has been broken for the world's largest gingerbread house. The house is 22 feet long and is made of thousands of pounds of butter, flour, sugar and eggs. Its outside is also decorated with more than 23,000 hard candies. It was built by a team of volunteers as a fundraiser for a local hospital, but we can only imagine that the town's rodents will have a field day while it is on display.

Banks are closing out the year and in general looking towards 2014 and trying to figure out what to expect ahead. We think it's a good time to reflect personally on what has worked and not worked in the past year, plus explore some ideas to improve personal productivity in the year to come. This morning we therefore pass on a few thoughts in this area.

Organize your space. This may mean getting clutter off your desk, but for many, it means organizing files better in your computer. Delete or move old files and icons out of your regular work space, then you will be able to find what you need more quickly and easily.

Plan ahead and look to daily, weekly, monthly and longer term. Having goals and milestones both long and short term helps you attain success and recognize your accomplishments.

Do similar tasks together if possible in your job. Many of us proclaim to be wonderful at multitasking, but study after study shows humans are just not capable of such feats and doing so can be 40% less effective. We are likely to be more efficient if we do technical, difficult things when our energy levels are highest and we are likely to be more successful in our day overall.

Focus on your work for a period of time but then get up and take a break. Move around and take a walk down the street or around the building. Often taking a walk will wake you up more than drinking another cup of coffee.

Use tools and automation to work more efficiently. Maybe this involves asking for software or outside aids like better technology, but it could also mean building better templates for tasks done repeatedly to save time. Think about workflow and if there are more efficient ways in your personal work and in your department to accomplish tasks then put them into action.

Learn to delegate intelligently. Most bankers are detail oriented and control freaks to some extent, simply because the nature of our jobs requires accuracy. This often keeps us from teaching others to help us, but there are bound to be tasks that can be more efficiently accomplished by others (probably in areas that your own skills are not as strong). This preserves your time for tasks that really can't be accomplished as well by others.

Distractions are a way of life, but work to minimize them in 2014 to improve. This is especially important for people who work in customer facing roles, as incoming communication must be dealt with promptly. If your position does not require that you react immediately to every email and phone call, do it on a schedule and try not to react anymore to false urgency.

By spending a little time thinking about the structure of your day and week, you may be able to find ways to gain efficiency and thereby have more time to accomplish your work more efficiently and to be happier in your work.

BANK NEWS

Fed

Despite the announcement of the slow unwinding of tapering activities, JPMorgan projects the Fed will continue to purchase about 90% of all MBS in the market.

Tapering

A survey of economists by Bloomberg projects the Fed will taper in \$10B increments over the next 7 meetings, ending in Dec of 2014.

Housing

Bloomberg reports Blackstone has purchased 41k homes across the US in the past 2Ys to become the largest single family landlord in the country.

Delayed

Janet Yellen must wait until Jan 6 to be confirmed as the new Chair of the FOMC, as Congress is on vacation.

Rates Hikes

Analysts say recent comments by Fed speakers and changes to the unemployment structure of the country (more people leaving the workforce) mean the Fed may not raise rates until the unemployment rate reaches 5.50%. The labor force participation rate is currently at a 35Y low.

Renting

A report by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies finds the percentage of people renting climbed from 31% in 2004 to 35% today.

Fines

The Wall Street Journal reports JPMorgan is expected to pay more than \$1B in penalties to settle criminal probes into its dealings with convicted Ponzi schemer Bernard Madoff.

Bill Pay

Fiserv reports the number of households that used mobile bill payment in the past year have doubled and now sit at 16mm. People surveyed said they did so because of convenience, the ability to pay when they wanted to do so and to save time.

Small Biz

A Bank of America survey of small business owners finds that when it comes to getting financial advice, these customers turn to: accountant or bookkeeper (75%), other small business owners (55%), financial advisor (53%), banker (45%), family or friends (45%), lawyer (42%), online sources (37%), nationally recognized small business or financial experts (27%) and local nonprofit or government organizations (25%).

Not Secure

CSO reports 80% of companies surveyed say they are satisfied with their current level of security but only 13% had updated their security approach in the past 2Ys despite increased malware and other risks.

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