



# Three Laws

of Workplace  
Behavior

from Bill Jensen's *Simplicity Survival Handbook*



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## Why these three laws are so damned important



Three reasons...

1

Companies and leaders keep designing plans, structures, processes, hierarchies, and compensation schemes to get you to do morebetterfaster ever day.

Mostly, they completely ignore one of the best ways to get you do morebetterfaster **and** meet more of your needs at the same time.

2 and 3

You are being sucker-punched into doing way more than your share of to-do's.

In two different ways.

# LAW

1

## **Ease-of-use** and **reduced-use-of-time**

are equal to — and sometimes more important than — recognition, compassion, inclusion, rewards, penalties, loyalty, and hierarchy in their ability to drive human behaviors.

### **Three Laws of Workplace Behavior**

Each of these three laws come from the findings of The Jensen Group's ongoing study, *The Search for a Simpler Way*.

They are undeniable patterns of behavior that occur in most workplaces, and drive how most stuff gets done — regardless of how policies, procedures, and dictates say it *should* get done.

### **The Big So What: Why should you care?**

#### **WHY EVERYONE SHOULD CARE**

All your teammates are just as overloaded as you are!

If you treat people's time and attention as precious, more people will do what you ask of them more often.

That means everything — from how you format your emails, to how you leave voicemails, to how you run your meetings, to how you organize documents and information — should all be designed with the guiding principle that your audience's time is precious. Does that sometimes mean a little more work for you? Yes. But think of it this way: The quicker people do what you ask of them, and the faster it's clear to them, and the more often they do it exactly as you had hoped, the easier your workload becomes!

That's the simplicity version of enlightened self interest.

#### **WHY SENIOR EXECS SHOULD CARE**

If you are user-centered — working backwards from the needs of your employees — you can drive as much change, compliance, and commitment as you currently get with traditional, top-down approaches. (If not more!)

That's the simplicity version of enlightened self interest.

# LAW

## 2

## The Number One behavior in business today is moving to-do's onto someone else's plate

In most cases, this isn't mean-spirited or malingering. It's merely an effective way of coping with too many to-do's, too little time, and too few resources

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### The Big So What: Why should you care?

#### WHY EVERYONE SHOULD CARE

The old adage: before most people accept change, they go through stages of denial, grieving, bargaining, questioning, and then understanding. Who's got time for all that? Nobody!

Instead of resisting or bargaining when faced with change as well as too many to-do's, most people just try to pass them on. (Often, to you!) This means it's fairly easy to get you to do someone else's to-do's — unless you learn how to push back.

The big So What is: Learn to push back. (In ways that don't create defensiveness.) Or else become a permanent victim of downhill to-do's. Because everyone around you is mastering the art of parsing and pushing their to-do's onto your plate. It's that brutally simple.

#### WHY SENIOR EXECs SHOULD CARE

(If this is what you want...) There is almost no limit to how much moremoremore you can squeeze out of people, as long as you suppress pushback from below.

Their universal behavior of pushing work onto someone else's plate is like gravity...it's a constant force that will always keep things moving for you — with little or no effort from you.

# LAW

3

## Once begun, work follows the path of least resistance.

Most of us manage our daily workload through triage:

We avoid or postpone all but the most pressing decisions and tasks.

And when everybody is in triage mode, the path of least resistance

is to just keep things moving, passing work on to others

as quickly as possible, even if that work comes up short in focus

or importance. Because the biggest wall of resistance comes from

stopping the flow and telling our bosses what they want us to do

isn't focused, important, or valid.

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### The Big So What: Why should you care?

#### WHY EVERYONE SHOULD CARE

#### WHY SENIOR EXECs SHOULD CARE

(Same basic reason for both groups...)

You absolutely must push back on much of the work you are being handed!

(See Law 2.) But the key is to do so *in a way that does NOT sound like* you want to slow down the project. (Like suggesting rethinking some idea or pointing out something that you *know* should have been addressed earlier.) That will get you nothing but trouble! Instead, the way to embrace this law, and use it to your advantage, is to constantly clarify

immediate, short-term next steps. Push back by saying something like:

“Sure boss, I’ll get all those 4,321 things done. Absolutely! (Ahem.)

But which one or two do we need to be focused on *this week*?

Oh...those? Great! Now here’s what I’d do next on those two...

does that make sense to you?”

Essentially, you’re pushing back on the stupidity of way too much to do, or too much that’s unfocused, but you’re doing so in a way that your boss (or coworker) won’t be challenged or upset, and in a way that provides you much greater focus.

Remember two key things: **1.** You absolutely must push back! Most work that lands on your desk has followed the path of least resistance.

**2.** Do so in a way that seeks to clarify. Never appear to slow things down!

## THE BIO OF

# A Simpleton



Some people see things that are  
and ask, Why?

Some people dream of things that  
never were and ask, Why not?

Some people have to go to work  
and don't have time for all that...

**George Carlin**



### ABOUT THE FOOL BEHIND THE BOOKS

**Bill Jensen** is a passionate simpleton, plain-spoken defender of common sense, and an outspoken gadfly against corporate stupidity and waste.

Bill is today's foremost expert on work complexity and cutting through clutter to what really matters. He has spent over a decade studying business's ability to design work. (Much of what he has found horrifies him.)

He's an internationally acclaimed speaker and author with 25 years of experience in communication and change consulting.

His first book, *Simplicity*, has been hailed as a "breakthrough in the design of communication and understanding," and was the Number 5 Leadership/Management book on Amazon in 2000.

His next best-sellers were *Work 2.0*, and *Simplicity Survival Handbook: 32 Ways to Do Less and Accomplish More*.

His latest book, *What is Your Life's Work?*, captures the intimate exchanges between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and caring teammates, all talking about what matters at work, and in life.

He holds degrees in Communication Design and Organizational Development. He's CEO of The Jensen Group, whose mission is: To make it easier to get stuff done. Among the Jensen Group's clients are Bank of America, Merck, Pfizer, Duracell, NASA, The World Bank, Walt Disney World, American Express, the US Navy SEALs, the government of Ontario, Singapore Institute of Management, Guangzhou China Development District, and the Swedish Post Office.

Bill's personal life fantasy is to bicycle around the globe via breweries.

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