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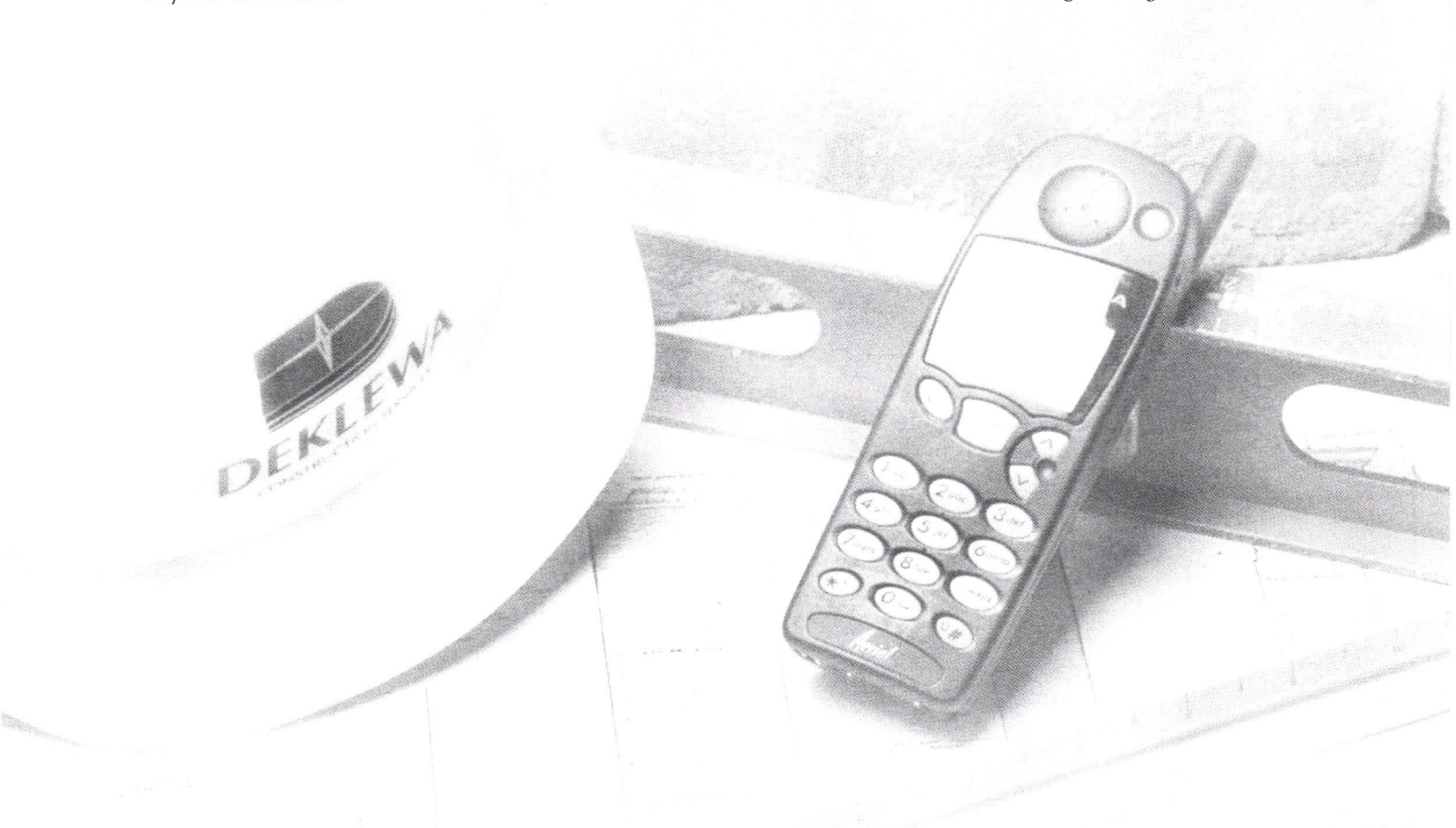
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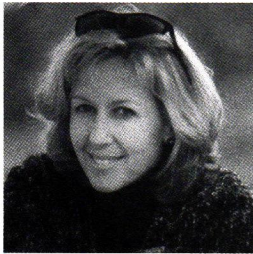
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When Productivity Jumps

By Tracy Certo, Editor



Getting Pittsburghers better connected with nature and our abundant outdoor activities makes for a more thriving city.

The irony stings. As I approach deadline

for this issue on office design and worker productivity, I am having a most unproductive week. Usually this close to deadline, my productivity jumps. I choose that verb carefully. You will soon see why.

My health, essential for productivity, is good. I have no complaints about my office. I'm motivated (a key factor) since deadline is approaching.

So what's the problem? I'm wildly distracted since I agreed to go skydiving for the first time this coming Sunday. So here I am, dealing with waves of anxiety interspersed with periods of acute excitement interrupted by strange lulls of calm. In other words, I'm having a hard time concentrating.

Static line jump at 4500 feet and land myself, or tandem jump at 13,000 and let the instructor do the work?

Productivity is a very difficult thing to measure even on a good week. For writers and architects, it's work produced as well as time spent on a project. When you're self-employed, you don't get paid for down time (down time!). And if you spend too much time on projects your hourly rate plummets. (plummets!) So if you obsess over something, such as whether you really *will* jump out of that plane once you're looking down from 13,000 feet, your productivity dives (DIVES!).

This week I checked my emails far too often, expecting several that were article-related and quite a few that were jump-related. We all know email is an efficient, time-saving tool as well as a real time-waster. I love email. I love writing articles on topics as interesting as office design and being focused and productive. Conversely, I hate being...jumpy.

I wouldn't be in this position if it weren't for the Western Pennsylvania Field Institute, a great organization with the mission to get Pittsburghers outside enjoying activities such as kayaking, canoeing, and hiking. (www.wpfi.org) The idea is, getting Pittsburghers better connected with nature and our abundant outdoor activities makes for a more thriving city. I agree. Which is why I volunteer as a trip leader, which is why founder Mike Schiller sent me a list of autumn activities to choose from, which is why I'm jumping from a plane on Sunday. It was time.

Here's the thing: With a static line jump, you must train for five hours, mostly dealing with what could go wrong. Ugh. On a tandem jump, it's half an hour and you're off—at a much higher altitude with fifty seconds of freefall. Or as a friend of mine said, "Fifty seconds of wondering, will the chute open or not?"

Kevin Kampschorer of the GSA would say my distracting thoughts are creating a spillover effect. He told me the National Institute of Health found that our perception of the physical office environment is interrelated in a complex way to our mood. If you're unhappy because you're too hot or uncomfortable, the acoustics and light don't appear as good.

I thought about this but that only made me think more about skydiving and how uncomfortable I'm going to be in that plane and how much I look forward to next week when I will cease (bad word) thinking about it. To think, I could have led the kayaking trip which I enjoy very much. Paddle paddle, la dee dah.

In the latest email, Sean Brady, program director of WPFI wrote to all of us "loonies" that "... Cotton kills. Wear polypropylene..." Huh? We're jumping out of a plane and *cotton* kills? I did buy a new jacket, of wicking fabric as suggested. Brought it home and tried it on again and honest to God, the zipper didn't work. Here's the thought process: Zipper. Rip cord. Zipper...

Fortunately, my work is keeping me somewhat sane. Luck's been with me in contacting some national experts, all very helpful. Judith Heerwagen referred me to her British publisher, Richard, who emailed me back right away about my request to publish excerpts of her writing. I wrote back to thank him and considered asking, out of the blue so to speak: So, Richard, ever jump out of a plane?

As deadline closes in, my productivity has to jump. And it will. And so will I. As Roger Kingsland said to me, "There's no motivator like fear." And he didn't even know what was on my mind this week.

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P.S. The editor jumped tandem with a freefall that was out of this world thrilling. She now has a strong (distracting, you might say) desire to do it all over again.

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On the cover: Interior view of PNC Firstside, designed by Astorino. Photo by Ed Massery.