

My Least Productive Month
By Delegate Albert C. Pollard, Jr.
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Being in government I often talk about efficiencies, when in reality I should be talking about productivity.

I learned this last summer when I had one of the least productive months of my life. I had involuntarily switched my phone so that it vibrated every time I got a call, email or text message. For 30 days, I got nothing done until I switched the function off.

According to an IT research and consulting firm, the average information worker – pretty much anyone at a desk – loses over two hours of productivity every day to interruptions and distractions. According to some research a typical office employee checks email 50 times a day and uses instant messaging 70 times a day.

All of this reminds me of the question that always nags me: How is it, with time saving devices such as PDA's, cordless screwdrivers, microwave ovens, and inside egg scramblers, we are busier than we've ever been? What do we do with all the "time" we have saved?

Basically, efficiency is how well we complete a task and productivity is how efficiently we meet a goal. In other words, productivity is about the outcome. Two researchers at the University of Minnesota discovered that peripheral tasks created twice the number of worker errors, and their interrupted test workers took 3% to 27% more time to complete a reading, counting or math problem.

So, the solution for some businesses was to increase productivity at the cost of communication efficiency. How? The company instituted four hours of "quiet time" per day, and thus its engineers completed a project without working nights or weekends. Governor Bob McDonnell is having his first meeting on Governmental Reform and Restructuring on Friday, June 4. I think he would be wise to look into some of the practices taking root in private industry.

However, before he takes the logical steps of sacrificing productivity for efficiency, he might want to rename his commission. In fact, I might go up myself to make the suggestion.

My productivity has improved considerably since I resumed using my phone for primarily, well, phone calls.

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