

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

BILL JENSEN AND JOSH KLEIN

# Hacking 7 Work

*Learn to love the  
rule breakers*

## The Problem

**W**hen a twelve-year-old can gather information faster, process it more efficiently, reference more diverse professionals, and get volunteer guidance from better sources than you can at work, how can you pretend to be competitive? When the personal tools in your mobile phone are more empowering than what your company provides or approves for your projects, how can you be saved from devastating market forces? You can't.

The tools we use in life have leapfrogged over the ones we use at work. Business's lingering love of bureaucracy, process, and legacy technology has fallen completely out of sync with what people need to do their best.

**The Breakthrough Idea** So what can you do? Hack work, and embrace the others in your midst who care enough to do so. Hackers work around the prescribed ways of doing things to achieve their goals. The benevolent among them do this rule bending for the good of all. And once frontline performers and middle managers try hacking work—and discover they've increased their output by a factor of 20—they never go back.

Richard Saunders (not his real name) is a benevolent hacker. He works for one of those banks that did its job so well in 2008 that we landed in the worst financial hole we've seen since the Great Depression. As the crisis unfolded, the bank's senior ex-

ecutives cried out, “Reports! Our kingdom for more reports!” The problem was that what they really wanted—useful, insightful analysis—couldn’t easily be produced with the software provided by corporate IT.


Poor Richard. What to do? Work 29 hours a day, 10 days a week, to manually create those reports and the much-needed analysis? No way. He hacked the system. He softened up a vendor, got a password, tapped into the database, and began creating never-before-possible reports for the C-suite.

Would the bank’s auditors and IT security guys freak out if they knew that Richard had hacked their system? Uh, yes. But since then, Richard has become incredibly productive and is now a go-to guy companywide. He’s a hero to all those senior execs who wanted more than data dumps. If only they knew the full story. Says Richard, “As a result of this hack, I keep senior management off our backs, so we’re able to continue doing more for our clients with less.”

He’s not alone in believing that he has to take matters into his own hands to get the job done and achieve better results for the organization. Many in the workforce are coming to the same conclusion. The illusion of corporate control is being shattered in the name of increased personal productivity.

**The Promise** This kind of workaround isn’t new—your company has been hacked from the inside for ages. What is new is that the cheat codes are becoming public, and there’s nothing you can do about that. Bloggers are telling your employees how to bypass procedures. Forums give tutorials on how to hack your software security. Entrepreneurs are building apps to help your employees run their own tools and processes instead of yours.

The only successful strategy for a hacked world: If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em. Change the debate within your company to leverage what your hackers know. We’re seeing managers in enormous corporations like Google, Nokia, and Best Buy embrace what benevolent hackers would pursue with or without them: greater worker control over tools and procedures, increased transparency, and meritocracy. As even senior management begins to feel the pain of outdated tools and structures that refuse to budge, what was once shunned as bad is now the new good. ♡

 **Bill Jensen** is the president and CEO of the Jensen Group, a change-consulting firm in Morristown, New Jersey. **Josh Klein** is a hacker and a consultant on security and workplace effectiveness. This article is adapted from their forthcoming book, *Hacking Work: Saving Business from Itself, One Bad Act at a Time* (Portfolio).

