

Deep Work by Cal Newport

Book Notes

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Introduction

What is Deep work?

Definition

Deep work: Professional activities performed in a state of **distraction-free concentration** that pushes your cognitive capabilities to their limit. The efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.

Influential figures who practiced deep work:

- ▶ *Carl Jung*: Frequent lake side retreats in a private tower to perform his research work.
- ▶ Mark Twain, Woody Allen, Michel de Montaigne, J.K.Rowling, Neal Stephson

Modern knowledge workers are not going deep primarily driven by the development of internet networking tools like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit. Fragmented attention is caused by increasing electronic communication taking up more than 60 percent of the average workweek. However, workers consider themselves as busier than ever.

Introduction

Impact of shallow work

Definition

Shallow work: Non Cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. This type of work is easy to replicate and don't create much value.

- ▶ Shift towards shallow work cannot be easily reversed. Almost permanent reduction in capacity to do deep work. Internet reduces capacity for concentration and contemplation.
- ▶ In the book, *The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr touches up on how internet affects the brain.
- ▶ Similar books: *Hamlet's Blackberry*, *The tyranny of email*, *The distraction addiction*.
- ▶ Networking tools lead to distraction, reducing capacity to remain focused. The shift towards shallowness is a massive economic and personal opportunity for those who recognize this.

Introduction

Example of how deep work can change careers

- ▶ Jason Benn, a financial consultant, automated his work from 6 hours to 1 hour with an Excel script.
- ▶ Became a programmer and learn coding fast. Requires uninterrupted attention for long periods of time.
- ▶ Realized that he was hooked to the internet and could not create a business plan that could have advanced his career.
- ▶ Locked himself in a room with no computers. It was initially hard for him, but he was able to clock more than five hours per day learning programming. Completed 18 books on the topic.
- ▶ Transformed his career. In his new job, he gets 4 hours of focused work before the first meeting and also 3-4 hours in the afternoon.
- ▶ To learn complex things, you need deep work and building great stuff requires depth.

Introduction

Relevance of deep work

- ▶ Deep work is key currency. Old fashioned skill that is increasingly crucial in the information age.
- ▶ Real rewards are not for the ones using Facebook, but the ones building distributed systems in the background that enable Facebook like tools.
- ▶ *Eric Barker*: Superpower of the 21st century.
- ▶ This skill is becoming increasingly rare and people who cultivate this skill will thrive.

The first part of the book tries to convince you of the above hypothesis and the second part of the book teaches you how to take advantage of this new reality.

Introduction

About the author and his motivation

- ▶ Theoretical computer science from MIT. Worked with a "genius grant" winner who is not on Twitter who does not respond to emails from unknown people and published 15 papers in a year.
- ▶ Similar to him, the author doesn't have social media profiles, except for a blog. Real newspaper delivered home through Washington Post.
- ▶ Did not own a smartphone until 2012. Published four books, finished PhD, Tenure track professor.
- ▶ Most of his days are deep work, with bursts of shallow work.
- ▶ 3-4 hours per day of directed concentration can produce a log of work.
- ▶ Non-professional benefits of deep work: Does not touch his computer outside work, surprisingly reads a large amount of books, okay with being bored.
- ▶ Book describes strategies to focus on depth over shallowness and convinces us to create our own retreats and produce work that is valuable. A deep life is a great life.

Chapter 1 - Deep work is valuable

The new economy

- ▶ *Nate Silver* - Data driven Election Forecaster, *David Heinemeier Hannson* - programmer who created Ruby on Rails, *John Doerr* - Partner in VC firm, helped found companies like Twitter, Amazon, Google.
- ▶ Micro-traits: Personality and tactics, Macro -traits: Type of work that they do
- ▶ Technology can render some jobs to be outsourced or automated.
- ▶ Three groups of people will be valuable in the new age economy.
 - ▶ Highly skilled workers: People who know how to work with machines/computers.
 - ▶ Superstars: Winner takes it all. Companies prefer to hire superstars remotely instead of the local talent pool.
 - ▶ Owners: People who have the capital to invest in new technologies. Very small group of people make billions by creating apps like Instagram.
- ▶ Not the only group that will have advantage in this new restructuring of the economy, but these groups will have the greatest advantage.

Chapter 1 - Deep work is valuable

Abilities needed in new economy

- ▶ Two abilities are important to thrive in new economy: The ability to quickly master hard things and the ability to produce at an elite level, in-terms of quality and speed.
- ▶ Tech changes rapidly, and you must master new skills again and again.
- ▶ These core skills depend on your ability to perform deep work. Let your mind become a lens, thanks to the converging rays of attention. Let your soul absorb the deep.
- ▶ Deliberate Practice: Your attention is focused on a specific skill you're trying to master. You receive feedback and correct your approach. Deliberate practice requires uninterrupted concentration.

From Performance Psychology

K. Anderson: The difference between expert performers and normal adults reflect a life long period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain.

Chapter 1 - Deep work is valuable

Talent code

- ▶ Myelin: A layer of fatty tissue that grows around neurons acting like an insulator that allows neurons to fire faster and cleaner. More myelin means better skills.
- ▶ Distraction does not help with Myelination since too many neural circuits are being fired.
- ▶ You need to be comfortable going deep to learn hard skills and learn them without distraction.
- ▶ Next example: Adam Grant: Youngest full professor at Wharton. In 2012, published 7 articles in major journals. In 2014, sixty peer reviewed publications in addition to his best selling book.
- ▶ Grant thinks a lot about the mechanics of producing at an elite level. Grant sees productivity as a scientific problem to be solved.
- ▶ Grant batches hard intellectual work into long un-interrupted stretches.

Chapter 1 - Deep work is valuable

Deep Work helps you produce at an elite level

- ▶ Grant teaches during the fall semester, highest rated teacher at Wharton and winner of multiple teaching awards.
- ▶ Full attention to research in the spring and summer with less distraction.
- ▶ During semesters dedicated to research, he alternates between periods where he is available to students and periods of isolation without distraction and focus on a single research task.
- ▶ Puts an out of office auto-responder on his email up to 3 or 4 days. Grant does not work more than the average professor but still manages to produce at an elite level.
- ▶ The author has also observed that the best student studied less, understood how intensity plays a role in productivity and maximized concentration. This goes beyond just students.

Formula

High Quality Work produced = Time spent x Intensity of Focus.

Chapter 1 - Deep work is valuable

Why is it so hard to do my work?

- ▶ Semi-distraction is potentially devastating to your performance. It can be as much as looking at your mailbox every ten minutes.
- ▶ To perform at the highest level, you need to work for long periods on a single task with full concentration, free of distraction, i.e. deep work.

Definition

Attention residue: When switching from Task A to Task B, a residue of your attention still remains on your previous task.

Chapter 1 - Deep work is valuable

Outliers

- ▶ Executives like Jack Dorsey, CEO of Twitter don't have time for deep work. Dorsey has 30 to 40 sets of meeting notes that he reviews at night. Serendipitous availability to all employees.
- ▶ His work is not shallow but also not deep and he is not so easily replaceable. He is an example of an individual who can thrive in this economy without depth.
- ▶ But this does not undermine depth. CEOs, don't need to do deep work, they need to instinctively take decisions. These behaviors are characteristic to specific roles.
- ▶ Salesmen and lobbyists also value constant connection and are highly valued in our society.
- ▶ Constant email connectivity is not always needed. Some project managers believe ability to respond quickly is efficient but that's not always the case. Efficient meetings give time for better deep work.
- ▶ Think if distraction is really needed for your job and give consideration to depth.

Chapter 2 - Deep work is rare

Current trends and impact on deep work

- ▶ Current work trends affecting people's ability to go deep:
 - ▶ open floor plans
 - ▶ instant messaging
 - ▶ presence of content producers on social media
- ▶ Open floor plans and instant messaging might increase collaboration, but at the cost of distraction. We are starting to embrace distraction in our work places.
- ▶ Media producers like Journalists need to go deep, forcing them on social media can devastatingly destructive.
- ▶ Atlantic Media CTO Tom Cochran was able to quantify the amount of time employees spent on emailing. It costed over a million dollars just for its employees to process emails.
- ▶ Not always easy to quantify how much value is produced by email. This leads to a metric black hole leading to companies taking the path of least resistance, which is to follow the trend.

Chapter 2 - Deep work is rare

Some examples

- ▶ An experiment was conducted at BCG where employees spent one day with no connectivity to no one inside or outside the company. Initially the teams resisted. At the end of the experiment, it led to better communication among themselves and a better product was delivered to the client.
- ▶ Culture of connectivity leads to running the day out of inbox and regularly occurring meetings become a form of self organization.
- ▶ Open ended emails like "Thoughts?" also use up the time of recipients.
- ▶ Busyness is used as a proxy for productivity. Knowledge workers do lots of work in a visible manner as an indicator of productivity.
- ▶ In Yahoo, Marissa Mayer banned employees working from home because employees did not sign in enough. This is antithesis to deep work.

From Feynman

To do real good physics, you need solid lengths of time.

Chapter 2 - Deep work is rare

Cult of internet

- ▶ If something is high tech, we assume that it's good.
- ▶ Dismissing internet publicly is equivalent to flag burning these days.
- ▶ Deep work is at extreme severe disadvantage because it builds on values like quality, craftsmanship and mastery are decidedly old-fashioned and non-technological.

Chapter 3 - Deep work is meaningful

Craftmanship and knowledge economy

- ▶ Ric Furrer is a blacksmith who uses a 1500 year old technique to smelt steel and other medieval techniques to forge swords.
- ▶ Small slip in concentration can ruin dozens of hours of effort. Furrer uses work as a means of a satisfying life.
- ▶ In knowledge work, depth destroying behaviors like immediate email responses and an active social media presence is lauded while avoidance of these trends generate suspicion.
- ▶ Deep work can generate as much satisfaction in a knowledge economy as in a craft economy.
- ▶ A deep life is not only economically lucrative but also a satisfied life.

Chapter 2 - Deep work is meaningful

A neurological argument for depth

- ▶ Science writer Winifred Gallagher, diagnosed with cancer did not let the diagnosis stop her life.
- ▶ She came up with a theory of mind: *Skillful management of attention is the sine qua non of the good life and the key to improving every aspect of your experience. Who you are, what you think, feel and do, what you love is the sum of what you focus on.*
- ▶ Scientific studies have shown that elderly people have trained their mind to reject the negative and focus on the positive. As humans, we can control how we feel.
- ▶ We construct our worldview on what we pay our attention to. Spend enough time in a deep state and your mind will understand your world as rich in meaning.
- ▶ Develop a concentration so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant or to worry about problems. The idle mind is a devil's workshop as they say. When you lose focus, your mind tends to focus on the negative.

Chapter 2 - Deep work is meaningful

A psychological argument for depth

- ▶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, one of the world's best psychologist invented a technique called Experience sampling method (ESM) to study how people feel experiences and came to the conclusion: *The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in an effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.* This is otherwise called as a mental state of flow.
- ▶ Deep work generates a flow state and that generates happiness.
- ▶ Individuals need to seek out opportunities for flow. Experience of flow is a proven path to deep satisfaction.

Chapter 2 - Deep work is meaningful

A philosophical argument for depth

- ▶ Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly published a book called “All things shining”, which explores how the notions of sacredness and meaning have evolved throughout human history. Human history has always revolved around the feeling of sacredness. Humans have searched for a glimpse of the sacred through craftsmanship.
- ▶ *The task of craftsman is not to generate meaning, but rather to cultivate himself in skill of discerning the meanings that are already there.*
- ▶ Knowledge work like writing code is also like craft and is similar to writing a poem and software projects always have room for individuality and craftsmanship.
- ▶ Obsession with following your passion is motivated by flawed assumptions that satisfaction is dependent on the specifics of the work that you choose. *You don't need a rarified job, but you instead need a rarified approach to your work.*
- ▶ The next part of the book defines rules to achieve a deep life.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

The Eudaimonia machine

- ▶ The goal of Eudaimonia machine is to create a setting where users can get into a state of deep human flourishing creating exceptional work that utilizes the full extent of one's abilities.
- ▶ One story narrow rectangle made up of five rooms, placed in a line, one after another. No shared hallway: you have to pass through one hall to get to another. First room is a gallery consisting of deep work produced in the building. The next room contains contains couches and wifi to create a mood that hovers between intense curiosity and argumentation.
- ▶ Next is the library, containing resources and books with a permanent record of all work produced in the machine. You will have copiers and scanners for collecting the information needed for the project. Next room is the office space. It contains a standard conference room with a white board, cubicles and a desk. The office is for light intensity activity.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

The Eudaimonia machine

- ▶ The final room is called the deep work chamber. Each chamber is conceived to be six by ten feet. You spend ninety minutes in a state of deep work with ninety minute breaks for a period of three cycles and your brain would have reached its concentration potential for the day.
- ▶ You don't need an Eudaimonia to focus. Replacing distraction with focus is not so simple. You have to fight the urge to turn your attention towards the superficial.
- ▶ You have to minimize the amount of willpower needed to transition into a state of unbroken concentration.
- ▶ Start with deciding on your depth philosophy.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

The monastic philosophy of Depth scheduling

- ▶ Monastic philosophy attempts to maximize deep efforts by eliminating or radically minimizing shallow obligations.
- ▶ Suited for people in well defined roles that have a highly valued professional goal. This philosophy might not be suited to everyone.
- ▶ Computer scientist Donald Knuth and science fiction writer Neal Stephenson follow this philosophy. They are typically very poor email respondents. They take months to respond to questions from readers and have a well defined system for eliminating important emails from the non important ones.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

The bimodal philosophy of Depth scheduling

- ▶ In this philosophy, you divide your time dedicating it for long stretches of deep work and leave the rest for other activities.
- ▶ Practicioners of this method: Carl Jung, shuffled between clinical practice and deep work stretches.
- ▶ The minimum amount of time needed for such long stretches of work is at least one full day. A few hours in the morning is too short for this philosophy.
- ▶ Adam Grant discussed previously also had semesters between deep work and courses.
- ▶ This is only for people for who can disappear for well defined periods without having to worry about emails or other modes of electronic communication.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

The rhythmic philosophy of Depth scheduling

- ▶ The idea behind this philosophy is to generate a rhythm that removes the need to invest your energy in scheduling.
- ▶ The chain method builds on creating a habit of deep work schedules as a daily habit.
- ▶ Brian Chappel, a doctoral candidate, schedules chunks of deep work every single morning for uninterrupted stretches of deep work. This method increased his productivity by a lot and he ended up producing more academic writing than he initially could.
- ▶ This is the most common philosophy among those with office jobs.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

The journalistic philosophy of deep work scheduling

- ▶ The idea behind this philosophy is that whenever you find free time, you switch into deep work mode.
- ▶ Walter Isaacson would go away twenty five to one hour, write down material related to his book and come back.
- ▶ You need to switch into a deep work at a moments notice and this does not come naturally and requires practice.
- ▶ The author of this book also uses this method whenever his kids are going to sleep or if meetings are cancelled.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

Ritualize

- ▶ Train yourself to be organized in your work habits. Charles Darwin had a fixed schedule in the morning where he would go for a short walk, have breakfast and retire into study. He would then read letters from the previous day and then retire to work again. After that he would think about challenging ideas while going for a walk on a planned route.
- ▶ Don't wait for inspiration to strike.
- ▶ Build rituals with the same level of importance as the important thinkers.
- ▶ Questions to address:
 - ▶ Where you'll work and for how long: clean desk, do not disturb sign on the door and a location for example.
 - ▶ How you'll work once you start to work: Use metrics such as words produced and rules such as ban on Internet use.
 - ▶ How you'll support your work: Have a cup of coffee, light food or light exercise. Also organize your work environment such that you minimize energy dissipating distractions.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

Make Grand Gestures

- ▶ Introduce radical changes into your work environments dedicated towards supporting a deep work task.
- ▶ J.K.Rowling checked into a five star Balmoral hotel in the heart of Edinburgh to finish the Harry Potter books since working at her own office proved to be cumbersome.
- ▶ Similarly, Bill Gates retreats into think weeks during which he would retreat into a cabin with a stack of papers and books to think about issues which are relevant to his company.
- ▶ Award winning Novelist Alan Lightman retreats into a tiny island in "Maine" every summer to think deeply and discharge.
- ▶ William Shockley did not emerge from his hotel room until he had ironed out the details for a design.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

Don't work alone

- ▶ Relationship between deep work and collaboration is tricky.
- ▶ Sharing working space with a lot of coworkers can sometimes be counter productive.
- ▶ Building 20 of MIT brought together people from different disciplines leading to breakthrough inventions.
- ▶ The best combination is to have collaborative spaces combined with deep work areas.
- ▶ Inventors of solid state transistor worked side by side pushing each other towards better designs.
- ▶ Aim for collaborative deep work.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

Execute like a business

- ▶ Four disciplines of execution
 - ▶ Focus on the wildly important
 - ▶ Execution should be aimed at a small number of "wildly important goals". Keep a small number of ambitious goals with tangible benefits.
 - ▶ Act on Lead measures
 - ▶ Lag measures describes your end goal but these measures come too late for any corrective actions.
 - ▶ Lead measures measure behaviors that eventually lead to success in lag measures.
 - ▶ Example Lead measure: Time spent in a state of deep work dedicated towards your wildly important goal.
 - ▶ Keep a compelling score board
 - ▶ Have a public place to track your lead measures.
 - ▶ For instance keep track of the hours spent in deep work and place it in a visible spot like marking the number of days you were able to spend working deeply on your goal
 - ▶ Create a cadence of accountability.
 - ▶ Have weekly reviews of your progress.
 - ▶ Understand why you were and were not able to reach your goals.

Rule 1 - Work Deeply

Be Lazy

- ▶ Idleness is necessary to the brain and helps get deep work done.
- ▶ Shut down your work thinking completely after your workday.
- ▶ Scientific studies prove that downtime aids insights and help people make better decisions.
- ▶ Scientific studies prove that downtime also helps recharge the energy needed to work deeply. Studies prove that walking through nature can improve your ability to concentrate. Having a casual conversation, going for a run, playing a game can also help.
- ▶ A novice can work deeply (or in a state of deliberate practice) for around an hour while experts can expand this up to four hours.
- ▶ Zeigarnik effect: Ability of incomplete tasks to dominate our attention.
- ▶ Use a strict shutdown ritual you use at the end of the workday.
 - ▶ Capture tasks for the day in a common list.
 - ▶ Review incomplete tasks at the end of the day and have a plan for its completion. Commit to the plan.
 - ▶ When you work hard, work hard. When you are done, you are done. Refreshing leads to better quality of work.

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Don't multi-task

- ▶ The ability to concentrate deeply is a skill that must be trained like a daily habit. But first you need to wean your mind from a dependence on distraction.
- ▶ Studies have proven that people who multi-task are chronically distracted. There is a huge difference in abilities between people who multi-task and the ones that don't.
- ▶ Once your brain becomes used to on-demand distraction, it's hard to get off this addiction even when you want to concentrate.
- ▶ If you fill your boredom with a glance at your smartphone, then it's likely that your brain has been rewired.
- ▶ Your training must address two goals:
 - ▶ Improve your ability to concentrate intensely.
 - ▶ Overcome the desire for distraction.

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Don't take breaks from distraction, instead take breaks from focus

- ▶ Once you are wired for distraction, you crave it.
- ▶ Internet Sabbath does not work if you still spend a lot of time on network devices.
- ▶ Instead, schedule in advance at what times of the day you will use internet and nothing outside those times is allowed.
- ▶ A trick is to use your notepad and record the next time you are allowed to use internet. Until that time no network connectivity is allowed no matter what.
- ▶ This strategy works even if your job requires lots of internet use and e-mail replies. Schedule internet blocks for example, every fifteen minutes throughout a two hours stretch.
- ▶ Keep your offline blocks strict, even if it means searching the internet for critical information needed for a task. Resist the temptation to look at your devices. Don't let your mind break this barrier between offline and online blocks. You can easily get distracted with pieces of information thrown at you like "one last email".

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Schedule internet use

- ▶ If you are glued to your smartphone throughout your evenings and weekends, then this behavior can undo many of your attempts to rewire your brain.
- ▶ Maintain a schedule for internet use even when your workday is over.
- ▶ You can make pragmatic exceptions like texting a friend to agree on a time for dinner.
- ▶ During your offline blocks, you simply occupy yourself with your thoughts and embrace boredom.
- ▶ Rewire your brain to be comfortable resisting distracting stimuli.

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Example of Teddy Roosevelt

- ▶ Teddy Roosevelt had a large array of interests like boxing, dancing, poetry, naturalism.
- ▶ He did not spend more than a quarter of his days studying but had exceptional grades.
- ▶ He would start his schedule from eight thirty in the morning till four thirty in the evening. Apart from the time he spent on recreation and athletic training, the rest of the blocks were spent on studying.
- ▶ He had small blocks of time but used those time blocks with a great level of intensity. His concentration was so intense, his reading so rapid, that he could afford more time off from schoolwork than others.
- ▶ You could also incorporate this strategy into your daily lives.

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Some strategies

- ▶ Identify a deep task that's high on your priority list.
- ▶ Give yourself hard deadlines and commit publicly to a friend. Or make a countdown timer and put it in a place where you can see it.
- ▶ Start working with great intensity: no email breaks, no browsing or no trips to the coffee machine.
- ▶ Attack the task with every free neuron such that the task has your full attention.
- ▶ Start slowly, like once in a week so that you give your brain some practice with intensity while not skyrocketing your stress levels.
- ▶ Always keep your deadlines hard but feasible. Deep work requires levels of concentration not many knowledge workers are comfortable with. This is a kind of interval training for your brain.
- ▶ These dashes are incompatible with distraction. After you complete a dash, resist distractions and the more you practice the more you become used to resisting urges. After a few months of training, you will notice a huge difference in your ability to concentrate and you will have more time for finer pleasures in life.

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Meditate productively

- ▶ Keep yourself occupied physically (with running, walking, showering), but not mentally and focus your attention on a single well defined professional problem.
- ▶ The goal can differ based on your profession like writing a article, making progress on a theorem, etc. Finding time for this strategy is easy as it takes advantages of times that would otherwise be spent on something else. Instead you can focus on your professional productivity. Productive meditation also helps you in strengthening your distraction resisting muscles since you are focused on a single problem. However, you need to be careful initially or else you you can end up distracted with nothing to show for it. Some suggestions that can help you get productive meditation right:
 - ▶ Be wary of distraction: The mind can try to distract you by throwing at you some unrelated but interesting thoughts. Be aware of this and bring your attention back to the problem to solve.
 - ▶ Be aware of looping: The mind avoids usage of excess energy and sometimes loops over the same information again and again. Be aware of this and redirect your attention to the next step in the process.

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Structured deep thinking

- ▶ When faced with a distraction free mental landscape with a hard problem to solve, the next steps can be surprisingly non-obvious.
- ▶ The following steps can be followed:
 - ▶ You need to start with a full review of relevant variables needed to solve the problem and store it in your working memory.
 - ▶ Define the specific next question to answer using these variables? Define the what and the how.
 - ▶ After you find the answers to your previous questions, you can consolidate the answers and document your gains.
 - ▶ Then you can push yourself to the next level of depth by starting the process all over again.
- ▶ This strategy can help you accelerate the problem solving process and also improve your ability to go deep.

Rule 2 - Embrace Boredom

Memorize a Deck of Cards

- ▶ Memory champions acknowledge that they were not born with exceptional memories but instead trained it.
- ▶ Studies shows that the cognitive difference between memory athletes and the rest of the population is not a difference in memory but of attention. This is called as attentional control and it is the ability of a person to maintain focus on essential information.
- ▶ A side effect of memory training is that it improves your ability to concentrate. As a mental training, the author suggests everyone to learn this impressive skill of memorizing a bunch of cards.
- ▶ Read “How to memorize a deck of cards with superhuman speed.” by Ron White.
- ▶ A smart way to retain information is not through repetition but by remembering scenes. You can visualize your house and store the information in each object or furniture in your room. Associate each object in the room with a card. Also you can try logically associating a card with an object in the room.
- ▶ Repeat until you master this technique and impress your friends!

Rule 3 - Quit Social Media

Weigh the pros and cons of each networking tool

- ▶ Networking tools like Facebook offer minor benefits. These minor benefits don't add as much value as we think they do.
- ▶ You can use a “any benefits approach to tool selection” or a “craftsman's approach” to selecting the tools you use every day.
- ▶ Strategy for tool selection:
 - ▶ Describe the main high level goals in your personal and professional life. Keep the list small. It should be high level and not specific. Identify the activities needed to achieve the goal. It should not be too high level or too specific.
 - ▶ Go through the activities and check if use of the tool has **substantially positive, substantially negative, little or negative impact**.
 - ▶ Use the tool only if there's a substantial positive impact.

Craftman's approach to tool selection

Identify the core factors that determine success and happiness in your professional and personal life. Adapt the tool only if its positive impact outweighs its negative impact.

Rule 3 - Quit Social Media

Law of the vital few

- ▶ Don't service low impact activities.
- ▶ Low impact activities can sometimes take up same time as a high impact activity.
- ▶ Networking tools are low impact but take up a large amount of your daily life.
- ▶ Since your time and attention is limited, you need to be more careful in which tools you use day to day life.

80-20 rule

In many settings, 80 percent of a given effect is due to just 20 percent of the possible causes.

Rule 3 - Quit Social Media

Quit Social media

- ▶ Get rid of useless stuff frequently. People tend to keep stuff that they don't need.
- ▶ You can use a similar strategy for networking tools. Stop using social media tools like Facebook for 30 days. You don't have to make it public.
- ▶ Ask these questions after thirty days:
 - ▶ Would the last thirty days have been notably better if I had been able to use this service?
 - ▶ Did people care that I was not using this service?
 - ▶ If the answer is no to both the questions, then quit the service. If the answer is "yes", then return to using the service. If your answers are ambiguous, then lean towards quitting.
- ▶ Social media tools if use frequently can be devastating to our attempt to work deeply. You are not missing out on anything if you don't use social media.
- ▶ Once you are done with getting rid of useless tools and stuff from your life, you will realize that these tools were really not needed in the first place.

Rule 3 - Quit Social Media

Social conventions

- ▶ People are bound to social media because of the idea that people want to hear what you have to say.
- ▶ Also a marketing gimmick by these companies that you are missing out if you are not on these sites play a role in convincing people to stay.
- ▶ An average user on Twitter has 200 followers and people tend to think activities on the platform are essential. This can be a powerfully addictive feeling.
- ▶ It's easy to obtain followers on social media than it was required previously. People previously had to work really hard to obtain a large following.
- ▶ People pay attention to each other's posts regardless of the value of the post. They "like" each other's posts. If a television program or a magazine does the same, it would not attract the same level of audience.
- ▶ The quest for self-importance plays an important role in convincing people to thoughtlessly fragment their time and attention.

Rule 3 - Quit Social Media

Don't use the internet to entertain yourself

- ▶ *How to live on 24 hours a day*: A famous 1910 self help classic says a typical man should use his sixteen hours a day to perform rigorous self improvement.
- ▶ As time has progressed, generations have seen the quality of their leisure time degraded and consisting of distracted clicks and digital entertainment.
- ▶ Entertainment focused websites like Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Reddit have carefully crafted titles and easily digestible content that catch our attention with the help of algorithms. These websites have links that direct you to other pages keeping you hooked to these sites.
- ▶ These sites are harmful in the sense that they eat up your leisure time and eliminate any chance of boredom. They are easily available for everyone making them more addictive.
- ▶ The solution is to put more thought into your leisure time. You have to dedicate yourself to thinking how you can use your "day within a day".

Rule 3 - Quit Social Media

Plan your leisure time in advance

- ▶ You tend to fallback to digital entertainment when you have nothing planned. Ensure that you plan your evenings and weekends in advance before they begin.
- ▶ One thing you can do is to choose a set of books and ensure that you make some progress on them every night.
- ▶ You may think that these activities might interfere with your leisure time and might affect your work times, but that is rarely the case. When you live every waking hour with meaning, it can increase the value of your work hours and you will live a meaningful life.

Rule 4 - Drain the shallows

Use your time wisely

- ▶ A company named 37signals, experimented with a four day workweek. Employees were getting more done as shallow things were being removed quickly and people started prioritizing their time more.
- ▶ 37signals went as far to give an entire one month off to employees to develop their own projects without any obligations. The result was two projects that helped increase the value to their customers.
- ▶ Shallow work still needed for businesses but you need to ensure that it does not eat up your time.
- ▶ Performance psychologists have discovered that, in early stages of deliberate practice (where you push your abilities to the limit), individuals can push up to an hour a day and it can go upto four hours a day at the maximum at an elite level.
- ▶ Out of your 8 hour workday, the most adept thinkers cannot spend more than four hours in a state of true depth.
- ▶ Don't let shallow work overtake the limited time that you have.

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Schedule every minute of your day

- ▶ People vastly underestimate the amount of time they spend watching TV. This has been proven in a study in Britain where when people thought they were spending around 15-16 hours per week, in reality they were actually spending around 28 hours per week watching TV.
- ▶ People also tend to underestimate the amount of sleep they get (in US, people sleep an average of 8.6 hours while they estimate themselves to sleep only 7 hours). Similarly, people think that work fifty five hours while they only work around 44 hours.
- ▶ We don't give a thought about how we spend our time and what we do with it. The author suggests an idea that might seem extreme to some: *Schedule every minute of your day.*
- ▶ Divide your workday into blocks and assign activities to these blocks. For instance, you can batch them into generic task blocks, lunch blocks, relaxation blocks. Next to each block, you can divide your tasks into smaller tasks and what you plan to achieve in those blocks.
- ▶ You might sometimes spend more time than you initially thought, so you might have to re-plan your day in such cases.

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Tips to day scheduling

- ▶ Scheduling your day might be overwhelming at first and realize that you will underestimate the amount of time it takes for you to complete a task. You will start with wishful thinking at first.
- ▶ One tactic is to have conditional overflow tasks. In case your task takes more time than initially planned, then you can use it for your incomplete task or if you manage to complete, have another task ready to start.
- ▶ Another tactic is to deploy these task blocks throughout the day so that surprises don't affect your tasks planned for the day.
- ▶ It is important to remember that this is not to force yourself into rigid behavior but only to make sure that you are thoughtful about the use of your time. Adapt and modify your plan as needed and don't let spontaneity decide your schedule.
- ▶ Using this strategy can help you come with creative insights and spend time on things that really matter.

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Quantify the depth of every activity

- ▶ It is important to determine how much time you are actually spending in shallow activities. It can be difficult to get this insight.
- ▶ A simple question you can ask yourself is : *How long (in months) would it take to train a recent college graduate with no specialized skills to complete this task?*
- ▶ You can also discuss with your boss about how much time you should ideally spend in shallow activities. In most cases, it should be around 30-50 percent. The intention of this exercise is to really think if your job would help you in the current information economy.
- ▶ One strategy to ensure the best use of your time is to not work after a certain time, say after five thirty. This is something called as *fixed schedule productivity*.
- ▶ According the author, junior professors spend extraordinary hours in their offices spending time on administrative activities for the majority of their time. However, that always need not be the case.
- ▶ The author cites the example of a Harvard Professor, Radhika Nagpal, on how she manages to work less but produce more.

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The example of Radhika Nagpal

- ▶ Nagpal initially tried to cram work into every free hour from morning to midnight, but she realized that this strategy was not sustainable.
- ▶ So, she set a limit of fifty hours of work per week and determined backward on how finding which habits were needed to satisfy this constraint.
- ▶ She set drastic quotas on shallow endeavours in her academic life. She decided that she would only travel five times per year as trips can sometimes require a huge load of shallow work.
- ▶ She also placed a limit on the number of papers she would review in a year. Nagpal is now an expert in her field.
- ▶ The author suggests to turn down requests that can yield shallow work. You don't have to be specific on why you are turning it down and don't offer consolation prizes. The idea of refusing is better than letting deadlines creep up on you. This kind of fixed schedule productivity creates a scarcity mindset for the time that you have and you will ruthlessly start eliminating the shallow tasks from your schedule.

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Become hard to reach

- ▶ Make sure that you don't respond to emails after work hours. Ensure that you wait till the next morning.
- ▶ Make sure that people who send you emails have done enough work before they use up your time. Have a sender filter like a status or FAQ or information on what kinds of emails you will respond to. This can drastically reduce the number of emails you receive. It can be psychologically freeing to not respond to emails that don't create much value. It does not mean that your time is more valuable than other it just creates clarity for both the sender and the receiver.
- ▶ Some emails can be productivity landmines. You can use a process-centric approach to emails that can help you minimize the amount of emails you receive and the mental clutter that they generate.

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More email strategies

- ▶ You can ask yourself this question before you reply to emails: *What is the project represented by this message, and what is the most efficient (in terms of messages generated) process for bringing this project to a successful conclusion?*
- ▶ The process-centric approach can significantly reduce the amount of time you spend on emails, reduce the brain power it consumes, and it “closes the loop”. This can help you free up much needed mental landscape.
- ▶ One strategy that academics at MIT use is to not respond to email messages. The idea behind this philosophy is that it is the senders responsibility to convince the reader that a reply is worth-while.
- ▶ Don't reply if the following apply to emails:
 - ▶ It's ambiguous and makes it hard for you to generate a response.
 - ▶ It's not a question or a proposal that interests you.
 - ▶ Nothing really good or bad would happen if you did not respond.

Conclusion

Some more tips

- ▶ Email strategies might make some uncomfortable but as Tim Ferris once wrote: *Develop the habit of letting small bad things happen. If you don't you'll never find time for life changing big things.* These strategies can control both the amount of emails you send and receive, use them with care and thought.
- ▶ Some of the greatest minds of our times like Bill Gates had a prodigious ability to work for hours together deeply.
- ▶ Introduce artificial constraints into your schedule to make use of your time more effectively. You need to train your deep work muscles.
- ▶ One more tip is to keep a tally of the deep work hours you spend per week.
- ▶ The author was also impressed with the amount of achievements (more publications and grants) he made once he embraced the ideas mentioned in this book.
- ▶ It can be a transformative experience to leave the distracted masses and join the focussed few.