

CLAIRE DIAZ-ORTIZ

DESIGN YOUR DAY

*be more productive, set better goals,
and live life on purpose*

*with intention?
plan?*

Praise for *Design Your Day*

I love the message of this book: get more done by doing less. Often, we think that productivity is the result of doing more, but rarely does it turn out that way. If you struggle, like I do, to focus on what matters most, then *Design Your Day* will be a breath of fresh air. Read it, then live it.

—JEFF GOINS, bestselling author of *The Art of Work*

Who doesn't need more hours in their day? With so many responsibilities to juggle and hats to wear, it can feel like the days fly by and your to-do list flies out the window. By the end of the day you wonder to yourself, "what did I even do?" and "why didn't the things I needed to accomplish actually get done?" If you can identify with this, you don't want to miss this book. I can't think of anyone better to teach you to make the most of your life than Claire.

—ALLISON VESTERFELT, author of *Packing Light: Thoughts on Living Life with Less Baggage*

I'm making more than a few changes based on the super-practical concepts in this book. Claire does an amazing job of clearing the air and helping you make the most important things the most important things. I've always been a goal-oriented person but this book is helping me take it to another level!

—JOËL MALM, founder of Summit Leaders Coaching and author of *Vision Map*

There are plenty of do-more-in-less-time strategies out there. Claire isn't about doing that with shortcuts. Rather, she's all about identifying the right goals, and acting with purpose so that you really can do more in less time, while still achieving the things you value. With clarity and insight, her methods are an antidote to idle busyness.

—JUSTIN WISE, founder and CEO of Think Digital

Goals are everything when it comes to business and life in general. Claire couldn't have done a better job defining how to set purposeful goals for yourself. There are a lot of books out there about goal setting. This one is special. Meaningful goals matter, and *Design Your Day* helps you understand how to give your goals purpose, and more importantly, how to achieve them using a simple and effective strategy. Bravo Claire!

—**SCOTT WARNER**, CEO, Gigg

Productivity isn't just about the grind; it's about the decisions you make about how you work. Work hard to work well. *Design Your Day* will show you how.

—**ALLI WORTHINGTON**, COO, Propel Women and author of *Breaking Busy*

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CLAIRE DIAZ-ORTIZ

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GETTING STARTED: BIG ROCKS

It is 5:00 p.m. and you're late to pick up a small, uniformed child at soccer practice. Although the day is mostly over, you feel like it never really began. You vaguely remember an alarm going off in a darkened morning, and a rushed hour of kids and notebooks and cereal flying. A big yellow bus passed in and out of your vision. Then a series of errands and meetings and phone calls paraded by for hours on end—a squashed sandwich in a plastic bag providing you a few minutes of quiet calm.

Throughout it all, there was the coffee. *May I never have to live a day without coffee*, you muse. A to-do list, sitting next to you on the passenger seat in your car, has twenty-seven items on it, only two of which you managed to cross off today. You didn't even really get started.

"But today was an unusual day," you rationalize. "So many unexpected things came up."

"Tomorrow will be better," you promise yourself, only slightly wincing.

It's not a lie if you believe it, right?

When it comes to living the life we want to live, there are good days and there are bad days. We all have bad days. Days where the car breaks down when you're in labor, the puppy eats your college thesis, and the basement floods the Christmas presents away. And sometimes we can't change these days. But there are many days—like when life zips by in a series of flashes and suddenly you're on the way to pick up that child from practice and your to-do list didn't get any shorter—that we can do something about. And learning to change these days is one of the most important lessons we will ever learn. Your particular day might differ—replace the kids and breakfast cereal with lattes and late-night graduate school study groups—but the idea is the same. Whatever it is that matters most to you in life—your family, your

health, your faith, your friends—will suffer if you don't learn to live your days well.

Many of us have seen the experiment with the rocks and the jar. If you are new to this idea, go get a few big rocks, a ton of small pebbles, and a large glass jar. You'll find that if you put the pebbles in the jar first and then try to put in the big rocks, you'll have trouble fitting everything in. Do things the other way around, though, and you're golden. Put your big rocks in the jar first, and then fill the jar's air pockets up with pebbles. Ta-da! It fits.

Life is the same way. It's easy to fill up a day or a life with an endless series of pebbles and then not have the time, energy, or resources to fit in the big rocks. A life well designed is about making sure that the important stuff stays important, day in and day out.

Days shouldn't live themselves, and this is a book about making sure they don't.

This book takes part in two acts.

Together, they walk you through the Do Less method, a productivity and goal-setting model I designed to help folks get more done in less time and succeed more often. Close readers will notice that "DO" is not just one of the most used words in the English language, but is also (fantastically, I might add) a word made up of the initials of my last name.

The **Do Less** method is about taking back your time, and giving it to someone who really knows what they're doing.

You!

In Part One, we'll look at the first step, **Decide**. This is where you'll think hard about what is important and what is not in the year or season you have ahead. This is where you pare down on the nonessentials and learn to clarify what you really want. Remember that what you want is all about what you value in this world.

In Part Two, we'll dive into **Organize**. We'll put key productivity strategies in place to reach the smart goals you've set for yourself, day by day, year by year. Specifically, **Organize** follows through four steps: **Limit**, **Edit**, **Streamline**, and **Stop (LESS)**.

The Do Less method will help you win more often and love your life better along the way.

PART ONE: DECIDE

“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.”

—Yogi Berra

First, we’re going to decide what matters. Then, we’ll figure out how to get you where you’re going.

The first step in getting where you’re going is deciding what you want, and thus the Do Less Method starts with a big D.

Decide.

It’s time to think long and hard about what you want. We’ll start by setting an overarching theme for the year or season ahead, and then we’ll jump down into creating powerful goals for your life and work.

WORD OF THE YEAR

For the last few years, I've done something smart. Now, I'm not always doing smart things, so believe me when I say that this is something to write home about. What have I done? I've chosen a word of the year.

I got the idea from a book, and it's worked well to bring my life a greater sense of direction and fulfillment. I'm now such a fan that I'll shout it from my handy nearby mountaintop:

Each year, you should choose a word to represent the year
you have in front of you.

Think long and hard about one word that will serve as a guidepost for what you want to do and be in the year to come. And remember that a year needn't start January 1—you can start your year at any time! One word that will remind you of what's important when you need it most. One word to mean everything you want your year to be, and one word that will be a guiding light when times get tough and you're not clear on what your priorities are.

There aren't a lot of rules. Your word can be a verb or a noun. It can be long. It can be short. A word that has funny sounds in it or a word that rolls off the tongue. Depending on the type of year you're going for, some examples of great words might be: Breathe, Push, Persevere, Give, Abundance, Direction, Moxie, Contentment.

The first year I did this exercise, I needed it badly. I was in a season of overwhelm, and so choosing my word—REST—felt like taking a big old breath of fresh air. Those four letters meant the world to me.

It wasn't all smooth sailing, though, and I made a lot of mistakes during the year. By publicly stating my word, I also provoked some interesting responses in others. Many folks who

read about my word of the year talked about it when they saw me—or, even better, mentioned it when they were asking me to do something! A number of times I received a note or call along the lines of, “I know you said your word of the year was REST, but I was wondering if you could ...”

This alone let me know that something about publicly stating my word of the year was working. And not just for me to know my own priorities, but for others to know them as well. (Yes, they may still have been asking me to do something, but they were at least conscious that I was likely to say it wasn’t the right year for me to agree!)

The next year, with great deliberation, I chose a new word: RENEW. After a year of rest, I was ready for balance, and looked for a guidepost to help me carefully choose what I would take on in my personal and professional life in this time of measured growth. I wasn’t resting, but I wasn’t going hog wild either.

This past year, I mixed it up, going digital with my word of the year and choosing not a word, but a hashtag.

#BanBusy

As a digital gal, living in a digital world, the act of choosing a hashtag seemed more me than ever before. The point’s the same, after all. It is one short, powerful idea promising to revolutionize the way I think about what I do. And so #banbusy aimed to help me be mindful of one of the scarcest resources I have: time.

#banbusy was my aim to help myself. And, as in past years, it did just that. On really bad days, I’d wear the #banbusy necklace someone sent me to remind me of just what I had signed up to. And, day-by-day, I worked hard to be a steward of my time, and a minder of not making my life *too* full.

The first step in deciding what you want to achieve or how you want to feel is about framing all those larger decisions as part of a larger theme. This theme is your word of the year (or your word for a season).

Think hard about a word that will help guide you in your upcoming season of life. Find a powerful word that encompasses the things you want to accomplish, yes, but the way you want to feel as well.

Don't jump into things. Try one word on for size. Then try another.

Give yourself time to find the right word (or, yes, hashtag) to express what you want the year ahead of you to be.

This process may take days or it may take weeks. You may start with one word, try it on for size, and discard it for another. That's fine. That's good, in fact! More than anything, you need to find a word that feels right, sounds right, and means right.

Find the **word of the year** that's **the word of you**.

HOW TO SET SMART GOALS

IDEATE

Once you have an overarching word in place, it's now time to begin the process of setting and then reaching your goals in the season ahead.

There are “rules” to goal setting. You can do it right; you can do it wrong. We'll get into all that, I promise. But first, it's time to brainstorm. I want you to think of anything and everything under the sun that may or may not be a goal in your life. Then we'll prune them down. We'll separate the goals from the non-goals. We'll separate the dreams from the goals from the Words of the Year. We'll choose what's this year, and what's another year.

Let's ideate.

GET AN IDEAS NOTEBOOK

Goals start with ideas, and we need a lot of them.

We're about to go through a process that requires you to think big, and to have bold ideas about where you want to be. Think long and wide about the next few years ahead of you and what you want to do, accomplish, and feel in your work and your life. To do this, you'll need a lot of ideas.

Luckily, each one of us—whether we're teachers, doctors, mamas, programmers, businesspeople, tennis coaches, politicians, or cartoonists—has tons of ideas every day. Every hour, often. Every minute, sometimes. The challenge, however, is in effectively capturing those ideas.

When you have an idea in the shower, do you write it down? No. (Although SkyMall used to sell something to help you with that.) When you have an idea while tossing and turning at night, do you write that down? Not likely. When you have an idea in the subway, do you type it into your phone? Sometimes. The problem is not in coming up with the ideas, but in systematically documenting them.

So get a notebook. A tiny one. Not your regular hefty journal, and definitely not your phone. A real notebook you can touch and look at and think, *this is for all my terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad ideas*. (And some of the good ones as well.)

Carry it around. Use it *just for ideas*.

Don't listen to the part of your brain that says that you don't need one more notebook just to write down a random idea in. For years, I told myself I could use my regular journal. For years, it never worked. I didn't want to lug it around. If I did, I didn't want to take it out to write just one line in. It never worked until I designated one spot for just such content: a separate notebook *just for ideas*.

Get yours today.

BRAINSTORM

These days, that notebook isn't just going to be for incidental ideas. We're going to be actively courting them, and you'll need it to ideate on potential personal and professional goals you might want to pursue.

Brainstorming is a tricky art. Some folks can come up with five hundred mostly terrible ideas in fifteen seconds and some believe that ideas must be "good" before they see the light of day.

In *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem Solving*, Alex Osborn set out the rules I follow when I brainstorm. Osborn's work holds that there are four basic tenets of brainstorming, and that they are important to ensuring that any brainstorming session results in positive, helpful ideas.

Here's how they work:

1. *Focus on Quantity*: Whoever said, "It's not quantity, it's quality," wasn't thinking about brainstorming. In brainstorming you want *as many ideas as possible*. This isn't always easy, so one way to do this is to motivate yourself by setting a specific number you want to come up with—say, twenty. Then, go a step further and commit yourself to coming up with those twenty ideas in a short period of time—five or ten minutes, say. This will help you to not overthink your ideas, and to keep on track with the next tenet.

2. *Withhold Criticism*: It's easy to think of this only being an issue when you brainstorm with someone else, or in a group setting, but in reality this is just as important when you're brainstorming by yourself, since many of us are our own worst critics. Come up with a bad idea? Don't throw it out without writing it down. As Osborn's fourth tenet shows ("Combine and Improve Ideas"), even "bad" ideas can be tweaked to become great ideas.

3. *Welcome Unusual Ideas*: A similar concept to #2 (Withhold Criticism), the idea of welcoming unusual ideas is

just to make sure that you are really thinking outside the box, and not limiting yourself to only “tame” ideas. Sure, some tame ideas might be great ones, but I’m willing to bet that most of the better ideas in your life (and mine) are the unusual ones. Also, as we’ll see below, remember that often a wild and crazy idea can be the genesis of a fantastic (tamer) gem.

4. Combine and Improve Ideas: Your best idea isn’t necessarily going to come fully formed to your brain. Instead, to really excel at brainstorming you’ve got to be ready to tweak, massage, and coax a great idea out of an okay or even poor idea. Combining and improving on ideas is essential to make this happen.

Ultimately, these tenets prove the point: with brainstorming, getting to good usually has to start with bad. So come up with lots and lots of bad, and, if you’re like me, feel free to do so in gigantic sparkle-blue pen for added mirth.

FREWRITE

Sitting down and asking your brain for a list of ideas is not always the best way to brainstorm, and many folks find that freewriting is a great way to supplement the brainstorming process to get that list of goals you need.

The act of freewriting is, in essence, the act of writing anything down without thought to what you’re writing, why, or if it’s even legible. The idea is that by writing out whatever you are thinking about, an idea will generate over time. Although people historically think of freewriting as a tool mainly for writers, Mark Levy’s wonderful book *Accidental Genius* explains that anyone can use it as a powerful tool for ideation and idea generation.

Levy says there are a few key reasons for this.¹

First, **freewriting gets the juices going and gets the writing and thinking process to flow.** The concept of getting your writing flowing is often the only reason most people think freewriting exists. And this is a good reason. Freewriting *does* get

the energy unblocked in your mind and gets your fingers clacking across the keyboard. But, critically, freewriting also gets the *thinking* juices flowing.

Second, **freewriting tells you what you know**. Are you having trouble coming up with any goals at all for the year ahead? Do you have way too many in your mind that you don't think are worth writing down? Are you not really sure what you want to focus on when thinking of potential goals—work or family? Are you simply baffled at where to start? Writing down what you do know is a key way to help you sort out your thoughts. If you start a brainstorming session and have no ideas, a ten-minute freewrite will induce some, guaranteed. By the same token, if you start a brainstorming session with lots of ideas you're not sure are fully fleshed out, a ten-minute freewriting session will help give clarity on which ones you really care about.

HOME IN: IS THIS A GOAL?

(Or is it a falafel?)

I don't mean to make fun of falafels. But I do have a saying.

If I'm at a restaurant, and I order lasagna, say, and it comes and I am taking my first bite and it doesn't taste like what it's supposed to taste like, I bring out my phrase: Is this a falafel?

It's the same with goals. You've come up with a whole host of words. But some of these aren't goals at all. They are falafels.

By now, you've written down a lot of ideas. You've ideated. Now it's time to take out those dozens and dozens of ideas and hold them up to the light. Shake them around. Look at them real good. And eventually distill them into your goals for the year (or season) ahead.

This is a process. It's *not* always linear, it's *often* messy, and it may or may not involve bulletproof coffee. (Coffee with butter. Yes, butter. Look it up!)

So, how can you start sorting out the goals from the falafels?

Goals, as we've all heard before, should first and foremost be actionable, and they should have a timeline. A goal is not "I want to make a billion dollars this year!"—unless you made 80 percent of that last year, of course, and a billion is actually a specific,

reasonable number. A goal is something that you really can potentially achieve with a little sweat, grit, and (yes) luck thrown in.

Good goals must also have a timeline, or deadline. (The “line” at which said aim is “dead,” if you will.) I certainly didn’t create the concept of SMART goals, not by a long shot. Instead, a smart man named Paul Meyer did. According to Meyer, a SMART goal² is a goal that fits the following criteria:

- **SPECIFIC:** A goal should never be vague. For a few years now, I have set a goal to read two hundred books per year. This is not a vague goal. It is not “I want to read some books,” or “I want to read dozens of books.” No. I want to read two hundred books. A specific goal is specific. Period.

- **MEASURABLE:** It’s not hard to measure a measurable goal—so find a goal you can count your progress against. If you are training for a 10K run, say, you need to plan out how many times you are going to run each week and for how many minutes. Three runs, twenty minutes each, say. Numbers are measurable. So are other things, but you get the point.

- **ACTIONABLE:** With an actionable goal, you know what to do next. If I want to finish my current book manuscript (I do), then I have a nifty word processing program called Microsoft Word I can go ahead and open up to get going. In fact, I can keep doing that every day for ninety minutes (or five hours, depending on the day!). Actionable goals tell you (or at least strongly hint at) what needs to happen next. To finish that book, I better fire up my MacBook Air.

Do you have a goal to expand your business? You’ve got to turn off House Hunters International and get cracking. Choose goals you can count progress against.

Although measurable goals don’t need numbers attached, they do need a yardstick you can work against. They should not be things that will randomly be either done or not done come December 31. So if you have a goal to have one out-of-town family reunion this year with your extended family, you can reasonably guess that if in June you have not thought about this

at all and neither has anyone else in the family, you are likely behind. Thinking creatively about ways to measure non-numeric goals is key.

- **RELEVANT**: Goals should be relevant to you and the year before you. Three years ago, health was top of mind for me, so I set a goal to try eating a thirty-day “Paleo” or Whole Foods diet. It’s worked so well for me over the years that this year my goal is to eat 90 percent Paleo. Always make sure your goals are relevant to the particular season of life you are in. The year I had a baby, I decided it was not realistic to read two hundred books, and dropped my goal by 25 percent. (I heard that babies took up time. I heard right.)

- **TIMELY**: Goals must be timely. Let’s say I want to write some ebooks, and I have a goal to self-publish two in a given year. It’s best to put more of a timeline on that goal. The first book when? The second book when? Put a date by those numbers. And never forget important life events that aren’t necessarily in your goals chart. If I have a goal to have at least one annual reunion with my college roommates (I set this goal every year, and luckily it’s a fun one to cross off), I should not plan for that to happen in the spring, when I have a baby due.

By understanding the SMART goals framework, we can now look back and see if the things we came up with during our brainstorming were actually goals, or if they were something else.

Take a look back at your list. If something doesn’t fit the profile of a goal as outlined above, then is it a word of the year? Or a dream to think about later on? Or is it perhaps just an idea of something cool you’d like to do, but don’t want to prioritize?

Sort all the ideas you came up with into three categories:

1. *A Word of the Year (or a Word of You)*: Your word of the year, as discussed, should be one defining word to help bring together what you wish to feel and accomplish in the year or season ahead.

2. *Dreams*: Your dreams should be big, bold ideas that you may want to pursue one day, but aren't ready to start actively working toward by prioritizing or putting a timeline on. If you're thirty, and you have dreams of retirement, say, or if you're eighteen and coaching your kids' little league games isn't around the corner.

3. *Goals*.

FINE-TUNING YOUR GOALS

“We overestimate what we can accomplish in a day, but underestimate what we can accomplish in a year.”

—Chris Guillebeau

At this point, you should have a list of goals that all fit the SMART goal framework. We now need to pare these down to a list that will work for you for this year.

One of the keys to goal setting is not to set too many of them. It can be easy for some folks to make a laundry list of things they’d like to accomplish that all meet the basic requirement of being a SMART goal. But it is not easy for most folks to accomplish every one of these goals. Ultimately, there is little worse in goal setting than getting 2 percent of the way through your massive list of annual goals, giving up, and throwing the whole list out with yesterday’s recycling, never to be looked at again.

Keeping motivation high and your chances for success higher is essential, and doing so is dependent on not thinking too grandly about what can be accomplished. That said, I do not believe there is a specific number of goals you should set, and I don’t stick to one number year in and year out. Instead, I (almost always) stick to the same categories.

Here’s the concept: If you’re going to live a life, you’re going to have more than one goal to go after. Once you have multiple goals, categorizing them into areas of your life not only helps organize your thinking, but also helps take the pressure off of prioritizing one goal over another.

Let me explain: Many of my annual goals have more or less equal weight in my life, or at least fluctuate in their importance over the course of a year. Thus, putting goals into categories frees me up to choose a goal that might be “small” in one category of my life, and not worry that it’s not equal to a goal that might be “large” in another category.

Let's see what this looks like in practice. Here are the categories I use for my goals most years, and the ones that many other folks find useful.

- God
- Family
- Health
- Personal
- Work
- Money

Within each of these categories, I have at least one goal each year, and often more than one. For some people who suggest that you should only have three to five goals a year, say, this may sound like a lot. After all, with six categories, just two in each means twelve goals a year. As I'll show, however, categorizing allows me to set "smaller" goals in some areas that do not require significant work on a daily basis, but are things I do want to be intentional about.

Let's look more deeply, using some of my goals in the past as examples.

GOD

When I got my first iPod back in 2006, I named my list of Christian music "God." This name has stuck. In this category I set goals related to my faith, which is the bedrock of everything else I do—the largest rock in the jar, and the one that goes in first. For me, this category often has to do with how I spend the time in my morning routine in terms of what types of books and devotionals I plan to read throughout the year.

Here are some examples:

- Read through the New Testament as a part of my morning routine.
- Read at least twenty books (as part of my larger reading goal) that guide or inform me in my faith.

FAMILY

For me, this is the category where my husband and I think about what we want to accomplish as a family this year. For example, last year I thought it was important to make two solo trips with my husband sans our glorious babe. I've also often set a goal to have one trip a year with extended family. So I set goals in this category like this:

- I want to take two solo trips with my husband this year.
- I want to do one extended family trip this year.

HEALTH

At times, like when I find a breath-o-meter on Kickstarter that promises to measure my hydration levels, I wonder if I've gone too far with the whole human guinea pig thing. (And then, I tap the sleep band on my wrist and fall asleep for exactly 9.5 hours like a baby.)

The health category is the place where my inner spreadsheet really shines, and where I take real advantage of the category system of goal setting to allow myself to set some goals that are about keeping me on track, and not producing or creating something.

In my health category, I think about what I want to do, and then I stick a timeline around it. Here are some examples from past years:

- I want to eat 90 percent Paleo this year. (This means about two or three non-Paleo meals a week. As I'll discuss, I use a simple app to check off when I eat non-Paleo meals, when I exercise, and when I do other things. This makes it easy to track.)
- I want to exercise an average of five out of seven days each week.
- I want to get a massage twice a month.
- I want to sleep an average of 9.5 hours a night.

PERSONAL

This is the category where I think of what I want to personally achieve that doesn't best fit elsewhere. Here are a few of the types of goals in this category:

- Do my morning routine (The Present Principle, which I'll explain later) an average of five out of seven days each week.
- Read two hundred books.

WORK

This is a big category, and there's always a lot in it, so I find that with this area in particular I need to really pare down and not overdo. I try to stick to the really important things.

Here are some examples from past years:

- Submit one book for publication this year.
- Publish thirty blog posts over the next twelve months.

MONEY

This is the category for setting goals for earning, saving, investing, and giving. When single and traveling the world for several years in my twenties, I was extremely frugal and very budget conscious, and began to write down everything I spent, thanks to the wise advice in the great book by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin, *Your Money or Your Life*.

Ultimately, this gave me a habit that has been hard to break—and it makes it easy to track financial goals. If that's not the case for you, I would encourage you to see what you're comfortable with in terms of ongoing financial tracking to help you meet your goals in this category.

Here is an example of one of my goals in this area from past years:

- Increase my giving by 10 percent over the next twelve months.

Now it's time for you to get started, and the first step is to create your categories.

Many folks use a version or variation on the ones I use above, so I believe they do serve as a good starting point. That said, some obvious other or substitute categories you might want to include are: Home, Parenting, Marriage, Extended Family, Nuclear Family, Giving, Church, Running, Sports, for example. Essentially you should think about the most important things in your life, and distill them into meaningful categories that work for you.

Once you have these in place, it's time to start placing goals into categories and evaluating where you stand. So, with a keen memory for catching those falafels, plug the remaining true "goals" into your chosen categories.

Now comes a critical, important test, and one of the hardest things you'll do in this entire process. It's time to ask yourself, honestly: **Do I have too many goals?**

As I explained, there are some folks who believe that a specific number of goals is important. *No more than five. No more than eight! Three is just right.*

I've never jumped on that bandwagon, though, and the most I can say for sure is that I do believe that having too many goals is a surefire way to lose focus. I'm not going to give you a number, but I will say this: Be realistic, and choose less rather than more. Also remember to think about the work involved with various goals.

For me, this is always most clear with my health goals. When I set a goal like, "eat 90% Paleo," it's not a goal that actually takes me more time or that I have to put in extra work or manpower to accomplish. I have to eat, and I have to shop for the food I eat no matter what kind of food I eat, so choosing this path simply replaces another one. Same with a goal like "read 20 books that relate to my faith." This goal, in terms of time, does not add to the goal "read 200 books this year." It just clarifies what my specific intention is within that larger goal, and writing it down on my list of goals that I regularly reference makes sure I will endeavor to hit it. That is not true, though, with a goal like,

“submit one book for publication this year.” I could easily spend my time doing a lot of things other than writing and publishing a book, and so setting this as a goal means that I must set aside time to do the work required to get it done.

Another key thing to remember is that some of your goals may be “fun” to work toward and execute, and others may be less so. This makes a difference when thinking of the overall number you can handle in a given year. For example, although I love my work, I find it more fun to read than work. So “publishing a book” will feel like more work to me than reading for pleasure will.

But that doesn’t mean that all fun things are easy. Although vacationing with my extended family once a year may in and of itself be a fun experience, planning it is not easy, so I shouldn’t discount the time it takes.

These are all critical points to think about as you analyze whether you have too many goals on your plate.

CREATE STRATEGIES TO REACH YOUR GOALS

Once you feel you have the right goals for your year ahead, it's time to dig deep into your goals and work out how to really accomplish them. One common goal on many people's lists is reading. Many of us want to read more, whether to become more informed on a given topic, or as a way to enjoy ourselves on a more regular basis.

But, as we've discussed, "read more" is not a very specific goal to go after. Putting a number on that goal is a great way to prioritize reading in a way you can really go after. Twelve is a good, round number, and a number on many lists of annual goals. Let's look at what a strategy would be like to ensure that you read twelve books this year.

BREAK DOWN THE GOAL

You don't hit a goal by doing it all at once, but by breaking it down. To read twelve books a year, you need to read one book a month, or one quarter of a book per week. If you stick to this average, you've got your annual goal covered. Some months you may not reach this, but some months (like when you go on vacation for a week and read a lot), you will exceed this.

FIGURE OUT HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE

Approximating how long a goal will take you to accomplish is key. In the case of reading, try timing yourself as you read to see how many minutes it takes for you to read one page. If we assume an average book has 250 pages, then you'll know how many hours (roughly!) it will take you to read an average book.

Let's say you find that it takes you about twelve hours to read one book. This means you need to read about three hours a week to hit your annual goal of reading twelve books. When you know these numbers, you can then face up to them with strategies to get that reading done.

The same works for any goal you set for yourself, whether it's running a marathon or increasing your giving by 10 percent or planning a vacation with family. Breaking down the goal into actionable items and determining how long it will take to accomplish that goal is essential. Sometimes this will be significantly easier than at other times. When faced with a goal like "self-publish a book," a thousand small tasks have to take place to make that happen. At this stage you don't need to have all those action items written down (or even know what they are yet!) but just plan as much as you can for the broad strokes of what needs to happen and when. Then you can move forward. At each stage of the larger process, you'll then again break down that part of the goal into smaller pieces. Once you know the steps you need to accomplish to reach your goal and you understand the time involved, you need to start employing strategies to reach your goal.

In the case of reading, for example, here are a few tactics you could use to read three hours each week:

READ TWO BOOKS AT ONCE

For some people, reading multiple books at once works wonders. By doing so, this means you never get bored of one book, and can always turn to whatever is most appealing in a given situation. In my own life, I know that if I have five minutes waiting in line, it's easier for me to read a memoir or novel than get through another page in a health or business book, for example. If I'm reading in bed late at night, I prefer dense nonfiction to help me fall asleep. Choosing different types of books on different occasions means that you'll be more likely to be "in the mood" for one of the books on your list.

AUDIOBOOKS CAN BE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF YOUR ARSENAL

I don't read every book with my own eyes, and neither should you. Using audiobooks is a great way to increase the time you can spend reading. I know someone who buys the print and audiobook version of a book so that she can switch back and forth between audiobook and print, depending on if she's in the car or at home. In my life, I have an audiobook going when I exercise, commute, get ready in the morning, do chores, or am doing anything else wherein an audiobook works as positive background noise.

PLAN WHAT YOU WILL READ

Some people swear by planning out what books they want to read each month or year. Crystal Paine, power blogger at MoneySavingMom.com, gives her readers lists of the books she wants to tackle in a given month. I find that I don't like being that precise, but I do have a few shelves of books just dedicated to books I want to get to sometime soon. I also have a list of books I want to read next in my email for those books I'll be listening to in audiobook or reading on Kindle. This means that any time I am ready to start a new book, I can easily see what books I've been itching to read and decide what feels right for the day or week ahead. This helps immensely to keep me motivated and excited.

Just as personal trainers say that setting out your running clothes the evening before will make you more likely to go on your morning run, choosing the books you plan to read ahead of time can help motivate you.

ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR NEW BOOKS

The desire to read is the biggest thing that will get you to actually do it, and that desire is built on there being a book that you want to *inhale*. So it's your job to make sure you're

surrounding yourself with really good books, and not just mediocre ones. Keep a list of great books your friends or family recommend, and solicit suggestions from people whose opinions you value.

Further, think big and wide when it comes to books. For example, I'm a nonfiction or memoir girl at heart, and I have trouble remembering how freeing novels can be. Do you equate "reading books" with "reading boring business books"? If so, push yourself to go beyond the boundaries of your normal life. To feel better about your reading voyeurism, hit garage sales or mine Amazon.com for \$.99 books. It'll encourage you to try new things without regret.

The same works for other goals as well. If you're trying to reach a goal, surrounding yourself with information, resources, or a relevant community in your daily life will increase your ability to hit it.

KEEP GOALS RELEVANT

One mistaken notion about goal setting is that you should always be incrementally increasing your goals. This "more is better" mindset is a trap I've fallen into many times before. In the past, I believed that if I hit my goal last year I should beat it this year. The reality, though, is that always increasing your goals can be just plain stupid, and can run in direct contrast to one of the keys in the SMART goal-setting framework: relevancy.

Smart goals must always be relevant to who you are in a given season of life. In my case, when faced with setting my annual goals for 2014, I had to come up against a very relevant reality of my upcoming 2014.

That reality? I was having a baby. And I was not the first person to have been told that babies take time, energy, and effort to keep in pristine, working order. As such, it made sense for me to think of this blaringly relevant life event when considering my list of potential goals. When I thought about where I could cut back, my goal to read two hundred books stood out as a bad idea. Although reading serves as my outlet, peacemaker, and primary

hobby, it does take time to reach that goal, and time was at a premium for me that year.

As such, I reduced my 2014 reading goal to 150 books. And even though that's still a truckload of books, in some tiny way it did feel like I was throwing in the towel. After all, in my heart I really did feel like I could hit two hundred *if I just tried*. But is it smart goal setting to think of the relevancy of a goal in your particular season of life? Absolutely. The year 2014 just wasn't the one to stretch myself to read more. Remember to keep your goals relevant at all costs.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU PICKED THE RIGHT GOALS?

One year, one of my health goals was about making sure I drank enough water each day. It sounds simple, and it is. Or that's what I thought. As soon as I wrote "drink the right amount of water" on my goals list, however, I stepped into a quagmire.

It turns out that there is a ton of conflicting advice online about how much water you should drink each day. Do you really need to drink half your weight in water? Or is it more like eight 8-oz glasses of water (which may be more or less than that, depending on your weight)? Does it really have to be all water? Or does tea count? Can homemade fruit juice or smoothies even be considered part of that number?

Twenty minutes of me, online, trying to figure out how much water I needed to drink, and I wanted to chuck the whole goal out the window.

This is ridiculous, I thought. *Who cares?* I wailed. (Me, apparently. Because who else spends twenty minutes cross-checking strangers' random responses to Yahoo Answer queries from 2009 as a means to determine anything about their health?)

Here's the thing: I never figured out the right answer. Today, I don't pretend to know the "right" answer or even if there is one. Instead, I just plowed ahead and picked a number. The goal I set (64 ounces a day) might be right. It might be wrong. But it's just what I chose. (And it happens to be exceedingly easy to

remember, given that it makes up exactly two full bottles of the brand that I use.)

Sometimes, we're not always sure about the goals we set at the beginning of the year. Are they "right"? Are they wrong? Should they be different? If they aren't going to hurt you (drinking water shouldn't hurt me, I hear), then just try them. If they don't work, you can always change course.

KEEP YOUR GOALS TOP OF MIND

To stick to your goals, it's important to remember them—and not just a few times a year. We all need a regular reminder of what we're setting our sights on in order to get where we want to go.

Different people do this in different ways. One of the downsides of being married to a brilliant architect is that he has high standards about how things look in the lovely home he designed and built for us. As such, I have still not won the battle for a treadmill desk (he cannot think of something more aesthetically unappealing). Additionally, hanging a huge sign in my office with my chicken-scratched goals on it is not in his vision of aesthetic bliss. And that's okay with me. There are things on that list I'm not sure I want every houseguest to examine.

And for good reason.

One of my most cringe-worthy life memories relates to seeing someone else's goal list, in fact.

I was twenty and my friend Lara and I had gone to London to visit our friend Amalia. As I remember it, we experienced some classic travel nightmare in getting to England from Italy, where we were studying for six months. We missed a connection, a lot of running and sweat were involved, and we arrived exhausted and near delirious. Amalia's roommates were out of town that weekend, and they kindly let me and Lara sleep in their beds. When I tucked into the tiny twin in the turreted corner lent to me, I saw a list tacked up above my head. At first, I wasn't sure what I was looking at. And then I realized it was a list of goals.

I've tried to block out most of what happened next.

When I realized what I was seeing, I giggled. And then I started laughing. Hard. And then I told Lara to come over and she laughed. Hard. Pretty soon we were rolling on the floor making

fun of the list. I don't even know what we laughed at, exactly. Whether it was the *idea* of the thing—tacking your goals on a wall! Ha! Or a *specific* goal in and of itself. Get good grades! Hysterical! Whatever it was, Amalia stopped us in our tracks, calling us out on our behavior. We immediately woke up to reality, apologized, and went to bed, embarrassed.

Even though I couldn't for the life of me tell you the name of the girl's bed I slept in that weekend, I've thought about this incident dozens of times in the years since. And although I'm sure no one who enters my house is one-tenth as mean as I was that night in London long ago, I'm still gun-shy about hanging my list up on a wall. Luckily, this works well with my husband.

My goals are in the front of my journal. Where I look at them daily. Find your place, and display them, proudly.

Now that you've got a word for your year, and some goals to work toward, it's time to live them.

PART TWO: ORGANIZE (LESS IS MORE)

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

—Annie Dillard

We’ve talked about how to Decide on the key goals in your life, and now it’s time to Organize your days to win.

Organizing your life, however, is not about taking a trip to the Container Store. Don’t get me wrong; I love me a fancy fabric-covered box that promises to solve all my problems. However, I also know how ineffective it is in terms of long-term organization. To truly create an organized life and reach the goals you’ve set for yourself, the key is doing less. (The same holds for closets, it turns out. Less stuff is always the path to true organization.)

The Do Less Method offers that organizing well is a matter of four steps, and we’ll go through these, point by point. The “O” (**Organize**) is divided into four parts. Each part makes up the word **LESS**.

L: LIMIT YOUR WORK TO YOUR BEST 20%

A massage therapist I know has spent her life around human bodies—strong ones, weak ones, and all the variations in between. She believes that the key to moving well is to listen to your body's desire to do less. Whether you're sitting in a chair or standing up tall, she says, you need to ask yourself how you can do less. Our bodies know that sitting on our sit bones, and not slouching, is better. Our bodies know that lifting something heavy works better when we squat and lift with all our power.

When I was pregnant with my daughter, this idea really hit home. For nine months, it felt like I wasn't doing much of anything. But really, while I sat in doctors' offices and lay around watching Agatha Christie movies—doing a whole lot of nothing, it felt like—the biggest thing I'd ever done was growing behind the scenes. More than anything, this was a reminder to me that we often don't realize when something truly powerful is taking place. Did that trip with a friend lay the groundwork for a new screenplay? Did the week off recharge your batteries to let you work well all season? In contrast, did your entire workday get sucked into a series of meetings that led to nothing? Did the volley of emails you sent back and forth this morning only add confusion—not clarity—to a situation at work? In everything we do, we need to think about when we are really making an impact, and always seek out the way to do less to do more.

When it comes to productivity, a key way to do this is to limit the things we do. The 80/20 Principle says that we accomplish 80 percent of our work in 20 percent of our time. Conversely, we waste 80 percent of our time spinning our wheels to get a measly 20 percent of our results. This means that to truly be productive we need to try and only do that 20 percent of things we are really good at that bring us great results, and eliminate the other 20

percent from our plate completely. Ultimately, this is the key to freeing up immense amounts of time and getting rid of those sixty-, fifty-, or even forty-hour workweeks.

If you can choose your hours or have control over how many hours you work, this concept is particularly revolutionary. Working in an office environment with fixed hours makes this more challenging, but there still are key ways to work in these lessons to make a powerful difference in your productivity and your life.

LEARN WHAT ONLY YOU CAN DO: DETERMINE YOUR “BEST 20%”

The first step is to identify those Best 20% activities.

Entrepreneur Chris Ducker is a great mind in the space of hiring outside help, and I’ve learned from him in developing my strategy to identify your Best 20% activities. This exercise will help you see where you should spend your time, where you should find resources or better delegate, and where you should work hard to simply stop doing a certain activity.

To get going, take out two pieces of paper. Label one BIG WINS and the other ACTIVITIES.

On the first sheet of paper, write down some of your biggest wins in the past few years in your personal and professional life. This should be a list of one-off individual things like, “The deal I closed with that big firm,” “Appearing on my local radio station,” “Taking a family trip to Mexico,” and ongoing things like, “Learning from my mentor,” “Taking piano classes,” or “Spending regular time with my children.”

On the second sheet of paper, ACTIVITIES, think about all the activities you take part in on a regular basis—no matter if they led to those big wins or not. Your list will include all manner of things: sleeping, eating, emailing, traveling, taking meetings, giving presentations, going to church, cleaning the house, spending time with kids, going to family events, commuting, attending Bible study, volunteering, etc.

Now, looking at the second sheet of paper, you need to identify which of three categories the things on the second sheet of paper

fall into. Here are the three categories:

1. Things Only I Can Do: try putting stars around the “things only I can do” category, as these are the most important.
2. Things Someone Else Can Do
3. Things I Should Stop Doing

So, for example, “spending time with kids” does not fall under “Things Someone Else Can Do,” as it is not something you can hire someone else to help you with, or something you can delegate to someone on your team. In contrast, cleaning the house is a great candidate for “Things Someone Else Can Do.”

There might be some areas where one thing falls into two categories. For example, “traveling for work,” although it is something only you can do, is not necessarily something you always need to do, or need to do as much as you do. Was that out-of-town meeting really necessary or did you just think you “should” be there in person? Could you have cut it out? Sometimes we think that all types of a certain activity are necessary, when we could pick and choose better and some instances might fall under “Things You Should Stop Doing.”

Most people find that once you categorize the activities, it helps to rewrite them on a fresh sheet of paper into ordered columns of Things Only I Can Do (starred), Things Someone Else Can Do, and Things I Should Stop Doing. Once you’re done categorizing them, it’s now time to look back at the first sheet.

The first thing to do here is to look for where items on your Big Wins list also appear on your Activities list. The items that appear as Big Wins AND appear on the Activities List as “Things Only You Can Do” are your Best 20% Activities. Let’s now order all the items on the Activities list to see where they fall in terms of your priorities.

- *First Priority: Big Wins + Things Only You Can Do*—These are your Best 20% activities and are key activities you need to prioritize in your life!

- *Second Priority: Big Wins + Things Someone Else Can Do*—These are important activities you need to keep doing, but they

are things you need to delegate to someone else to do. Whether that means hiring a part-time assistant or mother's helper a few hours a week, or working to delegate better at work, you need to work hard to protect your time to not personally take on these activities.

- *Third Priority: Things Only You Can Do*—Evaluate carefully the activities here, because they are not on your list of Big Wins. Some, you will see, you may need to continue. Some, you do not. Challenge yourself to also think broadly about what this means.

- *Not a Priority: Things You Should Stop Doing*—Try to stop doing these activities as much as possible.

Let's look more in-depth into each priority category.

First Priority: Big Wins + Things Only You Can Do

First and foremost, you need to make sure to think hard about these first-priority items—after all, they will get top billing. If you put on your ACTIVITIES list that speaking at conferences is something that only you can do, you then need to 100 percent ensure that speaking at conferences is actually a Big Win for you, and that it's not just on the Big Wins list because it sounds impressive or others would be eager to do it.

Additionally, it's also important to think about what steps really contribute to your big wins. If speaking at conferences on the surface doesn't seem like a Big Win in and of itself (say, you aren't getting paid enough for it to make a big difference in your household income, or it's very tiring), then how important is it to helping you get clients, for example? If it's only somewhat important, is there another way you can achieve the same result with less time invested?

Second Priority: Big Wins + Things Someone Else Can Do

Some of the activities on your list are not things that only you can do, but are activities that directly contribute to your big wins. For example, a blogger might find that posting regularly on social

media is important to driving traffic to her website, but in reality those posts aren't personal posts and thus don't need to be done by the blogger herself.

When this is the case, the most important thing you can do is delegate this activity out to someone else. Finding help is absolutely critical to ensuring you do your best work. If you work in a larger organization and don't have the ability or authority to get an extra set of hands, then the key for you is to make sure that you aren't taking on tasks or activities that are really the role of someone else. If you do work for yourself and have the autonomy to hire help or have money in your family budget to help out your family at home, start to understand that the investment you make in hiring someone to do these activities will pay itself back in the time you earn to do your best work (which will, ultimately, earn you more time and happiness).

Third Priority: Things Only You Can Do

This category is full of some important things that we need to do every day (sleep, eat, groom, go to the dentist) that you might not think contribute to your Big Wins, and many, many things that regularly drain our time. Some people, for example, are quick to say that only they can manage their calendar, book their flights, clean the house, make the dinners, cut the grass, or drive the carpool, but if they think really broadly, they might see they could hire someone to help.

Additionally, if you put on your list that attending meetings is something that only you can do, you're likely right—most of the time. Additionally (and unfortunately!), most meetings do not directly contribute to great results and 99.9 percent will not appear on your list of Big Wins. In this case, the best you can do is limit your involvement to the greatest extent possible.

Not a Priority: Things You Should Stop Doing

Many of us have things we know we "shouldn't be doing." This is your chance to get rid of those activities, once and for all.

Additionally, though, it is essential in this category to not cut out all your meaningless activities. The #1 thing people forget to

put on their Big Wins list is relaxing or rest. The reality is that we all need downtime desperately in order to be truly productive—and I believe that it is only when we are truly rested (and I don't just mean sleep) that our bodies naturally upswing into productivity. If this isn't a reason to rest, I don't know what is.

You absolutely need to keep some of your fun, non-productive activities on that list. No, you don't need to watch the American average of five hours of TV each day.³ (And if you do now, you should absolutely make some of that time “Not a Priority: Stop Doing,” but yes, you may be someone who enjoys and benefits from watching a good movie on the weekends to relax.)

Ultimately, this activity is a mind-opening way to see where your time and work is really moving the needle, and where you're just running on the hamster wheel to stay busy.

SAY NO

Saying NO is one of the hardest things many of us have to do on a regular basis. Unfortunately, it's also one of the best, and it's absolutely critical if we are trying to limit ourselves to our Best 20% that we learn how to say no, and do so frequently. As Lysa Terkeurst says in *The Best Yes*, “Whenever you say yes to something, there is less of you for something else. Make sure your yes is worth the less.”

It's true. A chain of *no* responses paves the way for powerful yeses, and ultimate success.

E: EDIT THE TIME YOU SPEND ON WORK

“Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.”

—Parkinson’s Law

Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Workweek*, became famous for telling us that we could only work four hours a week and still succeed. And although his book’s title isn’t exactly literal, the overarching concept is true: we can absolutely work less and win. In fact, as I believe, working less is a key way *to* succeed. Tim believes combining two distinct concepts is essential to working less. Specifically, the 80/20 Principle (that we spend 20% of our time to do our best 80%) and Parkinson’s Law (that work expands to fill the time we have to complete it).

And Tim Ferriss is hardly the only one who thinks this works. Author and international development consultant William Powers says that by layering these two concepts over one another he was able to take his five-day workweek down to two days. Alongside the other tools in the Do Less Method, this is how I do my work and read and sleep more than most people I know.

Let’s explore the specifics of editing the time you spend on your work.

TRACK YOUR TIME

To edit down the time you spend on work, you first need to know how much time you’re spending on the things you do. This is an important exercise, and there are a few good ways to do this:

A Notebook or Excel Spreadsheet

Time experts like Laura Vanderkam might say that there's nothing better than a good old grid for a true time diary (whether in an Excel spreadsheet or on graph paper). The concept is simple: divide the day into twenty-four hours. Spend a week or a month noting what you do during the course of a twenty-four-hour period and add up the results to understand where you spend your time.

That said, there are also some online tools I swear by to step in and smooth out the process.

Rescue Time

RescueTime is a program that automatically tracks all the time you spend on the computer, giving you a report at the end of the week (or day) showing exactly what you were doing every minute of every day that your computer was on. It can also track any off-screen time you manually input. It also has functionality to help you hit and reach productivity goals—like helping remind you not to spend more than 40 percent of your workweek in your email inbox.⁴

Moment

Remember that your digital work time doesn't just happen on your computer, and that you likely spend far more time on your mobile device each day than you think. Moment is a great app that tracks how much time that really is. It doesn't break it down into categories like Rescue Time, but it does tell you how many minutes you've been on your phone each day, and can also help remind you to stay off it if you go over your prescribed goals.

More than just knowing where you are spending your time, many tools can help you track some of the overarching goals you've set for yourself. Here are a few:

An Activity-Tracking Device

There are a number of different wearable devices on the market, and I've tried a few. Whatever tool you use, though, the idea is to track sleep, exercise, steps taken, and potentially heart rate to get a better sense of your overall health metrics, and to

work toward bettering yourself. These tools will provide data that will not only give a detailed picture of how you spend your time, but will also help you stay on track to hit any health goals.

Coach.me (or another Habit-Tracking App)

Although the Coach.me app can be used to help show how you spend your days, it is most helpful as a way to track the goals you're checking off on a daily basis. Meaning that it works best for regular goals—so not “go on two solo vacations with my spouse this year,” but rather, “eat fish three times this week,” or “get a massage twice a month.” I have a few of my goals set up and every time I do one of my goals, I check in and it adds up over time. You can also see who else in the world hit the same goal that day as well.

Ultimately, the idea is not only to track how you spend your days, but also to understand how long it takes you to do those regular activities that make up your Best 20%. If you're a writer, say, knowing how long it takes to write a blog post, or approximately how long it will take you to write a magazine article or book, is really important information. The same goes for anything in your work life. Over time, this will give you key information.

REDUCE THE TIME YOU SPEND ON YOUR WORK

The biggest misconception people have about working less is that you'll get less done. In reality, if you made yourself work twenty hours this week instead of forty, you would likely adjust quickly to identifying what is important, and to only doing those things. This is the premise behind the concept of editing down the time you spend at work.

Once you've tracked your time for a few weeks and know where you are spending your time, you are ready to tackle the task of editing down the time you're spending on your work. By doing this after you have started the process of trying to only do your Best 20% work, you should be able to fluidly start seeing some early results.

Here are some key ways to start seeing progress in working fewer hours:

Keep Strict Work Hours

I wasn't the only one in Silicon Valley who breathed a sigh of relief when Sheryl Sandberg went public saying she always leaves the office at 5:30 p.m. every day.⁵ Keeping strict office hours, even in a Silicon Valley company where the doors can be open 24/7, is a key strategy for those in an office environment to consider, and I highly recommend working toward achieving this. From my years in Silicon Valley I know firsthand how hard it is to deal with the expectations of other team members who are happy to sit in their seats working (unproductively) for fourteen hours at a stretch, but remember that your health and sanity may depend on it.

In my case, I knew I regularly slept several hours longer than most of my colleagues, so working more than ten hours in my Silicon Valley office on top of commute time simply was not an option in order for me to get the sleep I needed. As a result, I was intentional about working more productively. Ultimately, if you work in an environment where clear business hours are not expected, it is important to create your own boundaries.

In graduate school, for example, I had a professor who set an auto-responder that explained when her working hours were, and when they weren't. If you emailed at the wrong time of day or night, you simply could not expect a response until her next window of time opened up. She claimed that this single act alone had saved her sanity and she felt free from expectations to work outside of these hours, because she simply told people she would not be available.

Jessica Turner, author of *The Fringe Hours*, has a full-time job in marketing but also has a host of other interests and hobbies. In order to pursue her passions, she learned years ago it was essential she use her "fringe hours" outside of work and family time wisely. And she did. As her husband says, she can get more done from five to nine in the morning than most people do between nine and five!

For those who work for themselves, keeping strict work hours is an essential step that is often overlooked. Crystal Paine, author of *Say Goodbye to Survival Mode*, works hard to ensure her computer is turned off by 6 p.m. at night—no matter what. For a work-at-home entrepreneur like Paine, this is more important than ever, since working for yourself tends to blur the barriers between work and everything else. This is especially important when you love your work. Author and blogger Ruth Soukup fervently loves her work—and says happily that she would be fine working seven days a week. That said, this year she promised her husband she would take every Sunday off. I bet it will be one of the best things she does for her productivity.

Go on a Work Diet

In *New Slow City*, author and consultant William Powers commits to trying to work only two days a week for a year. It's a radical experiment, and one that pays off in spades. Week after week, he finds that he's able to get done what could take five days in just two, squeezing forty hours of unproductive work into sixteen hours of true productivity. When, midway through his year, he adds to his schedule by accepting a professorship, he experiences the challenges of balancing the goal to work less with new, outside expectations for longer, sometimes unproductive hours. Ultimately, though, he is able to succeed at working less than five days a week by remembering all he learned when taking time into his own hands.

I have tried many of my own experiments with this over the years, while both employed by organizations and when working for myself. Some of those include: not working more than twenty hours a week (highly effective when I was self-employed); doing three months' worth of writing projects in one solo weekend (very effective); only working five hours a week on an extended vacation and seeing if I could stay head above water (mostly, but hard); testing how two days offline over the weekend changes my Monday efficiency (it vastly improves it); and testing how a twelve-day period offline changes my productivity upon return (another great improvement).

Ultimately only you can decide what is right in your situation. The goal is to challenge yourself to place strict boundaries around your work responsibilities, and try to drastically reduce the time that you actually spend on them. Experiment to see what you can do in your own life to reach this aim.

Find an Organization That Cares about Results

Finding an organization that embraces a Results-Only-Work-Environment (ROWE),⁶ where employees are evaluated on performance, not presence; asking to spend more time working remotely (where you can save hours a day on commuting and office socializing); or trying to make a long-term switch to working for yourself are also key thoughts to pursue.

If these bold ideas aren't realistic short-term options and you are employed with an organization that isn't helpful in your attempts to more productively manage your time, try to see if you can make any headway encouraging change from within. It's hard to convince a whole organization to follow suit in editing down the hours worked, but it is possible. I have friends who work for a publishing house in Michigan that has a "summer hours" policy. In the summer, employees come in earlier, leave earlier, and take off half of Friday to go home and be with their families. I loved this idea, and when I asked why they did it, they looked at me blankly. "It's summer in Michigan!" they said. "We only get this weather for a few months a year—and we need to enjoy it." To them, it was obvious. To me, it was revolutionary. By enjoying their summer, they'll surely be more rejuvenated and work better all year long.

S: STREAMLINE THE WORK YOU DO

HACK YOUR MORNING

The power of creating a positive morning routine that sets your day up for success cannot be stressed highly enough, and I'm a raging fan.

Importantly, it's hard to talk about a morning routine without giving a nod to the idea of actually waking up earlier.

We've all heard the rumbling about morning people: *Morning people get more done. Morning people are more effective at everything they do. Morning people win more often.*

The world might as well come clean and say what it really means: *Morning people do better in life.* The reality is that morning people do seem to get an awful lot done, and even night owls have reported that waking up early in the morning can make them feel more productive and more content with the work accomplished. As an experiment, try it out for yourself (this is easy if you work for yourself, but if you work for others you'll have to vary this experiment up to perhaps include a weekend day to understand its purpose).

Work for only three hours tomorrow, and do it at 8 a.m. Then, the next day, start your work at 4 p.m. At the end of each day, think of how productive you felt. Chances are, the day you started work in the afternoon will have left you feeling behind all day—even when you put in the same number of work hours.

I'm naturally a late chronotype (or "night owl" for you animal lovers), and I need more sleep than most people I know, so I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to regularly wake up earlier. One of the first things I realized in my attempts to hack my mornings was that I was going to be tired at first. And, if you're like me and you travel across time zones with some

frequency, this isn't a one-time thing. You will be tired every time you try to force your body to wake up earlier. Luckily, it's a short-term loss for a long-term gain.

DEVELOP A MORNING ROUTINE

Getting up earlier isn't all you need to set yourself up to win. After all, it matters immensely what you do in that morning time. Some years ago I started implementing a seven-step process I have come to call the Present Principle. This is a simple routine built around the acronym PRESENT, which helps me remember to implement the seven most important things I need to do each and every day to keep me present in my life—and to do those things in the mornings.

Here's an overview of my routine. Remember that this is what works for me, and that you may not like all the steps at hand. Just ignore what doesn't work for you, and always work toward the goal of finding something that sets *your* day up for success.

Ultimately, this takes me about twenty to thirty minutes each day, and I often find myself reflecting that it is the single best thing I do to start my day well.

In brief, the letters stand for:

Pray (for guidance, direction)

Read (usually something scriptural or devotional)

Express (put your thoughts on paper)

Schedule (sketch out an overview of the day)

Exercise (you'll feel better when you move daily!)

Nourish (do something for yourself)

Track (at the end of the day, track your progress in how much of your routine you were able to accomplish)

(You can read more about this in my book *The Better Life* or at ClaireDiazOrtiz.com.)

Some days you won't do every step, and sometimes you won't do any of them. But trying to implement a routine such as this can be a powerful motivator.

ORDER YOUR DAY TO WIN

Writing, like dozens of other things people do each and every day, is a task that requires focus and concentration, and a task that usually requires your best work.

I'm an efficient writer and have always enjoyed being able to write quickly. That said, it's critical that I know when I can write well and when I can't. Because if I write when I'm not working well, I've no hope of efficient writing, and every hope of extreme frustration.

The other day, for example, I went to a coffee shop where I was going to spend a few hours writing. I know for sure that it's easier for me to write outside of my home office. Writing at a coffee shop generally works for me, and I can plow through quickly to get a lot done.

But not that day.

That day, I arrived. I sat down on the couch I'm a fan of. I ordered a freshly squeezed orange juice. I pulled out the computer. And that's where it went downhill. Somewhere between checking email, and then checking Twitter, and then rechecking email, and then reading an interesting article, I got all lost and tangled up. Pretty soon I was texting my husband, José: *When are we going grocery shopping? Now, please?*

Because I would rather go grocery shopping than write. Obviously.

In order to work well, you need to know when you are most effective and utilize those times to do your work. I would go further and say you don't just need to know when you're effective, you need to know when you are most effective for the specific task at hand. And so the fact that I wandered into the coffee shop on a holiday at 3 p.m. was never going to turn out well. I do my best writing in the morning, with a large decaf coffee with almond milk or after dinner, with a cool Kombucha. These are times I can write. The afternoon is not my writing time.

We all have times of the day and days of the week that work best for particular tasks, and it is essential to figure out what those times are and to make sure that we respect them to their holiest extent.

When José picked me up to go grocery shopping, I felt icky and annoyed. I had done very little work, and most of it was terrible. The wrong time of day, you see. I'd bungled it all up from the start and needed to remember my own rule. Only work when you can work well.

THE POWER OF FOCUS AND DECISION FATIGUE

If you're reading this book, I'm betting this isn't your first rodeo. You've probably read something about productivity and goal setting before, and if so, you've likely heard the now-common advice to **do the hard thing first thing**. Brian Tracy, author of *Eat that Frog!*, is one of the biggest proponents of this strategy, and his teachings have done much to convince folks that doing hard things first thing is essential.

Got an important memo to write? Do it first thing. Got a mission-critical presentation to finish? Do it in the morning before anything else.

That said, most folks don't actually remember why this is so important. It turns out it's not just about the fact that morning folks are more productive or about the fact that finishing one task helps you feel more productive and encourages you to keep going. Instead, I believe the key reason that doing the hard thing first thing is a good idea is all about warding off the energy-zapping power of decision fatigue and maximizing your energy to focus.

Listen up:

The reason you need to do your big job in the morning is that you will always have the most energy to focus *before* you get decision fatigue.

New to the term *decision fatigue*? Decision fatigue is that vitality-draining experience you get after spending an hour trying to decide on the best flight home to your parents' house for Thanksgiving weekend (wake up early on Monday morning to fly home? Or pay more to fly back Sunday night?), or why you feel tired after an hour at the paint store trying to figure out what color to paint your bathroom (periwinkle? teal? cyan?). It's even the reason why some life-hacking entrepreneurs swear by wearing

the same thing each day, or eating the same thing for lunch! Decision fatigue is the exhaustion you get from making decisions, and it takes a real and present toll on our daily productivity.

By the same token, doing your hard thing requires focus. I believe that one of the biggest reasons we procrastinate on our big work and spend far too much time in email and meetings during our work days is because when we lack focus, we do the thing that doesn't require that much focus at all. Email, it turns out, is a great candidate for that—so one of the great reasons to not get engaged in email first thing is to keep your mind energetic for your big task. Meetings can also fill time on doing things that don't require your maximum focus. Doing hard work, it turns out, requires focus. You will always be most energetic, and most likely to focus, before decision fatigue sets in. Although I'm betting you'll be more energetic earlier in the day, let's find out for sure.

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME OF DAY TO WORK?

My try-hard-do-little day at the coffee shop attempting to churn out some writing was an abject failure. Despite the fact that I am generally someone who can put pen to paper with particular speed, that day I did nothing of the kind.

But what I did do that day was confirm, once again, how important it is to know the time of day I'm best at a host of regular activities in my life.

Things like:

Exercising

Relaxing (yes! There is a time of day for this!)

Leading meetings

Taking conference calls

Giving presentations

Doing my daily PRESENT time

Emailing

Brainstorming

Doing research

Chatting on the phone with family and friends

Having difficult conversations

Reading

If you want to work toward having more productive days, it is essential to figure out the best times of days to do the activities that either make up your Best 20%, or are otherwise required for you and your family to live a great life, and then to build a loose schedule around it. You won't be able to choose things perfectly, but trying to create your schedule around your best times—and knowing why something isn't working well if it's out of order—is just as essential.

Here are a few steps to try to build these better lives we're after using this strategy:

1. Refer to your ACTIVITIES list and look at all the items in the “First Priority: Best 20%” column and the “Third Priority: Things Only I Can Do” column—so, the two columns of ACTIVITIES made up of things that you personally are going to keep doing on a regular basis.

2. Now *think* about when you're best at each of those things. *Really think*. Don't answer right away, but rather take some time to think about it. If an answer doesn't come, keep watching to notice how you behave at different times of day, and how certain activities sit with you. It took me a long time to realize, for example, that attending meetings was a far better use of my lower energy afternoon time than leading presentations, which for me was best in the morning. Watch yourself as you live your life, and think about it, over time. Remember the importance of the Power of Focus and Decision Fatigue when deciding these times, as most people's Best 20% activities likely need that high-energy time before decision fatigue takes away their powers.

Slowly but surely, you can **start to build a life designed around living at the right time of day for you**. Even if you aren't someone with a detailed schedule day in and day out, this can still work incredibly to give you the broad-strokes picture of how you should run your days.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP FORCING YOURSELF

Learning about what time of day you are best suited to do specific work is essential. But there's a corollary lesson that is also important to learn: **Sometimes, it's best to stop working.**

Or, sometimes it's best to stop forcing yourself to do work you're not doing well. In the story I told you, about me at the cafe not doing the writing I was supposed to be there for, I left out an important detail. That detail is the moment I realized that I needed to stop trying. All our lives, we hear again and again about the importance of not giving up. Truth be told, though, most of the advice we receive about the importance of trying hard is not that useful.

Because, in reality, **we all need to know when to stop trying.**

And I don't mean in some large sense of the word—when to quit a job, when to put down a project, when to admit something has truly failed. That's a very valuable thing as well, but right now I'm just talking about the importance of knowing when to stop trying on any given day when you're in the middle of a particular project or activity.

For me, the answer is all about flow.

In certain types of work I do, flow is critical. Otherwise known as “the zone”, this popular positive psychology term named by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi is the mental state when you are completely immersed in what you are doing with intense focus and energized engagement. Writing, for example. Brainstorming, for sure. The act of creation in general, often. Most people report that these tasks go better when they're in the zone. And most of us know very intimately when we feel like we're there, and when we feel like we're not.

The reality is, when you're not in a state of flow, it's rarely going to be to your benefit in terms of time effectiveness to keep going. Now, often that doesn't matter. Say you have a presentation to prepare for in three hours' time and you're not feeling the flow. Too bad. Keep working. But if you do have a choice, that's when you can really make headway. Take the example of writing. If I am in a productive state of flow, I can crank out in two hours something that might otherwise take five.

The same goes for a host of other activities—from doing a spreadsheet to building a house to producing a podcast.

Ultimately, the key to doing your best work in the least amount of time is to find those times that you do specific activities best, and do as much of those activities in that time period as possible.

KNOW WHEN TO JUST DO IT

Sometimes, you’ve just got to sit down and do the work. In Ann Patchett’s memoir, *This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage*, she talks about how to make yourself write when you don’t want to. As Patchett says, **you’ve got to show up**. You’ve got to sit yourself down at your desk for two hours each day without books to distract you, or an open Internet connection. *You’ve just got to sit there*. Doing nothing. And after a week—or maybe two—you will either start writing because you are so bored out of your mind from not writing, or you will get up out of the chair, go watch television, and never write again.

Now, I believe this advice is not limited to writing, and in reality works for anything you’re trying to do. Are you trying to make yourself do the one thing on your list that you never get to because you’d rather come up with a million excuses for how busy you are or how many useless errands you have to run?

Here’s what you need to do: Sit yourself in the chair and do nothing. At the right time of day when you know you should be productive. Day after day. *Until you do that thing*.

It’s worth a try.

And not just for writers.

BATCH WORK

One powerful concept that is essential to add to your productivity arsenal is to make sure you are batching your work. Most individuals do a number of different things in any given hour of the day, with no regard to the fact that switching back and forth between activities—calls, emails, writing memos, coding, doing design layout—takes a huge toll on our productivity. In fact, studies show that we lose up to 40 percent

of our time in any given day by switching back and forth between tasks.⁷ You can reap huge rewards and make yourself infinitely more productive by batching your work to do similar tasks in bulk.

For example, I work hard to keep my meetings and calls batched into certain days of the week and times of day, and my creation days batched into others (this also addresses the issue that creation tasks require more focus). So, for example, if you determine you have about fifteen hours of meetings a week for work, you would try to schedule those as much as possible to fit within two or three days. Especially when working within a large organization, this requires you to make an art of calendaring your meetings well, but as I've seen even within the busy meeting environment of Silicon Valley, it is very possible, and it pays off remarkably.

This works for all manner of tasks, and you'll likely find that most of the things on your ACTIVITIES list will work within this strategy—from running errands, to going to doctors' appointments, to managing email, to doing creation-based work.

As I'll talk about further, I make sure to also process email in batch as well, another huge time-saver.

PUT IT ON THE CALENDAR

My friend Erik Fisher has a podcast called "Beyond the To-Do List." When I first heard about this podcast, I thought Erik had drilled into my brain to create it, as I can't think of anything more fascinating than spending half an hour a week listening to how other people try to be productive. One time when I was on his podcast, he was talking about how to use a calendar smartly. Erik told me that Jerry Seinfeld has said that he became a better joke writer by ensuring that he wrote a joke each and every day. To maintain this discipline he used a calendar with the whole year on one page, and he hung it on a wall where he would always see it. Whenever he did his work for the day, he'd use a big red marker to check off that he'd completed his task.

Some folks say that if it's not on your calendar it won't get done. I agree, and tell folks to calendar as much as you can to

encourage yourself to do what you need to do. This is most essential, I find, when talking about things you wouldn't normally think to block off time for on a calendar.

Like your, ahem, work.

Let me explain:

In your work life, you likely spend 40 percent of your time on email.⁸ If you work in an organization with other employees, you probably spend 35–50 percent of your time in meetings.⁹ In a forty-hour workweek, this means that you might have as little as four hours a week to do the rest of your work!

The only way to get this done in this day and age (aside from editing what you need to do, as we've discussed) is to be sacred with your time, and sacred with your calendar. Keep appointments with yourself to “work” as religiously as you keep appointments with your boss. Finally, make sure that you batch similar activities into similar blocks of time.

TAME YOUR EMAIL

At face value it seems like email is the biggest blow to productivity the world has ever seen. But first impressions can be deceiving.

The reality is that emailing is necessary to our work lives, and we need to email to succeed in our careers. We are expected to exchange emails with clients, partners, and coworkers, and to do so in a timely manner.

Furthermore, since email is not something that can just be “fit in” at the end of the day around “real” work, we need to acknowledge the massive amount of time we spend on this task and make it a part of our work hours. So, if you wondered why you didn't feel restored after your Sunday “off,” consider how that ninety minutes of emailing factored into things.

That said, email is a special kind of work.

The vast majority of email is not creation-based and does not lead to tangible results. Email doesn't write a book or a record a song or cook a gourmet meal for thirty. Hundreds of emails strung together do not lead up to a finished project. Instead, email is a fishbowl of semidistracted people pinging each other

back and forth ad infinitum. As Jon Acuff likes to joke, can you ever be done with the Internet? Do you ever log off and say, “Yup! I finished the Internet today”?

In a word? No.

Same thing goes for email.

You will never be done with email. Someone will always want to ask you to do something. Someone will always want you to get back to them about something. Someone will always be in your inbox, waiting for you to respond yesterday.

So, given all this, how do we go about managing it? How do we acknowledge that it is necessary to do deals, write books, and communicate with communicators, but keep it from getting in the way of creation? Specifically, how do we figure out a productive system to best respond to emails?

First, I believe that 95 percent of the time email does not require the same level of energy as our other projects do. And so I agree with folks who say that you should never email first thing in the morning. Instead, with those first few hours of peak energy that most of us have before decision fatigue sets in, we should focus on our most difficult task of the day, and get that done. This is not a new idea, and it appears in many other books on productivity. Although there are always exceptions—writer Gretchen Rubin, for example, likes starting her days with an hour of email and social media because she finds it energizing—for the vast majority of people email is an energy suck, and should not be the first thing you do when you sit down at your desk.

That said, telling you when *not* to email isn’t suggesting when you *should* respond to emails. So when is it best to respond to emails, if not in the first few hours of the morning when you first turn on your computer?

I believe there are a few key times when it’s best to do real emailing. And by “real emailing” I mean when you spend a chunk of time devoted to working through a bunch of emails, and not when you send a one-off urgent response to something from your iPhone or from your computer while you’re typing furiously in a Word document to meet a deadline in another screen.

Here are some email rules to live by:

- *As much as possible, email should be done in bulk.* There are always exceptions to this rule, but in order to be truly productive you need to slot the bulk of your emailing into specific times of the day—and not too many times! The alternative, which most of us fall into the trap of, is doing our “real” work all day with email perpetually pinging in the background, ready to interrupt our concentration and derail us on a near-constant basis, even for the most minor of queries or cute cat pictures.

- *Email should be done when you have less energy, rather than more.* Figure out when that is, whenever it is, and create a block of time in your schedule to fit in your emailing in that period. In my experience, the lull in the afternoon is a great time to go through a bunch of non-urgent emails.

I recommend thinking about your email in terms of four categories:

- Urgent
- Daily
- Weekly
- Never

In my email inbox, urgent and daily emails generally come from the same sources, and the response time is simply determined by the degree of urgency I associate with the particular note at hand.

Here is what this category of email is mostly made up of:

Urgent and Daily Emails

- *“Live” projects:* In the course of a year in your chosen profession, you might have fifteen projects on your plate (just go with this number for this example—your number may be different). In the course of any given month in that year, you might be in some stage of development/analysis with up to six of those individual projects. However, only a few of those will be considered “live” at any given time. These two or three live projects will get top billing in that month—meaning that the majority of your attention will be focused on them. Sure, you

might think of and respond to notes about some of the other projects—but it is the “live” ones that you are most attuned to.

- *Life-changers*: This is a mixed bag. Generally, though, life-changers are some type of make-or-break news (you sold your company! the IRS is auditing you! your mother’s participating in a flash mob!) or opportunity (a significant press opportunity! a president wants to meet you!). You know these when you see them.

- *Inner circle emails*: We all have one of these circles, and these folks get top billing, even when they are emailing their tenth pregnant stomach shot or stupid animal YouTube clip this week. To be a happy individual connected to friends and family, this is healthy and important (and not unproductive).

Weekly emails

I consider weekly emails to generally be emails that are often about other people’s agendas. Typically, these are queries from people who want things I may or may not be able to give that are not considered urgent, and do not fall into any set of my real priorities. These are emails I do want to respond to, but should not do on a daily basis if I hope to get my own work done.

Never Emails

We all know what these are, and have different standards for what these may be. I believe that email can become even more challenging when you face a regular stream of *unsolicited emails*. These are emails from folks you don’t know who want things, want to tell you things, want to ask you things, or want to yell at you about things (see more on that last one below).

As someone with an active online life and a popular blog, I get a lot of these unsolicited emails. And, for years, I tried hard to respond to many of the ones I get.

But there was always one type of email I tried to never respond to. I called it the Toxic I Hate You Email.

Is there an email sitting in your inbox that screams at you for something you likely never did? An email that bashes you for

something someone read about you that isn't even true? An email that makes inaccurate assumptions about your life and then cuts you down for them?

My advice: just don't respond. It's not worth your time.

In 2006, when I first started a blog, and random people online who didn't know me were able to contact me for the first time in my life, I started learning this lesson. Years later, I'm still at it. I'm not perfect, and I mess up. Just this month, I responded to one because it was so appallingly offensive. The result? I started an idiotic chain of toxic emails that took up my headspace for a few of my short hours on this planet.

Was it stupid? Highly. Did I regret it? Very much so. How did it end? I stopped responding and put a filter in Gmail to immediately trash all future emails from the person. (If I didn't do this, I knew I'd be tempted to keep at it!)

The lesson is simple. Get an insanely negative email in your inbox from someone you don't know about something you're not responsible for? Don't answer. Unless you want to feed a troll. Then go ahead and respond. Spend your energy trying to convince someone of something they'll never be convinced of. Start an email war. But I don't recommend it.

What do I recommend?

Think boundaries, and don't invite crazy in.

An Email System That Works

- Check your email daily to deal with urgent and daily emails.
- Every week, calendar aside time to deal with weekly emails in one fell, focused swoop.
- Never deal with never emails.

MEETINGS

People who have worked with me know how much I dislike meetings, and how I've made something of a study of figuring out why our meeting culture is so broken. When the reality is that we spend 35–50 percent of our work lives in meetings, though, I don't think I'm very controversial in saying there is a problem. Obviously, some meetings need to happen. But the notion that we

need so many of them—with so many participants!—to successfully run our work lives is absolutely preposterous. Here are the critical ways to change the way you think about meetings, reduce the meetings you lead and attend, and make meetings more meaningful when you are there.

Use Email When You Can

The key to avoiding many unnecessary meetings is to do things in writing when you can. Especially these days, when seamless chat tools like Basecamp and Slack and Google Chat exist to make back-and-forth exchanges even more instantaneous than a regular email client, written communication is often infinitely faster in reaching certain goals than having a meeting. There is nothing more frustrating than multiple back-and-forth exchanges to schedule a meeting, then cancel a meeting, then reschedule a meeting, only to finally have it and find out the other person had a quick three-minute question! Although no one thinks they want more email, in terms of time efficiency, email often wins.

Use an Efficient Way to Schedule Meetings

If you do your own scheduling, you know that the least efficient thing you can do is to email back and forth with someone about good times that you can connect. Instead, use a tool to help. If the others you're going to meet with are in your organization, encouraging everyone to keep their calendars updated makes this step irrelevant. If they aren't in your organization or you don't have access to their calendars, try a tool like Calendly.

Block Your Meetings

Remember to block schedule your meetings just as you block schedule other activities in your work life. If you are an introvert, like me, this also helps to deal with the fatigue that comes as the result of meetings.

Allow Buffer Time

This is especially critical if you schedule meetings using the block scheduling technique. Scheduling things back-to-back with no buffer is a recipe for chronic tardiness and stress. Instead, make sure to keep a small buffer between meetings to ensure you'll show up at the next one on time.

Schedule Meetings for the Amount of Time They Really Take

A great way to allow buffer time is also a great tip on its own: don't schedule meetings for the preset thirty- and sixty-minute time slots that appear in your calendar system. People are much more likely to stay on the conference line for a full thirty minutes if it's been scheduled as such, even when they're done with the agenda after twenty. Instead, schedule meetings for the length of time you really need to get things done.

Be Clear if There Is an Agenda

As we have become more aware of some of the problems with meetings in corporate America, the idea that all meetings require an agenda has become a part of popular wisdom. In contrast, I do believe that some meetings simply do not have an agenda, and that's okay. Sometimes people just want to connect, which is important to maintain healthy relationships. In terms of time efficiency, though, it is important to schedule that catch-up, and not just have it spontaneously uproot your schedule and cause you to miss out on another activity you had blocked. Be up-front about its purpose, and you'll save your schedule.

Have an Agenda

The vast majority of meetings do require an agenda, and this is an important step in keeping things on track and on time. Work hard to create simple, clear agendas that everyone can follow. If other people need to prepare something, send the agenda ahead of time so that they can come with what is expected from them.

Be Careful of Standing Meetings

Oftentimes standing meetings (every week, or twice a week, say) are very necessary, and in my past I have regularly held

standing meetings with bosses and with direct reports. The challenge is to make sure you aren't holding standing meetings on principle, and that you're doing it because it's truly needed. A great tip to reduce time spent on scheduling is to set up a weekly meeting with someone you think you might need to talk to two or three times a month, and then simply state that if it's not needed you will cancel a certain number of days (and not hours!) before.

Prepare When You Need to

If you are invited to a meeting and need to prepare, do so. This allows you to give your best effort to the other participants and sets the precedent for what you expect from others.

Only Go to Meetings Where You're Really Needed

If you work in a large organization, you likely have seen the number of meetings folks invite you to increase linearly with the number of years you've been at the company and the number of employees hired. Nip this in the bud and directly ask organizers to remove you from meetings that you aren't adding value to—or that fifteen other people can handle on their own.

Learn Positive Multitasking

The world is down on multitasking, and articles everywhere claim its demise: *Multitasking doesn't work. Mono-tasking is the new multitasking. Do more than one thing at a time and you're doing nothing at all.*

I agree that multitasking as we know it is broken. That said, I believe there is one type of multitasking that does reliably work.

As I've said before, I read a lot. And although this has always been true, it was the year that I discovered the power of positive multitasking that I really upped my reading goals. I did it through a little thing called audiobooks.

When I first read that combining “brainless” physical activities with mental activities is a great way to get more done, I realized that I was already doing this in my regular life, and that it was really a version of positive multitasking. I talked on the phone while cooking the tomato sauce I'd made a thousand times. I

knitted while watching TV. And I listened to audiobooks while doing, well, anything.

When I first started talking about how listening to audiobooks had increased my reading goals on my blog, my friend Amalia responded in the comments:

When do you listen to these? I can't think of any time except exercise when I wouldn't just whip out a book/kindle instead? I'm intrigued.

Especially considering the fact that audiobooks often take longer than reading for most people (you likely read faster than you listen), this was a good question. After all, why bother to listen to an audiobook if you can read it faster, right? Wrong.

The benefit of an audiobook is that it enables positive multitasking, and not just when exercising. Here is when I find time to listen to audiobooks, and when you can do so (or do any other of your brain-“full” activities).

1. *While Exercising:* I'm a huge fan of listening to an audiobook while running or working out. If you want to read and work out at the same time, you have to find a stationary bike (or subject your treadmill to Kindle-induced nausea), but with an audiobook you can be doing anything.

2. *When in Transit:* Driving, taking public transport, or walking anywhere (through the grocery store, through an airport) are all easy times to listen to audiobooks when you wouldn't otherwise be able to read, and when most folks listen to music or nothing at all.

3. *While Eating:* Although you can read books while eating, it's never quite ideal. In contrast, listening to audiobooks is the perfect complement.

4. *While Doing Other Brainless Tasks:* Unloading the dishwasher? Cooking something you've made a thousand times? Putting on makeup? Nursing (sorry guys)? A perfect time to listen to an audiobook. Don't worry about putting on the headphones, just let your iPhone or other device play

it on speaker. I do this all the time, and love the content I'm able to consume in an otherwise "down" moment.

As you might have guessed, many of the tips above don't only work with audiobooks. In fact, they work with all kinds of other brain-needy tasks as well. Inventor Nilofer Merchant is one of many innovators who has jumped on the bandwagon of walking meetings—taking meetings with coworkers while walking around the park, or up a mountain. This isn't a strategy that works only if your coworkers are up for the exercise, though. Having a walking meeting (or a walking call with a friend, family member, or friendly American Airlines representative) over the phone is a smart multitasking move, and has become even more common with the advent of treadmill desks. Bestselling author A. J. Jacobs is one of many people I know now using treadmill desks—and swearing by them.

Just be careful not to pant. During my long marathon training runs I was known for calling friends and family members to chat. One day, twenty minutes into a call, my friend Court asked, "Are you panting?" I confessed.

Remember the basics: positive multitasking combines a truly brainless activity with a brain-"full" activity. Or, said another way, a mental activity with a physical one.

S: STOP WORKING: KNOW WHEN AND HOW

FIND YOUR OASIS

In 2012, when I was working at Twitter, I went to both the Democratic and Republican national conventions. They were both crazy big events that involved nonstop meetings, long nights, and terrible fast food.

But then there was this thing called the Oasis.

The Oasis was the best thing that happened to me in those two weeks. It was Arianna Huffington's attempt to bring peace to the crazy, and boy did it work.

When I arrived in Tampa, I heard mention of this supposed hub of well-being and mindfulness. A place where anyone could go—free—and find peace and calm and books and food and—did I mention?—calm. As the whispers of other convention-goers became impossible to ignore, I knew I had to see it for myself. When I entered into the white-walled space from the Florida heat the first day, I already had high expectations.

Within five minutes, all such expectations were blown out of the water. It turns out that eating a lovely, healthy meal, perusing good books for your body and soul, and watching (and participating) in the yoga and meditation classes in session all around me were exactly the fuel I needed. The Oasis became *my* oasis at both conventions, and since that time, whenever I have found myself in a sterile conference space with thousands of other folks listening to the tenth speaker of the day, I long for such a special experience.

But the reality is that most busy events and busy days don't have an Oasis like the ones Huffington's team set up in Tampa or Charlotte that year. So it's important that we work to create them in the midst of our regular lives.

As Arianna Huffington says in *Thrive*, the point isn't to escape from it all and live on a Wyoming ranch—but rather to find a way to *live well* in the midst of our lives.

Here are some key ways to find your oasis to recharge during the day-to-day:

TAKE A MINI BREAK

One of the best ways to bring yourself back to the moment in a day of stress or overwhelm is just to pull your hands away from the keyboard, move your eyes to the window, and breathe. Let the thoughts come in, and let the thoughts flow out. And breathe all the while. I've heard it said that making sure your feet are on the floor at key moments of grounding can also help you feel more connected to what's going on around you. So try that as well as you breathe. And try the Time Out app on your computer to help remind you to do it.

FIND A MOMENT TO STOP

Mini breathing breaks are great, but what's even better is a ten- or fifteen-minute period of time where you can take a stop and do nothing, all for yourself. I find that the best way to do this—especially in a corporate environment where it's not necessarily possible to stare at the wall for fifteen minutes while others look on in wonder—is to take a short break to go on a walk. *Outside*.

They say that one of the best ways we can reduce stress is by getting out into the beautiful world around us. Indeed, nature is a great way to get the endorphins going and to kick your stress to the curb. Whether it's a beautiful park, a pristine botanical garden, or just a hotel balcony with a view, find nature and go there.

Combine it with a trip to get a coffee, say, or to run an errand you need to do. But in those ten minutes of walking, don't make phone calls. Don't listen to podcasts. Just walk and breathe and wait as the thoughts jamming your mind slowly rearrange themselves into calm.

It's all about finding those small moments where you take time out of the crazy, and finding time to disconnect from the speeding train of your life to bring your mind and heart back to calm.

TAP INTO POSITIVE EMOTIONS

You've likely heard it said that smiling makes you actually feel better. It's true, and I have more than one friend who swears by smiling in the mirror whenever she feels down. Positive emotions like hope are key to making sure your stress is as low as it can reasonably be. Every day, think of a way you can better tap into these key emotions and cultivate the side of your heart and mind that wants to feel happiness. A great way to do this in the midst of your life is to find something you love to do and weave it into your workday.

One of my friends has a demanding job as a physical therapist. Given her long days, she used to find it incredibly helpful to take a minute out of her day to rejuvenate—and she got creative to do so. At lunchtime she'd look for an open room where she could read a novel for thirty minutes by herself as she ate her lunch. It cleared her head and recharged her for the afternoon. Even if you're not an obsessive reader like I am, it turns out that the act of sitting down, resting, and reading a good novel can really make you feel better. The key is to immerse yourself in a story—and not a nonfiction business book—to really turn your mood around.

QUIT SOMETHING TODAY

“Every single Thursday, I quit something.”—Bob Goff

Another way to limit your activities to your best work is to make a consistent, regular routine of taking things off your plate.

My friend Bob Goff is famous for doing just this, and for encouraging others to do the same. Bob has a crazy full life: he runs a law firm and a nonprofit organization, serves as the honorary consul to the Republic of Uganda, is a bestselling author, and has a vibrant community of friends and family he takes pride in spending regular time with. Every day, Bob pops up

in my email or my Instagram feed doing amazing things somewhere in the world: helping kids in northern Iraq, building a chapel on a remote British Columbian island, and cheering on his friends wherever they are. In order to accomplish all this, he has to make sure he's not doing what he shouldn't.

This is true of all of us. Every day, we continue to do things—or take on new things—that don't connect with our true passions or goals. Little by little, we stuff our lives and lose our way in the process. Bob attacked this problem directly by starting to quit one single thing every Thursday. As he learned, the single act of cutting down and cutting back can have an incredible cascading effect in your life. Even if it's not Thursday, choose one thing you can quit today. Try it again next week. Slowly but surely you'll work to pare down your life.

TAKE A WEEKEND OFF

Two days isn't a lot of time. And, as many of us know, two days can easily be taken up with shuttling kids back and forth to sports practices and birthday parties. To make our weekends count, we have to find a real break from work, and a real way to rejuvenate for the week ahead.

Laura Vanderkam, author of *What the Most Successful People Do on the Weekend*, suggests a great strategy for making sure you are maximizing rejuvenation in your weekends, and it's all about something she calls “anchor events.” The concept is this: Choose a few pleasurable activities you want to do over your weekend, and schedule them in. It may be “bake a cake with my daughter on Saturday,” or “watch a movie as a family on Friday night,” or “go biking with a friend.”

Whatever your anchor events are, by scheduling in this fun time, you'll be able to take advantage of the happiness we all get from the anticipation of them. Additionally, you'll come to the end of your weekend feeling like you truly enjoyed yourself and didn't fritter the time away with reality TV marathons. In general, the strategy of scheduling downtime doesn't require a whole weekend, and can also work well even in an afternoon.

TAKE A VACATION

With a longer period of time on the table, the stakes are higher, and the potential for rest and rejuvenation is even greater.

They say that 57 percent of Americans don't take all their vacation days each year, and I'm surely not the only one who thinks there's a problem with that.¹⁰ A vacation is the perfect pause that more of us need in our work lives. A good time-out can reenergize and refocus you to win, and vacations are great opportunities to do just this.

Marisa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo, is known for taking a one-week vacation every four months.¹¹ For her, the reward for four months of head-down work is getting one week off to play. Critically, though, time off is not just about playing. As Mayer says, it's really about recharging. We need time off to make our time "on" really count.

Author Michael Hyatt, who used to work in corporate America as the CEO of Thomas Nelson, now works for himself, allowing him to take a sabbatical each summer. He values this time immensely. Ken Blanchard, the San Diego-based business author who has sold over twenty-one million copies of his many books, spends his summers at his lake house in New York. Although he does do some work, he prioritizes relaxing time with friends and family.

Although we often hear about the importance of starting things, we easily forget that starting only works if we take regular stops as well. And as these leaders show, stops can come in all shapes and sizes. A digital one, I believe, can prove one of the best kinds.

DIGITALLY DISCONNECT

When I started tracking the time I spent online, one of my clear goals was to reduce that time. I wanted to be more productive, with less wasted time spent staring at a flat screen. I've often found that if I'm not being productive in the middle of my day and find myself on my dreaded Internet loop (email, Twitter, Instagram, CNN, email, Twitter, Instagram, repeat), stepping

away from my computer is the single best thing I can do to refocus my priorities.

On the weekends, I take the same approach. By keeping my computer off for at least one full day—and hopefully two—I can “detox” enough so that, come Monday morning, I’m excited to dive back in. Stepping away also makes the heart grow fonder, of course.

A few years ago, I started to explore the idea of taking longer digital breaks or “digital detoxes,” and along the way I learned a number of key lessons about how important getting away from our screens is, and how to create truly effective digital detoxes.

Here are some key things to remember when considering a digital break:

Decide What Kind of Break It Will Be

The first key step in any break-taking is figuring out what exactly you’re taking a break from. A break from social media? A break from email? A break from the Internet at large? A break from all flat screens? There are a variety of different types of digital breaks. In *The Winter of Our Disconnect*, Susan Maushart eschewed all flat screens from the house for six months—but allowed herself to use her computer outside of the home to meet her writing deadlines. Baratunde Thurston left the Internet for twenty-five days—and turned off text messages. Author Kyle Tennant in *Unfriend Yourself: Three days to Detox, Discern, and Decide about Social Media* promotes the idea of taking a fast from social media in particular. One person I read about allowed one email check per day. Different breaks can work for different aims.

The key is to define what the break is in specific terms. Then go a step further and write it down so you won’t be confused. When I took a twelve-day digital detox, I did just that, filling my journal with constant reminders of what I was doing a la “*You are on a complete digital detox, Claire. Remember!*”

Set Your Break Boundaries and Stick to Them

Boundaries are always tough, and your break boundaries are just as challenging. Even on a social media break, say, you might wake up one morning with an insatiable itch to scroll through

Facebook for the teams of babies born in your network overnight. Don't do it. A break is a break, and if you've decided to take one, uphold your boundaries.

A total tech blackout is sometimes a good thing, as I learned on my twelve-day complete digital break. The first couple of mornings I could practically feel the shakes as I tried to reach for my iPhone to scroll my emails and tweets before getting out of bed. My only "cheat" was to receive text messages if something crazy happened and I had to get online. Another year on vacation, I decided I wasn't into such a total blackout, so instead I did a very scaled-back version of a detox, staying off my computer but checking emails occasionally on my iPhone. Since I rarely respond to many emails on my iPhone, it kept me out of the email fray.

Prepare Beforehand

Depending on the level of intensity of your digital detox, you've got to plan. Write blog posts, schedule social media updates, and set auto-responders on your email addresses alerting folks. Especially if you are going offline for more than a few days, making sure that you've got a good auto-response is key. Importantly, you've got to do it right in order to encourage folks to not expect a response, and not try to contact you through other means. On my twelve-day total digital detox, I encouraged folks in my auto-responder to "text me if needed." The result? A number of non-urgent texts coming. Next time, I know to use *much* stronger language.

Alert the Important Folks

There are folks who just might need to know when you're stepping out of life for a little while. Friends and family who might wonder why you're not responding at once to every long cat pic they send? A client you're working with on a project due after your break will end? An assistant who will need to help out just a bit more while you're away? All these people need to be in the loop—and doing so beforehand (and then reiterating with an out-of-office response message that conveys clear information on

when you'll be back and how to deal with things while you're gone) is essential.

Make It Public

Another benefit to telling your friends and family what you're doing: it will encourage them to keep you on track. Tell them to slap your wrist, or guide you gently toward the ink and quill for your communication needs.

Start Your Day Right

As you might imagine, a perfect offline morning shouldn't start with you tweeting from the pillow. Instead, use your digital detox to tap into your offline morning routine. When consciously trying to disconnect, what you do first thing in the morning is more important than ever.

Have a Backup Plan

There is always the chance that someone really needs to get in touch, and so it's a good idea to have a backup plan. Whether that means hiring someone to help out (or tasking a current hire with the job), or checking texts on occasion for urgent messages, think of the way that you'll feel both digitally disconnected and responsible at the same time.

Working better is about stopping more, and don't let anyone tell you differently. Stop the madness, get the break you need, and watch your productivity soar.

CONCLUSION

In this book we've explored what it means to live in a world where there are too many things on our plate. This is our reality, and it's not going away. As such, my goal is to enjoy more of life in the midst of the busy journey. The way to do this, I believe, lies in understanding how to do better work. The teachings in this book are the exact strategies I have used in my own life to do as much as I do—and to (usually) not feel harried in the process. It is a process, and one I work at every day. The Do Less method, for me, has been nothing short of transformative. I believe it can work nicely in your own world as well. The key is to take the time, do the work, and then reap the rewards. Ultimately, it's about doing your best work, and finding more time for living along the way.

That said, none of this living is worth it if you don't have a clear idea of what you're living for. Each of us has an inner compass telling us why we're here and what we want out of this time on earth—to pursue the calling of our life, to raise our family well, to be a leader in our faith or community, to serve as a source of motivation for the world. For me, that means discovering why God put me on earth at this particular time and place and then doing that thing He wants me to do. Finding clarity on what your vision is for a life of happiness and fulfillment is absolutely essential. Living well means nothing if you don't have the meaning behind your life to hold up to the light. Your meaning might differ from that of your neighbor's, but what won't differ is its existence. We all have something that drives us and that makes the journey worth every step. The key is to figure out what it is so you can determine how you want to live. Then do everything you can to make as much time for that living.

RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER READING

Here are some of my favorite books on productivity, goal setting, mindfulness, and balancing it all.

- *The Balance Within*, Esther M. Sternberg
- *Eat that Frog: 21 Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time*, Brian Tracy
- *New Slow City*, William Powers
- *The Four-Hour Work Week*, Tim Ferriss
- *The One Minute Manager*, Ken Blanchard
- *Rework*, Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson
- *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast*, Laura Vanderkam
- *The Power of Full Engagement*, Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz
- *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg
- *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi
- *The Willpower Instinct*, Kelly McGonigal
- *The Winter of Our Disconnect*, Susan Maushart
- *The Best Yes*, Lysa Terkeurst
- *The Fringe Hours*, Jessica Turner
- *The Way We're Working Isn't Working*, Tony Schwartz
- *The Clockwork Muse*, Eviatar Zerubavel
- *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott
- *Accidental Genius, Using Writing to Generate Your Best Ideas, Insight, and Content*, Mark Levy
- *Start: Punch Fear in the Face, Escape Average, and Do Work That Matters*, Jon Acuff
- *Vision Map: Charting a Step-by-Step Course for Your Biggest Hopes and Dreams*, Joël Malm
- *The Well-Balanced World Changer*, Sarah Cunningham
- *The Happiness Project*, Gretchen Rubin
- *Internal Time*, Till Roenneberg

- *Unfriend Yourself: Three days to Detox, Discern, and Decide about Social Media*, Kyle Tennant
- *The Better Life: Small Things You Can Do Right Where You Are*, Claire Diaz-Ortiz

NOTES

1. Mark Levy, *Accidental Genius: Using Writing to Generate Your Best Ideas, Insight, and Content* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010).
2. Paul J. Meyer, *Attitude Is Everything: If You Want to Succeed Above and Beyond* (Meyer Resource Group, 2003).
3. <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/average-american-watches-5-hours-tv-day-article-1.1711954>.
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10. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/TRAVEL/05/23/vacation.in.america/index.html>.
11. <http://www.businessinsider.com/successful-people-who-barely-sleep-2012-9>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Diaz-Ortiz is an author, speaker, and technology innovator who has been named one of the 100 Most Creative People in Business by *Fast Company*. Claire was an early employee at Twitter, Inc., where she led social innovation.

In Claire's time at Twitter, she was called everything from "The Woman Who Got the Pope on Twitter" (*Wired*) and "Twitter's Pontiff Recruitment Chief" (*The Washington Post*) to a "Force for Good" (*Forbes*) and "One of the Most Generous People in Social Media" (*Fast Company*).

Claire is the author of several books, including, *Twitter for Good: Change the World One Tweet at a Time*; *Greater Expectations: Succeed (and Stay Sane) in an On-Demand, All-Access, Always-On Age*; *Hope Runs: An American Tourist, a Kenyan Boy, a Journey of Redemption*; and *The Better Life: Small Things You Can Do Right Where You Are*.

She is a frequent international speaker on social media, business, and innovation and has been invited to deliver keynotes and trainings at organizations like the Vatican, the US State Department, Verizon, South by Southwest, TEDX, and many others.

She writes a popular business blog at ClaireDiazOrtiz.com and serves as a LinkedIn Influencer, one of a select group of several hundred global leaders chosen to provide original content on the LinkedIn platform.

Claire holds an MBA from Oxford University, where she was a Skoll Foundation Scholar for Social Entrepreneurship, and has a BA and an MA in anthropology from Stanford University.

She is the cofounder of Hope Runs, a nonprofit organization operating in AIDS orphanages in Kenya.

She has appeared widely in television and print news sources such as CNN, BBC, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Good*

Morning America, The Today Show, The Washington Post, Fortune, Forbes, Fast Company, and many others.

Read more about her at
www.ClaireDiazOrtiz.com or via [@claire](https://twitter.com/claire) on Twitter.

* * *

Now that you have finished, share with your friends! Write a review on Goodreads and other book-sharing sites, Tweet & Facebook your thoughts on the subject, and share your testimony on how this book impacted you at mytestimony@moody.edu.

Thank you,

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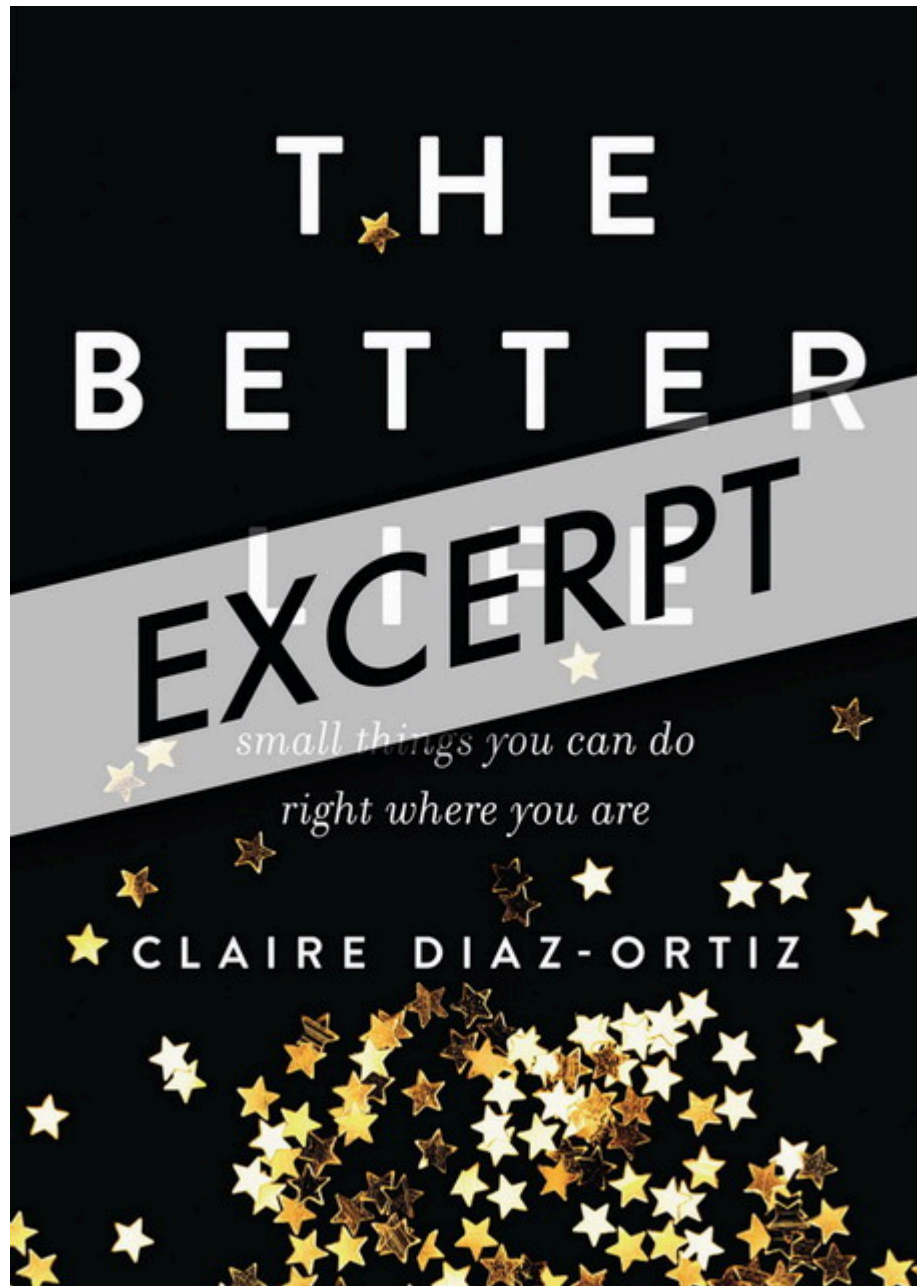
More from Claire Diaz-Ortiz

Now that you've enjoyed *Design Your Day*, we know you'll love *The Better Life*, Claire's motivational memoir about how little changes make all the difference.

In winsome style, Claire coaches readers with vignettes from her uncommon life. A top-level Twitter employee, world traveler, author, non-profit founder, and mom, she shares action steps and reflections on balance, productivity, and other essentials for rocking it at life every day.

Take some advice from Claire: Say yes. Say no. Quit something. Write more. Worry less. Travel. Pray. Pause. Rest. Know your limits. Do Hatchi Patchi. Don't beat yourself up. Be still. Be thankful. Be you, but your best.

For more tips and advice from Claire, check out the following excerpt from *The Better Life*.





SET YOUR INTENTIONS

Like most of us, I want to be happier. Whether it's waking up with more spark or going to bed more satisfied with my day, I want to open my life to the opportunity for greater joy.

As such, I love to read books about happiness. My writer pal Gretchen Rubin has written a few of those, and in one of them she recommends a small, powerful idea that has taken hold to become a big, strong force in my own life.

That idea is to choose a word each and every year that represents the year you have in front of you. Rather, to choose a word *for* your year. (Oh, and take a cue from Gretchen: years don't need to start in January.) Choose one single word that imbues the type of year you wish to have, one word that can serve as a guidepost for what you want in the season to come. A singular word you can always harken back to in moments of darkness and doubt. One word that informs your decisions, crystalizes your passions and priorities, and embodies you—the new you!—in the months ahead.

Depending on the type of year you seek, there are many words that can do the trick. Words like Move, Pause, Breathe, Dance, Less, Family, Health, Travel, and Choose all hold a certain special sauce.

The guidelines are simple. The word can be a verb or a noun. It can be a long word or a short word. But it is key that the word

brings together everything you fervently hope to live and breathe in the year to come. One word to inform and synthesize the year you have ahead of you. One word to mean everything you want the year to be, and one word that will help serve as a guiding light when times get tough and you're not clear on where your priorities are.

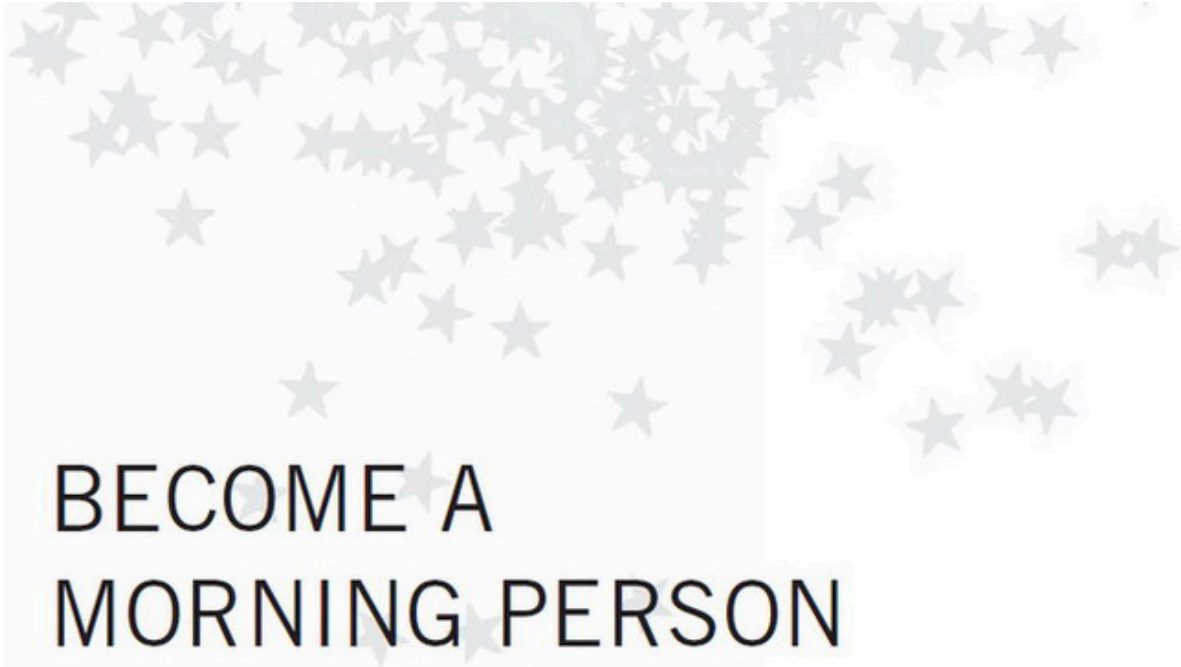
A few years ago, my word of the year was Rest.

It was a word that meant the world to me in that season of my life. I was harried and overwhelmed from a few too many years of corporate globetrotting, and I needed a daily reminder to do less. And so I did. Although my Rest might not have been as restful as the Rest that some might be able to enjoy (I saw nary a beach that entire year), my word still served as a key force in getting me to slow down. It helped me to make decisions, and to keep in mind what was really important when difficult choices arose.

Should I go to that social event—or stay home? Should I say yes to what could be a great opportunity, or pass it up to wait for something better to come along? Should I travel to that work meeting—or call into it instead?

When life and work calls for us to be busy, it is hard to slow down. However, by attempting to make this word forefront in my mind, I sought to make small strides that would lead to notable changes and positive transformation. I knew I wouldn't be perfect. I knew I would never get it 100 percent. But I did know that by setting the intention, I could make some progress.

In the end, I did. And you can, too. Set a word now, and watch your year rise up to take shape around it.



BECOME A MORNING PERSON

If you've heard it once, you've heard it a thousand times: The early bird gets the worm.

It turns out that cultures all over the world have concepts that convey the same idea.

Morning people get more done. Morning people are more effective. Morning people win more often.

The reality is that morning people *do* seem to get an awful lot accomplished, and even night owls have reported that short periods of morning waking have made them feel more productive, even if they really aren't.

As a self-professed night owl (or “late chronotype”) who has worked hard to get up earlier, I can vouch that waking up in the morning earlier can make you *feel* you've done more. In contrast, doing a lot between 1:00 and 4:00 a.m., like many a raging night owl, invariably makes me feel behind when I drag myself out of bed at noon the next day. Waking at 5:30 a.m., watching the sunrise, and literally feeling that you beat everyone at the first competition of the day—getting up—is something that just can't be matched.

There are many reasons to try your hand at getting up earlier. Here are my favorites:

You get the best of you. If you're generally sleeping enough and you aren't suffering from health problems, then you

should feel rested in the morning. In those first precious hours, you'll have energy in abundance to do what you need to do. This is the golden hour of productivity, and by getting up early you can use it to the best of your ability to kill your to-do list and really get rocking.

You get the best of others. I once heard someone say that people are nicer in the mornings because they haven't yet had the chance to have a bad day. It just might be true, and you just might benefit as a result.

You get quiet. Fewer people are around in the morning—in your house, in your office, and in the world at large. That means quiet, peaceful time for you to do what you need to do. Make the best of these moments.

Getting things done early makes you happier all day long. The earlier you get done the necessities, the better you'll feel the rest of the day, no matter what pops up to surprise you. You're also far less likely to be off-track at the end of the day, because you'll have at least gotten *something* done in the morning.

You're likely to get more done by the end of the day. Even if your workday is the exact same nine hours it might have been had you started work at eleven in the morning, by starting earlier you're likely to get time on your side through the simple art of personal motivation. The more you get done earlier, the more you're likely to get done *as the day progresses*. By the end of the day, you'll be farther along than you would have been had you started later on.

Even if you agree that waking up earlier is a good move for you, however, it's not (yet) possible to turn on a magic switch to make it happen. Instead, you've got to work a bit to make it a reality. Thankfully, it may be easier than you think. In my efforts to do just this, I've learned a few key lessons:

Accept the Fact That You Will Be Tired at First

The first step in becoming a morning person is acknowledging that the initial adjustment won't be pretty. If you are not already in a state of perpetual exhaustion (I hope not!), when you try to go to bed two to three hours earlier than you normally do, it just isn't going to work. Thus, the result of the initial shift to waking earlier will be a tired, grumpy you no one wants to be around. Warn those around you, and remind yourself you're doing it for a greater cause. Better yet, try to combine it with that necessary red-eye flight you have to take, or that crying baby that just can't seem to get to sleep on her own (I have one you can borrow, if needed).

Immediately Find a Way to Reward Yourself in the Morning

Especially in the beginning, you've got to find a way to reward yourself for the effort of getting out of bed before the sun brightens the sky. What is one thing you wish you could do each day that you rarely give yourself time for? Reading a novel? Watching a TV show you love? Doing the Wednesday *New York Times* crossword (not too hard, not too easy)? In the beginning, do that one fun thing each morning to reward yourself for getting up and to make you excited to keep doing so. One day soon, you won't need it.

Start a Morning Routine

Once you've found a way to create the initial shift to getting sleepy earlier at night, and have done so for a few days in a row, you've got to find a way to develop a strong morning routine that will get you waking up at that same (early) time each morning. As we'll talk about, no one routine works for all breathing beings, and ultimately, it's all about finding a series of morning steps that work for you, and then making them automatic.

Soon enough, your (more) productive self will thank you.



TRY THE PRESENT PRINCIPLE

No matter what time you get up, having a morning routine will help ground your day. Most days, I start my mornings with a seven-step process I have come to call the Present Principle. It's a simple routine built around the simple acronym P.R.E.S.E.N.T., which reminds me to implement the seven most important things I need to do daily to keep me present—and to do those things in the mornings.

My routine won't work for everyone, but I hope it will give you the inspiration you need to come up with a morning routine of your own that will lead you to success. As you'll see as you read through mine, the key to developing a routine of your own is to identify the handful of important activities you want to accomplish each and every day, and then to front-load them into your morning.

The 7 Steps in My Morning Routine (the Present Principle):

P—PRAY (or PAUSE)

I start my days with a steaming cup of bulletproof coffee or tea and a prayer of guidance, thanks, and direction for my day ahead. Another way to think of this moment more broadly is as a “pause”—for prayer and contemplation. It's a critical way to start a busy life, day in and day out.

R—READ

After praying and pausing, I dive into reading something inspirational and motivational. I generally work through one particular devotional for a few months, and sometimes have a few going at a time. Make sure to find one that speaks to you personally, and not one that someone else loves but you think reads like fluff (been there, done that). If you aren't into the idea of inspirational or spiritual reading at this groggy hour, think about a good read on business, leadership, or productivity that you can slowly work through sections of, day in and day out.

E—EXPRESS

After reading, I then take my own thoughts to paper. I use a black Moleskine journal that has seen better days, but a Post-it note or Evernote document will do just fine. The key is just to get your feelings out there. Worries, thoughts, thanks, angst; anything and everything.

S—SCHEDULE

Now's the time in my routine that I sketch out an overview of my day and do a check-in on my week. I typically spend five minutes on this step—drafting my day's schedule and checking in on the week at large. I do this on paper, with the goal of this step being offline, but you may find it works best to use your computer or an app.

E—EXERCISE

I try to get in exercise of some sort every day (I run most days, except when my jogging stroller gets the best of me), and I find that doing it in the morning is the most effective way to keep at it. Experts say this is also smartest when working to form solid habits. Move daily, and you'll feel better.

N—NOURISH

Each day, do one thing that truly nourishes you. Go on a walk. Take a bubble bath. Read a novel. Talk to someone you love. Do something for you. It's fun to do this in the morning

straightaway, but if not, put this off until later as a reward for getting your big tasks of the day done.

T—TRACK

At the day's end, look back at how many of the steps in your routine you were able to accomplish. Can you do better tomorrow? Track your progress, and think about what is working and what isn't. This will better poise you to make tweaks and win long-term.

I'm not always perfect. Some days I don't do every step, and some days I don't do any of them at all, but trying to implement this routine each and every day has been an incredible motivation for me and has given me the conviction that morning routines can make anyone's day better and brighter.

Now you try it.



In 2008, I was in business school in England when Biz Stone, the cofounder of Twitter, came to visit Oxford University. By that point, I had been in touch with folks on his team for a few years: first, when the original Blogger crew found and promoted my travel blog to the world; and later, when the Blogger team and Biz started Twitter and they featured me as an early user, tweeting away from my life trotting the globe and living in an orphanage in Kenya.

During my time in business school, I had been thinking a lot about what I wanted to do next with my life. I had a strange background—having spent time in both digital innovation and in the nonprofit world of social change—and I wanted to marry the two. Silicon Valley seemed like the obvious place to do so.

During Biz’s visit, one of our mutual friends told him I’d take him on a tour of Oxford. I’m not a very good tour guide, though, since I get lost even in my hometown of Berkeley, where my parents have lived my entire life. So that didn’t seem like such a great idea. Instead, I introduced myself after he gave a talk to my business school class, and we hung out while some reporters asked him if it was true that Facebook was trying to buy Twitter. That evening, he sent me a text, telling me to come stop by.

I go to bed early, and England is cold in October, and I was already cozy in my small turreted room at an Oxford college, and

I'm one of the more introverted people you'll ever meet. I wanted to say no. I really did. But a different part of me took over. The part of me that sensed that something might happen if I went, and that I should make the effort.

And I did. I put on the big tweed coat I had bought at the thrift shop the week before and walked all the way to where he was staying, the famous old jail that is now the fancy hotel.

And that night Biz said I should come work for Twitter. (There was more to it, of course, as I talked about what I wanted to do with my career, and what he wanted to build with Twitter, and how he wanted to use the platform to change the world, and why people called him Biz anyway, but I'm skipping over that part.)

And I did.

And it was one of my best yeses.



The year I decided to create a word of the year was the year I also tried to learn how to better say no. It made sense, of course. My word of the year was Rest, and as I learned almost immediately, the only way to rest more was to limit the things you say yes to.

When I had a choice between X and Y, I remembered my word. When I needed to make a decision between going out or staying home, I remembered my word. When I wanted to drink another double shot espresso and fire off a string of emails to world changers about things we should do together, I *remembered my word*. And this meant I had to say no on many occasions when my normally overactive brain and body simply wanted to shout YES!

Saying NO, as everyone knows, is hard. And so I had to work to get better at it.

One day, to practice my NO muscle, I tried to come up with ninety-nine ways to best say it. Ninety-nine ways that kindly, smartly, officially ended the ask in question in favor of me having more time to say yes to something better.

My aim was that each word or phrase should be truthful, firm, and not apologetic or explanatory. Sometimes I succeeded and sometimes I failed. But I did finish that list. And this is what it looked like.

Ninety-Nine Ways to Say No

1. Not now.
2. Look! Squirrel! (This wasn't my idea, but I loved it. And I will be forever grateful to the blog reader who sent in this gem.)
3. My word of the year is Rest, so I can't fit another thing in.
4. Nope.
5. No thanks, I won't be able to make it.
6. Not this time.
7. Heck no.
8. No way, José! (Since my husband is named José, this is a favorite.)
9. Regrettably, I'm not able to.
10. It's that time of the year when I must say no.
11. It's a Wednesday. I have a "No on Wednesday" policy.
12. Ask me in a year.
13. I know someone else who might be a fit for that.
14. You're so kind to think of me, but I can't.
15. Maybe another time.
16. Sounds great, but I can't commit.
17. Rats! Would have loved to.
18. I'm slammed.
19. Perhaps next season when things clear up.
20. I'm at the end of my rope right now so I have to take a rain check.
21. If only it worked;)
22. I'll need to bow out.
23. I'm going to have to exert my No muscle on this one.
24. I'm taking some time.
25. Thanks for thinking of me, but I can't.
26. I'm in a season of No.
27. I'm not the person for you on this one.

28. I'm learning to limit my commitments.
29. I'm not taking on new things.
30. Another time might work.
31. It doesn't sound like the right fit, but many thanks.
32. I'm resting right now.
33. I'm not sure I'm the best person for it.
34. No thank you, but it sounds lovely.
35. It sounds like you're looking for something I'm not able to give right now.
36. I believe I wouldn't fit the bill, sorry.
37. It's not a good idea for me.
38. Not now.
39. I'm trying to cut back.
40. I won't be able to help.
41. If only I had a clone!
42. I'm not able to set aside the time needed.
43. I won't be able to dedicate the time I need to it.
44. I'm head-down right now on a project, so I won't be able to.
45. I wish there were two of me!
46. I'm honored, but can't.
47. NoNoNoNoNoNo.
48. I'm booked into something else.
49. I'm not able to make it.
50. Thanks, but no thanks.
51. I'm not able to make it this week/month/year.
52. Bye now.
53. I've got too much on my plate right now.
54. I'm not taking on anything else.
55. Bandwidth is low, so I won't be able to make it work.
56. I wish I could make it work.
57. Not possible.

58. I wish I were able to.
59. If only I could!
60. I'd love to—but can't.
61. Darn! Not able to fit it in.
62. Nah.
63. No thanks, I have another commitment.
64. It's just not a good time.
65. Sadly I have something else.
66. Unfortunately not.
67. Something else will be taking up my time. Sorry.
68. Apologies, but I can't make it.
69. Thank you so much for asking. Can you keep me on your list for next year?
70. I'm flattered you considered me, but unfortunately I'll have to pass this time.
71. Unfortunately it's just not a match.
72. No, sorry, that's not really my thing.
73. Nope. Again.
74. Eeek! (no.)
75. No, I'd rather not, but thanks anyway.
76. I can't make it work.
77. It just won't fit right now.
78. I'm really buckling down on my priorities right now, so I can't.
79. No says I.
80. My family won't allow me to take this one on.
81. This isn't a good season.
82. Ick.
83. Nein.
84. Sorry, no can do.
85. I only say yes to very select opportunities, and unfortunately this doesn't meet my criteria.

86. The demands would be too much for me.
87. It's not feasible for me to take this on.
88. I wish I had all the time in the world.
89. My body double can.
90. In another life.
91. I cry, but decline.
92. My advisors won't agree to it.
93. My body says yes, but my heart says no.
94. I'm not the person you're looking for.
95. I don't have an iota of bandwidth left in my wee brain.
96. Somewhere over the rainbow.
97. If only.
98. N to the O.
99. NO.

* * *

We hope you enjoyed this excerpt from *The Better Life*. For more from Moody Publishers in this genre and others, visit your favorite local or online bookstore.

More from Moody Collective

The Leap

In the past, the world of work was one of full-time jobs, long careers at the same company, and a steady paycheck for those in the system. Now, the economy has radically changed. We are living in a world of part-time jobs, many career switches, and instability in our work. President of Crown and former CEO of an international company, Robert Dickie has a wealth of knowledge and experience to draw from. With these he outlines seven proven strategies for operating in our ever-changing landscape and helps you make an action plan to achieve results.

Click [HERE](#) for excerpt.

Vision Map

Whether you want to start a business, raise a family, run a marathon, plant a church, restore a relationship, or climb a mountain, you can take practical steps to see your vision come to be.

Vision Map is not a formula for overnight success, but it is a template to start anyone on the path to envisioning a God-given dream. God often gives us a difficult problem to solve, and we just need a push in the right direction to find the answer.

Click [HERE](#) for excerpt.



CHAPTER 1



“Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway.”—JOHN WAYNE

I’ve always done some of my best thinking on late-night flights. The military afforded me the opportunity to travel all around the world. Although each location is very different once you set foot on the ground, the world has a quiet peace as you fly high above it at night and watch the lights of the cities below you. It is a utopian view of a world without borders, issues, and problems. I have always thought those cityscapes at night are some of the most beautiful scenes. As I fly over neighborhoods and cities, I often think about the families below and their stories, hopes, dreams, and challenges. Everyone has unique challenges they are facing. During one particular flight from Milwaukee to Flint, Michigan, on a night in October of 2009, I started thinking about the recent and crippling economic collapse and the pain most households were going through below me. The Great Recession was in full effect. Our society was struggling and calling Americans to rise up—there was a global shift taking place, even as I flew over the Midwest landscape. There were businessmen and women leaving their safe and secure jobs to branch out on their own—pursuing new careers, creating start-ups, and buying out struggling companies. The writing was on the wall for me, but I was afraid.

OUR BLACK SWAN EVENT

The Great Recession marked something we call a Black Swan event, which in this case is the employment shift that began in 2007 and continues today. Black Swan events mark unpredictable, game-changing shifts that forever alter the course of what comes next. In retrospect, observers can see the event was bound to happen. They are like the proverbial meteor striking Earth, changing life as we know it. This Black Swan caused a new direction for job creation we are only beginning to address.

For aspiring workers, the strike of the economic collapse permanently altered their dreams for their bright future careers, and the repercussions remain severe. Today, as more Americans struggle to build a full-time life in a part-time world, the economic shift in job creation from steady employment to a patchwork of professions leaves many wondering when this will end. The *Washington Times* recently reported that 77 percent of the jobs created in 2013 were part-time.¹ Very little attention is being paid to how the historically low labor-participation rate is impacting evolving economic systems. Many assume the drastic shift to part-time job creation is an aftereffect of the crash that will slowly dissipate as the economy improves and we will resume the normal full-time employment we experienced in the past. I don't believe this is true. (See the chart on the next page.)

There are currently over 200 million people worldwide who are officially unemployed, with the unofficial number being much larger. Of that number, 75 million are under the age of 25.² Nation states are alarmed at the growing unemployment of the world's youth and the potential destabilizing impact this could bring. This problem continues to grow daily, but unemployment is not the only issue—it is the lack of full-time jobs being created, and thus more and more of the global population need to patch together multiple jobs, freelance work, or “gigs” to make a living. This part-time workforce continues to grow. For example, a staggering 47 percent of the workforce in the UK is part-time.³



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS12032194>)

Adapted from Alyson Hurt/NPR (www.npr.org/blogs/money/2011/09/13/140432433/-49-445)

Three issues in particular are evidence of a Black Swan event reworking our economic structure: the increasing rate of globalization, the technological revolution displacing workforces, and the unbalanced laws and regulations governing free-market capitalism.



Today, globalization swallows up industries across national lines as businesses seek economies of scale to keep costs low and stockholder

returns high. Even China is now losing jobs to other countries offering cheaper labor. Outsourcing in search of cheap labor continues to displace more workers than any other event in the economy. In the proceeding chapters we will discuss the huge opportunities that are available for those who are seeking advanced education and technical skills. However, for those who are in the blue-collar jobs, I hope this book will be the proverbial “canary in the coal mine” and that we are able to sound the alarm to take action, seek more education and advanced training, and prepare for the shifts that are already well underway. Everyone needs to make these adjustments, but those in the manual-labor, less-skilled marketplace should be sprinting in the direction of change.

The second strike for such company-driven communities is how technological advances are also making large workforces irrelevant. If your job can be automated, it will be automated. It is just a matter of time. Bill Gates commented, “Technology over time will reduce demand for jobs, particularly at the lower end of the skill set ... 20 years from now, labor demand for lots of skill sets will be substantially lower. I don’t think people have that in their mental model yet.”⁴ This will create instability in regions all around the globe as workforces are displaced and left behind unable to find work in the new technologically advanced global market. In a recent *USA Today* article John Shinal wrote, “Workers wanting secure employment in coming decades will need skills that complement software applications rather than compete with them.”⁵ Career fields that will be hard to automate are ones that will rely on people skills, relationships, creativity, ones that leverage emotional intelligence, and ones where interpersonal activity is critical for success.

However, the “knowledge economy” (jobs that require advanced education and skills) will grow leaps and bounds in the coming decade, and people with the right skills and education will be in high demand. As an example, a recruiter recently told me the unemployment rate in Nashville for anyone with a programming background is under 0.3 percent. She said, “They know how much they are worth and everyone needs them and they walk around town with a newfound arrogance because they can get anything they request.” Another placement expert said, “It’s crazy. I am placing C-students in programming who have just graduated, and they are getting six figure salaries. There just aren’t enough of them.” The job market may be suffering, but for those who are prepared and have the right skills, there is great opportunity.

Now you may be questioning your ability to program or fear you can't afford to go back to school and not know how you can take advantage of these opportunities. In the coming chapters I will highlight multiple online resources that will teach you programming and multiple technical disciplines that you can leverage today in your job and that will help you prepare for the future.

Finally, government initiatives that are supposed to improve our economy may actually cause harm to employees and the unemployed. A prime example of this is the new Affordable Care Act in the United States. The trickle-down impact of this new regulation on the economy is forcing business leaders to alter their workforce and the way their companies operate. One industry executive said, "[The ACA] is an impossible topic to be educated on. It changes weekly. We all know it makes it more expensive to hire employees, and since businesses have no idea what they are signing up for and what the cost is going to be, we aren't hiring. Actually, we are moving all our hiring to temp agencies so we can remain flexible." Joe Saad, CEO and founder of the placement firm Diag Partners in Michigan, said the last three years have been ones of explosive growth. "Companies in the past used firms like ours to outsource their recruiting. Now they are using us because they need help, but they can't afford to hire full-time employees, so they are looking for part-time and temp employees. We will continue to grow at record pace for the foreseeable future," opined Joe. When pressed further, most every business executive said the ACA in some way was impacting their hiring. This is just one example of how a regulation passed in Washington can have negative impacts in neighborhoods around the country.

In light of the three trends previously mentioned causing tectonic shifts in the global economy, what should we do? I believe we need to understand the new realities of the developing economy and the educational requirements needed to be successful. Furthermore, we need to be externally focused helping those in transition. Finally we need to prepare to take a leap in our career. From young to old one thing is certain, everyone is going to be in a state of transition in the coming years and those who have prepared for it will be best suited to navigate it successfully.

MY LEAP

So as my flight approached its destination city and I felt overwhelmed by this staggering shift facing our American economy, I contemplated another shift that would need to happen for the current workforce and the unemployed, for the next generation of workers, and for myself in order to have the fulfilling and successful careers people dream about. In the “old days,” a college graduate would usually be able to secure a job with ease right out of school and possibly have the opportunity to stay in that company and keep advancing until retirement. This old way of being able to almost stumble into a lifelong career is no more. If you want to succeed in this new economy, it’s going to require a leap of faith. I was ready to jump.

I left the military in 2004 to become the CEO of a small Midwest company back in my hometown of Grand Blanc, Michigan. Over the next five years the company experienced record growth, and we launched many new initiatives. I was fortunate to work with some very talented people and was blessed to be able to bring in a number of leaders from the military to help round out the team. We worked hard, played hard, and I enjoyed my time learning from each one of them. However, as key programs I was brought in to launch were winding down, I felt the burning desire to do something new. I felt stagnant, so I sought advice from a number of mentors regarding what I should do. There were a few different perspectives, and some said, “Bob, we are in the worst recession of our lifetime. You are married with four kids. Setting out to launch your own thing right now seems nuts.” But my advisors, which included my Young Presidents’ Organization (YPO) forum mates in Detroit and a host of entrepreneurs who themselves had made similar leaps in their careers, encouraged me to follow my heart and make the leap. I was fascinated with technology and wanted to launch an application company with some partners. I wanted to start a consulting business, leveraging the things I had learned in the military and my time in the business world, and work with other companies on new challenges. I wanted to pursue advanced education, and I desperately wanted to move from Michigan to the warmer South to raise our family.

To do this would require me to take a huge leap of faith. As I flew home that night, I prepared my talking points for a phone call I would have with the owner and chairman of the board the next morning regarding my intent to resign and pursue a new career direction. I wrote

up my official letter of resignation for the rest of the board and mentally prepared to take the leap. As the plane touched down that night at Bishop Airport in Flint, I remember a complete peace that came over me regarding the decision. I knew it would not be easy, but I was excited to be embarking on a new journey and following my passions. That Monday morning I made the phone call with the chairman, spoke with the rest of the board, and began to prepare the transition plan. The following days and weeks were a whirlwind of activity. I had crossed the Rubicon and there was no going back.

Taking the leap is scary and often painful, so I certainly don't want to romanticize my decision or transition. Looking back, it is easy to remember all the victories and harder to remember the challenges I faced along the way. When taking a leap, I have learned that you have to be flexible and be ready to change directions on short notice. It took us much longer to sell our home in Michigan than we anticipated, but we were finally able to relocate back to Knoxville, Tennessee, where my wife and I had met, gotten married, and started our family. The road to launching my consulting practice and technology company presented multiple challenges I had not anticipated. Mainly, it took longer than I expected. But it also offered valuable learning experiences and opportunities I never dreamed I would have. I was able to work with some great companies in multiple industries, opportunities like a Google Venture start-up, non-profits, and companies in the direct sales industry.

As my partners and I continued to press forward with our technology initiatives, I continued to work as a consultant. My good friend Ron Simmons, chairman and founder of Retirement Advisors of America (RAA) in Dallas, was having breakfast with a friend in Dallas and passed my name on to him when he heard that he needed some help with some initiatives he was undertaking. And so my relationship with Chuck Bentley, CEO of Crown, was born. After meeting with him in Atlanta to discuss his plans for the future, I accepted an offer to come on as a part-time consultant in January 2011 to help in a corporate transition. A few months later, Chuck and the board presented an offer to come on full-time as the president of Crown. This was a perfect opportunity for me to merge the things I was passionate about in the business world with the things I was passionate about regarding non-profit work and serving those in need. When I took that leap in October of 2009, I had no idea of the twists and turns I would take over the coming years. Many times I

have heard the quote, “Man makes plans and God laughs,” and I know for certain God was guiding my steps. I could look behind me and see in my career how God had opened doors and prepared me for the challenges and opportunities He was placing in front of me. During this same time I received an email from Harvard Business School accepting my application for an executive course, and I started the Harvard Business School Executive Program for YPO presidents. All the dreams and goals I had hoped for as I sat on that Delta flight in 2009, preparing to take the leap and resigning from my safe job to launch out on my own and follow my passions, had come to pass.

I was fortunate to have mentors around me who helped me analyze the opportunities and landscape and provided wise counsel and encouragement when I needed it most. I don’t advocate taking the leap without a plan. Those who stand on the sidelines of life waiting for something good to happen will grow old waiting and watching everyone around them taking deliberate and intentional action and #winning in the game of life.

This book is a tool for you. I want you to understand how to craft a plan for your life and career that’s in alignment with your strengths and values, how to avoid anchors that can hold you back, how to take the leap and accomplish your plan, and why taking the leap matters. The global economy is changing all around us. The Black Swan at the start of the Great Recession has changed the paradigm of work, jobs, and careers. What happened and what this means for the global workforce is still being discovered, but one thing is for sure: this is not our grandfathers’ economy, and there are new rules everyone needs to understand. Understanding these changes is important. Developing a plan and taking action is critical.

LEAPING BY EXAMPLE

A LEAP OF FAITH: Tom Darden, *Cherokee Investment Partners founder and CEO*

By any measure Tom Darden—founder and CEO of Cherokee, the \$2 billion private equity firm investing in brownfield redevelopments—is a success story worth studying. With a bachelor’s and master’s degree from the University of North Carolina and a law degree from Yale, Tom has an educational pedigree anyone would admire. Tom made his

leap following graduation from Yale while he was working with the prestigious consulting firm Bain & Company. It was a safe and secure job at a prestigious firm, but Tom wanted to do something different. He was aware of Cherokee Sanford Group, the struggling North Carolina company on the verge of going out of business. Tom pulled together a plan to purchase the company and see if he could turn it around. “It was such a disaster when I bought it. It was going to fail without me, and if it failed at least I knew I had tried. I could always go back to practicing law,” said Tom. “I was a good saver and had saved up at least a year of savings before I made the move.” The move proved to be a pivotal moment in his career as he turned around the company, which became the largest privately held brick manufacturer in the United States. This gave birth to Cherokee Investment Partners, the private equity firm Tom leads today. It has massive impact around the world in environmental land reclamation.

Pressing Tom further to understand how he can take such big leaps and press through the fear that most people would have succumbed to, he said, “Bob, any fear I have faced has always been a function of failure or embarrassment, never about money. I also never let fear stop me from doing what is right. When facing those fears, I would initially be upset at myself for not having more faith. Faith is a big part of your journey. I have learned to have comfort in faith, not accomplishments.” As I closed the interview and asked Tom what words of advice and counsel he would give people entering the workplace today, without pause he answered, “The central message I would convey is this: their own opinions of their current situation and the things that happen to them in their career are almost always going to be wrong. This is essential to understand. If something happens and you think it is good or bad, you really don’t know. Many times you may perceive something to be bad, like if you get fired or lose your job, but in reality it is good for you because it launches you in a new direction. The inverse is also true. Never form an opinion about your current circumstances because your opinion will almost always be wrong.” I asked him if he felt this changes over time and with experience, thinking I knew the answer. Again he surprised me. “Bob, you really don’t. You have to take each situation as it comes and only time will tell if what happened is good or bad.” Time has proven that Tom Darden is one of a kind. In 2010 he and his company were awarded the

YPO Corporate Social Responsibility Award because of his work to return hazardous waste sites to productive use through environmental remediation. He currently has over 550 properties under management worldwide and his environmental work is making the world cleaner and safer for everyone. His leap is benefiting us all.



“Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.”—PETER DRUCKER

As an officer in the United States Air Force I often heard the phrase, “If you don’t have a plan, you are planning to fail.” This wise counsel is not only great advice for leaders preparing for combat operations, but it is also crucial for those in the job market today.

The reality is that without help, it can be hard to build a plan and then execute it. Having a plan of action can make stressful situations manageable with a specific step-by-step approach to reach your objectives. With a trusted mentor or advisor helping us it can be much easier, but it will still require time and thought to put it all down in a written document so we can reference it regularly and make sure that we are on track.

The new economy has affected all aspects of life, and the old rules no longer apply. To navigate the ever-changing economic landscape, it will be critical to start with a deliberate plan—a life plan, freedom fund, and early planning for retirement.

First of all, we need to know where we are and where we want to go. When you are orienteering in the woods, knowing your location is a critical first step to getting to your final destination. You might think, *I*

know where I am ... I'm a student looking for a job, or I'm about to launch a new start-up company. Unfortunately, this is not what we are talking about. We need to go deeper. Discovering who you are—your gifts, skill sets, desires, and values—will tell you where you are in life. This is your frame of reference. From there you can build a career plan that will maximize your talents and gifts to help you achieve a life of meaning and purpose.

In this new economy it is critical that everyone have a high level of self-awareness to understand how they have been made, what their unique gifts and talents are, and what their passion and life goals are. In the past, high school and college were used as years of self-discovery, where people could take classes and over time decide on their career. Some even went on adventures in their 20s, continuing to live a Spartan college-existence, traveling and working multiple jobs that might have varied considerably with no thought to the future. It was easier to jump into a career path of choice.

Today is different. Mounting education costs are drowning graduates in debt. Spending more time in college taking classes and dragging out the experience is no longer ideal, as it only adds to the mounting student-loan debt a graduate carries. The average student is graduating today with \$30,000 in student-loan debt and having a hard time finding a job in their career of choice.¹ Student-loan debt is now \$1.2 trillion and is the second largest form of debt in America, behind mortgages and ahead of credit card debt.² Many economists believe the real-estate bubble that exploded in 2007 will be followed by a student-loan burst that is looming even now. This has led many to debate the value of education today. Some have argued that college educations are not worth it and are a waste of time. I spent the past year interviewing leaders from all over the world—economists, CEOs, placement-agency executives, and recruiters—and everyone agrees that education is critical for success in this new economy. Because this has been a hotly debated topic I want to highlight some key facts here. The goal is threefold:

1. Obtain useable knowledge you can leverage in your career.
2. Obtain the right certification or degree for your desired career path.
3. Do 1 and 2 as quickly and inexpensively as possible.

EDUCATION

In January of 2014, while attending the YPO Presidents' Program at Harvard Business School, I was able to have dinner with professor Krishna Palepu and his wife, Laurie. Krishna taught at Harvard for 29 years, 10 of those at HBS, and is currently the Senior Advisor to Harvard's president, so I jumped at the chance to ask him questions about the global economy and education. Knowing that Krishna and Laurie had children, one of my questions was, "What are the three most important things you could tell your children today to be ready to have success in this new economy?" Without pause Krishna said, "First, become a lifelong learner. Second, learn to speak a foreign language. Third, travel the world to get a global understanding of the different cultures and how people see and interact with the world." Understanding how technology was changing our world, I realized that all three were things that anyone could do right from their home. Yes, even if someone did not have the money to travel the world, they could spend time online to learn in-depth about countries, regions, and cultures of the entire globe. Technology was making it possible for everyone to have a world-class education at their fingertips.

In the first chapter I pointed to a number of sources that foretell of this new global economy becoming more and more dominated by technology, and those who have the advanced skills and training will disproportionately win in this economy. Those who do not have the requisite skill and training will find it extremely difficult to find quality work and gainful long-term employment. Based on these comments some might think, *I can't afford the time or money to go back to school to get more education*. Don't be discouraged. Today, anyone in the world can receive a world-class education for free, right at home, and I want to tell you how.

The amount of education you might need depends on your life plan and goals. For those who want to climb the corporate ladder and obtain leadership positions within Fortune 500 companies, college degrees and advanced degrees are going to be *very* important. The college you attend is equally important, as certain colleges with "prestigious brands" are seen differently than a small community college degree in these environments. There is no way around it. So if that is your desired career path, it is important to understand those dynamics. For those who aspire to be entrepreneurs and to start your own companies, the path can be a bit different. The goal: usable knowledge with the ability to execute in

the marketplace; the degree or institution it is from is largely irrelevant to the entrepreneur. No matter where you are in your educational journey, I encourage you to grow as a lifelong learner and continue to advance your knowledge base and skill sets. Here is how you can start.

MOOCS – MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are college- and graduate-level courses being taught over the web. A person can enroll in a class being taught on campus, use the same course curriculum, be taught by the same professor, and many times monitor the exact class being taught on campus via the web. Many of these courses come with a certificate of completion. The very best universities in the world like Harvard, Yale, MIT, Stanford, Penn, Duke, and Michigan are now offering many of their classes via a MOOC environment, allowing everyone the ability to have a world-class education for free.

Over dinner, Krishna Palepu told me the story of when MIT launched a MOOC with one of its hardest courses taught at the school. Over 150,000 people around the world signed up to take the class. At the end of the class, one of the top scores came from a 15-year-old boy in Ulan Bator, the capital of Mongolia. He was awarded a full scholarship to MIT and started a year later full-time.

I recommend visiting [Coursera.org](https://www.coursera.org), which is an online aggregator of MOOC courses from the top colleges in the world. You can search for a program, see when it is starting, and see which ones offer a certificate of completion. List these courses and certificates of completion on your resume under the heading “Continuing Education.” This shows that you are not satisfied with what you may have learned in the past but that you are challenging yourself, growing daily, and looking to the future.

LEARN TO CODE

As I have traveled the world I have heard many people mention that the global language of business is English. Some have said they think in the future it will be Chinese. Only time will tell. Regardless, many will tell you that in the coming years equally as important or more important than English will be the ability to code. Technology transcends all global boundaries, and those who can speak and understand “code” are in the

driver's seat in this new economy. It is reported that over the next 10 years there will be 2 million unfilled technology jobs.³ Companies are looking for MBAs who can assume leadership positions but can understand code, as this is becoming a new skill even leaders need. There is virtually zero unemployment in the coding field, with recruiters complaining they can't find enough talent for the open positions they need to fill. Those same coders can ask a king's ransom, and their demands are being met. If you want job security for the future, learn to code. Just like MOOCs there are many websites that will teach coding for free, from the basics all the way up to advanced coding, and will also provide certificates for completion. Here are my favorites:

1. [Codecademy.com](https://www.codecademy.com)
2. [Udacity.com](https://www.udacity.com)
3. [ReFactorU.com](https://refactoru.com)
4. [KhanAcademy.com](https://www.khanacademy.com)

Again, list any course you take and certificate of completion on your resume. Every department in every company today somehow interfaces with technology. Regardless of your background, if you start building your coding knowledge and certifications you will be quantum leaps ahead of your peers when interviewing for jobs.

PODCASTS

I don't know what I would do without my iPhone and the podcast content I have downloaded daily. I am amazed at the amount of educational material I can carry in my pocket and the amount of time I have to invest in my continuing education every day—from my commute, running, lunch breaks, and even shopping. I am always listening and taking notes. For aspiring entrepreneurs, I highly recommend the following podcasts, but my favorite by far is Stanford's *E-Corner*.

1. Stanford University's *E-Corner*, "Entrepreneurial Thought Leader" series
2. Harvard Business Review's *HBR IdeaCast*
3. *Chicago Booth Podcast*
4. London Business School's Official Podcast
5. *Seth Godin's Start-Up School*

ADVANCED EDUCATION

One of my favorite sites that I use regularly is [KhanAcademy.com](https://www.khanacademy.com). No matter what subject matter you would like to learn, they have videos for you. It has been one of the most widely used global learning platforms, bringing world-class education to the masses. Since I am such a fan of this online learning environment, I am currently working with a team to launch [CrownBiz.com/venture-academy-listing](https://crownbiz.com/venture-academy-listing) to bring Harvard Business School case studies to entrepreneurs. These are taught by an HBS graduate in a similar fashion to how HBS presents them. You might not have time for a two-year MBA, but many of the concepts and key principles taught in the HBS MBA-program can be learned online using the same case studies and teaching methods.

I hope I have convinced you that education is important. For some, this will be a very beneficial option. However, education for the sake of “discovering yourself” or to find out which career is best for you is a luxury many cannot afford today. There are alternative ways to gain this experience and self-awareness.

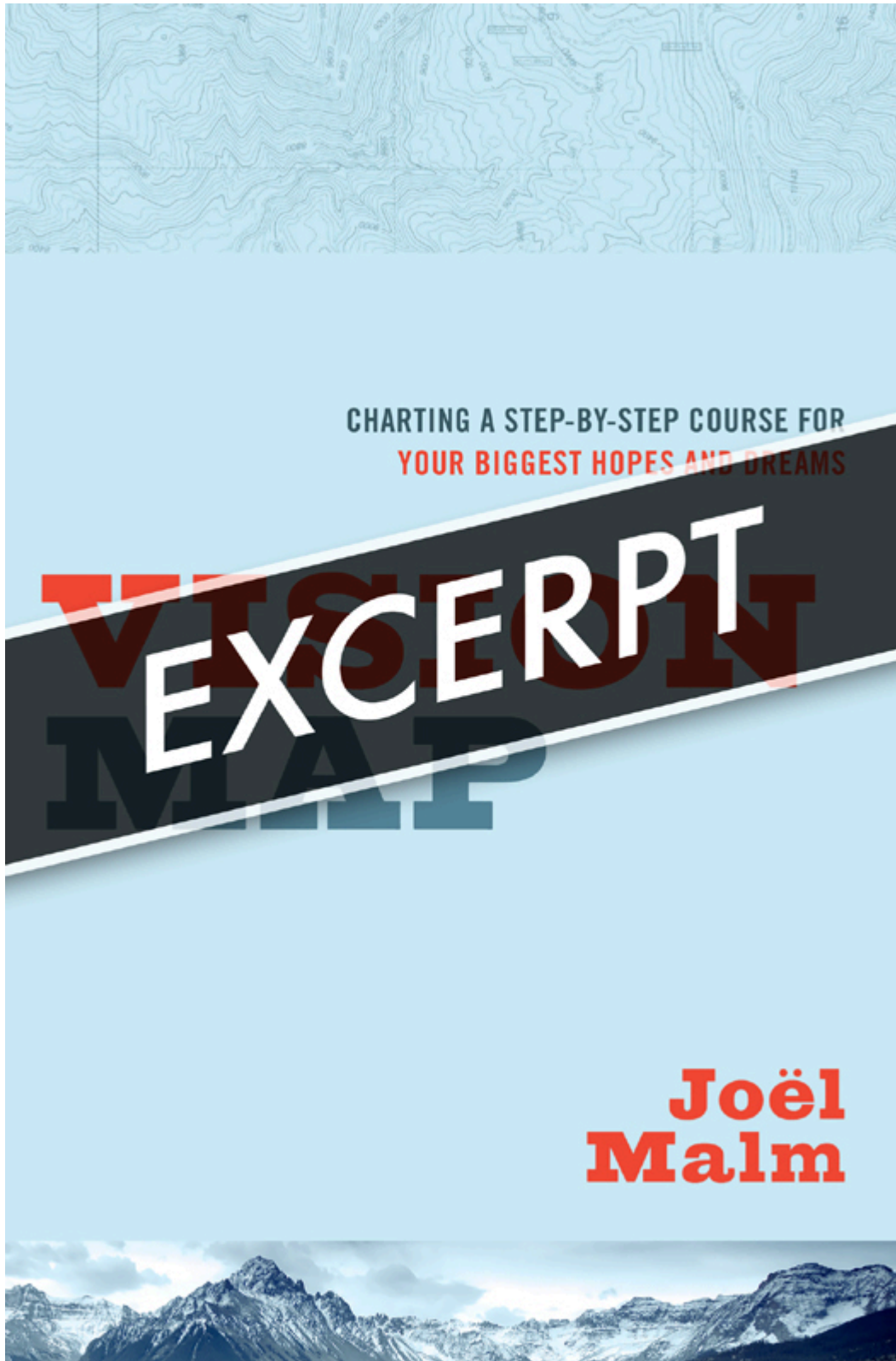
KNOW YOURSELF

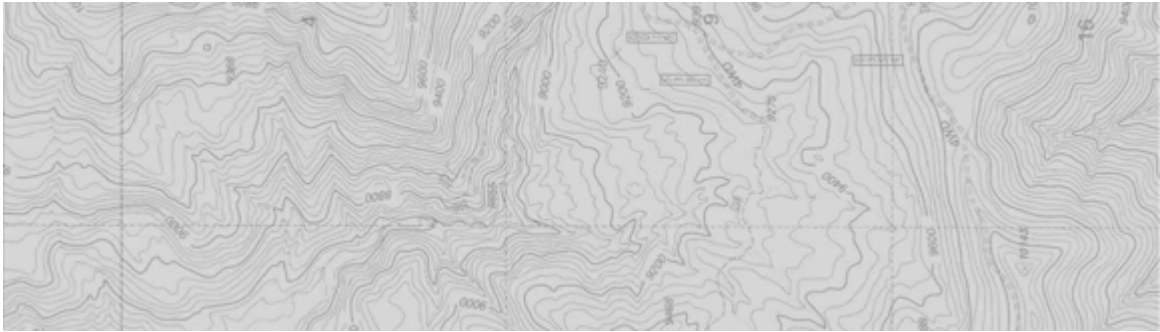
The Bible says that everyone is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). You and I are totally different, and there will never be another person like us. God has given each of us special talents, skills, desires, and passions in His unique design for our lives. When we understand how we are hardwired and we pursue a career that is in total alignment with our skills, life is much easier. It is like we are swimming in a river with a powerful current that is helping us reach our destination. However, if we don’t understand how we are made with our unique values and talents, we could find ourselves on a path of study or in a career where we are misaligned. Being misaligned is hard work, painful, and sometimes full of misery. If you know someone who is struggling in life and not happy with their job or course of study, it is possible they are misaligned in a key area of their life.

If you have never really been able to discover those talents or have always felt that you have been living outside of your God-given design, it is never too late to gain this self-awareness. I have seen so many people who were struggling and dissatisfied in life, but once they developed a great sense of self-awareness, their life was forever changed.

* * *

We hope you enjoyed this excerpt from *The Leap*. For more from Moody Publishers in this genre and others, visit your favorite local or online bookstore.





1 }

SO YOU'VE GOT AN IDEA?

IT ALL STARTED FOR ME ON a mountain in Russia. In a blizzard. At 16,000 feet. I could've written it off to oxygen deprivation, but something within me said it was more. God placed something big in my heart that day.

The blizzard pummeling our side of Mount Elbrus made our attempt to summit the highest peak in Europe an exercise in futility. We gave up for the day. Secretly, I was relieved. I realized earlier that morning when we pulled out the ice axes and roped our team together that I was in way over my head. This was above my climbing level; I had no experience ice climbing and only basic knowledge of how to use the axe in my hand. I was still loving it, but the situation made me remember there was some real danger involved.

On the way back down, we discovered that the blizzard was causing a whiteout that covered the trail markers. We stopped to reorient.

"Wait here. I find trail," my Ukrainian guide, Oksana, said in her flat Russian accent.

I nodded and knelt down in the deep snow. Ahead there was a break in the storm. Through the clouds I could see the Cheget Valley far below us—an encouraging sign.

I looked at my watch. It was noon. I thought of my family, soundly asleep back in Texas. They had no idea how dangerous conditions had become.

In that instant something hit me. It was one of those moments of transcendence. I felt alive and alert. I realized just how much I loved this kind of thing. I loved the thrill of climbing mountains. It was a spiritual experience for me, a way of deepening my sense of dependence on God and feeling connected to the sheer power of the vast world He created.

Travel experiences like this shaped my worldview. They gave me a wider perspective on life and a greater appreciation for God's amazing world—the people, the geography, the diversity.

I thought of my friends back in the US. They thought I was crazy when I announced I was planning to go climb a mountain in Russia. “Why would you do that? It’s expensive isn’t it?”

I tried hard to explain it, but they had no experience with mountain climbing, no frame of reference. I wished there was a way to show them how much they were missing. I thought of a favorite quote of mine from St. Augustine: “The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.”

In that moment of transcendence, I realized something. I finally knew what I wanted to do with my life. I was on track to go to law school. That’s what everyone said I’d be good at. I believed them, but I was never thrilled about the prospect.

In the midst of a blizzard hiding our way down the mountain, toward the safety of base camp, God placed a dream into my heart. He gave me a vision to start bringing people with me on these kinds of trips. I wanted to start helping others create spiritual adventures.

YOUR PROBLEM TO SOLVE

I’m convinced that God has given each of us a message to share with the world to bring Him glory. I’m also convinced that along with that message we all have a problem that God has uniquely equipped us to solve.

Let me establish something at the outset. God can solve any problem He wants to solve with the flit of an eyelash. He doesn’t

need us. For whatever reason, He chooses to let us participate in ultimate goal of bringing Himself glory. It's definitely not the most efficient method. I'm slow. I fumble the ball a lot. Inexplicably, God still chooses to use people like me. You are no exception. He wants to use you.

You may not have received a vision on a mountain in a blizzard. Your vision may have started by seeing a simple need. God works differently in each person. The circumstance surrounding how you got your God Idea isn't the important thing.

Doing it is.

Whether your goal is to write a book, go to college, pay off a huge debt, or start a business, never discount the dream God placed in your heart, however it may have come to you.

This book is about taking practical steps toward sharing your unique message and solving the problem God has equipped you to solve.

This book is for *those* people. Those who are certain God has given them a vision or dream. If you've got it, you know what I'm talking about. It's a burning desire to do something for God. It doesn't have to be clear, but there is something within you that yearns to solve some problem or share a unique message you think the world needs to hear.

How do you know if you are at that place?

Well, when you have a dream or vision that God has placed in your heart, you are obsessed with it. It's what you talk about *ad nauseam* with all your patient friends at the dinner table. You think about it all the time. Working on it feels like a moral imperative. Conversely, not doing it would feel almost sinful.

If you are at that place, I think you'll find this book helpful.

If you aren't there yet, I hope this book will inspire you. Read through it prayerfully. Then keep praying, explore, read lots of books, and start serving. God wants to show you His unique calling for your life.

If you had a dream that now seems impossible, or you wonder if your moment has passed, I want to encourage you. If you are still alive, then the dream is still alive—no matter how dead or impossible it may seem. I pray this book will revive the vision in your heart.

I've started quite a few things in my life. It hasn't always been easy. At times it can be downright hard. It often takes years.

In this book, I want to share the process I stumbled upon for taking a God Idea that seems so overwhelming that you don't know where to start, and breaking it down into smaller steps. I'll tell a little of my story along the way.

One warning: If you don't have a God Idea, this book might still help you, but you'll probably think some parts of it seem a little too hands-off.

You see, this book is for folks who have a dream and vision in their hearts that is so big it will be impossible to accomplish without God's direct intervention and miraculous provision. That's how I define a God Idea.

One of my main focuses is making sure God is always in the center of the mix. If yours isn't that kind of dream, you probably don't need this book.

So if you've got a dream—a really big, crazy vision that is impossible to accomplish without God—I think you might find this book helpful.

Enough set-up. God has a plan for us. We need to get moving!

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

—EPHESIANS 2:10



2 }

GET A ONE-LINER

I MADE IT OFF THE MOUNTAIN and out of the Russian blizzard safely, but the fire that ignited in my heart was still burning. I started telling everyone about my idea. I was sure they'd all get excited about it too. Instead, I learned something crucial for every visionary.

I met with a prominent Christian leader to share my idea. I spent thirty minutes sharing my newfound life goal, my big God Idea.

The man listened attentively. I told him every angle. I shared everything I could think of that might get him excited about the idea. He seemed to like it. Then came the deathblow question.

"That's great. So what *exactly* are you doing?"

Grrr. *I just told you, dude!* I thought, as I smiled graciously. I walked away from that conversation learning an important lesson for anyone who has a vision: you need a clear, one-line explanation of what you are trying to accomplish.

It took me weeks to bumble my way through it. I had to seek lots of counsel and share the idea with many people who gave me confused looks. But I finally came up with a simple, one-line explanation. The next time someone asked me what I was trying to do I had it down cold: "I want to take people on spiritually focused adventure trips around the world."

The best way to refine a one-liner is to say it over and over and over. Talk it out. Watch how people respond. Tap into elements that seem to consistently bring out the “wow” response in people as they listen. Narrow the vision down to the clearest possible explanation.

I’ve heard it said, “If it’s a mist in your head, it will be a fog in the listener’s head.” It’s true. You need a clear, concise explanation of what you are trying to accomplish. It can’t be foggy.

I realized, after lots of talking it through, that my ultimate goal was to use travel to give people a bigger perspective on their lives. That was my problem to solve. Make sure you are very specific. Tell people what problem your vision is going to solve. You’ll refine it in the process.

Many people share their one-liners with me. I recently heard one that sounded something like this: *Create strategic alliances that empower synergistic approaches to complex problem solving.*

I read it a few times trying to figure it out. I didn’t want to discourage him, but I had to be honest. “That sounds amazing! Lots of fancy, hip words. But what the heck does it mean? What are you trying to do?”

When I asked him some clarifying questions and we got down to the nuts and bolts it became clear that he still didn’t know *exactly* what he was trying to do. His one-liner had some glamour, but if no one can understand his ultimate goal, it isn’t serving its purpose.

I know lots of missionaries who send me newsletters about their work. I’m confident they are doing something of value because I know them. However, even though I support them, I still have no idea what they do. Even when I directly ask them I can’t get a clear statement of their main focus. Some have shared that they’re struggling to raise funds for very good projects. I wonder if part of their challenge is that they haven’t taken the time to define their vision. If you can develop a clear picture, others will get on board. We follow clear visions.

When God gives you a dream or a problem to solve, it usually first appears in a general, overarching idea with very few specifics. You see a problem and want to solve it. I only knew I

wanted to help people have experiences that expanded their perspective. It wasn't super clear.

I don't think anyone ever gets a vision for something amazing with all the details exactly laid out. It takes time. It takes talking it out. It takes homing in on exactly what you want to accomplish.

Don't be afraid if your one-liner sounds too big or even impossible. William Wilberforce, the man who is considered to be largely responsible for ending the slave trade in most of the British Empire, had a huge vision. On October 28, 1787, he wrote out his one-liner:

"God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of morals."¹

Seriously, Will? Think about this. That was a huge dream. Slavery was so prevalent in his time that I'm certain this goal seemed absolutely impossible, bordering on ridiculous. It would be like saying, "I'm going to eliminate cigarette smoking!"

Guess what? It took forty-six years, but it happened. Wilberforce saw slavery abolished in almost the entirety of the British Empire three days before he went to be with the Lord for eternity. He worked his entire life on that dream.

A single mother I shared this concept with developed this one-liner:

Raise kids who love Jesus and people.

Have you seen this world we live in? Talk about an impossible dream! But God placed that vision in her heart, and she is pursuing it with all she's got.

I don't think there's anything wrong with having a one-liner for every area of your life. In fact, I'll be bold and say I think you *need* one for every area of your life. I have the guys in my Summit Life Coaching Program write one for family, finances, career, and ministry. It's amazing to see what happens when people write out clear visions for their lives.

God wants to give you a vision for every area of your life.

Like we discussed, developing a one-liner isn't necessarily easy. It will take some time, some thought, and probably a few bumbled attempts at explaining it to people. Don't get discouraged if you are at this phase of the process right now. It

will get clearer. As you keep explaining and exploring the problem you want to solve, you will eventually get to a place where you can clearly articulate what you are trying to accomplish.

Once you've got the one-liner, run it past a few folks. See how they respond. Do they understand it? If not, you may need to keep honing it. There is a problem that God has placed you on this earth to solve. You have a unique message to share with the world that will bring God glory.

Pretty confident you've got a good, clear one-liner? Then write it down.

ON THE WALL

An African friend visiting the US pointed out how strange he thought it was that hospitals have a vision statement on the wall.

"Doesn't everyone know what a hospital is there to do?"

It's kind of funny when you think about it, but the fact is we all have a tendency to forget. I get into a routine and forget why I'm doing what I'm doing all the time. That's why it's so important to write out your one-line vision.

"Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it" (Habakkuk 2:2).

I think the best possible thing you can do is to write your one-liner out in a visible place. Make it large.

When I finally had my one-liner, I ran to the store and picked up a black marker and large poster board. This was the beginning of a process I stumbled upon that has helped me navigate my way through many projects and visions God has given me over the years.

I CALL IT A VISION MAP

The concept isn't complicated. But it really helps me clarify my vision.

Some people spend thousands of dollars on consultants, displays, and spreadsheets to explain their goal. Not me. No, I was a poor college student. I spent a few bucks, but it served the

purpose. I stuck the poster board up on the wall of my bedroom. This was how my Vision Map began.

At the top I wrote out my one-liner in big black letters:

Take people on spiritually focused adventure trips around the world.

The vision greeted me every morning now. It was in front of me. It was clear. I had a tangible, one-line goal to run with.

Several people helped me nail it down. You'll probably need someone to help you do the same. I discovered early on that if I was going to pull off this dream God placed in my heart, I needed some trusted advisors. You will too.

* * *

We hope you enjoyed this excerpt from *Vision Map*. For more from Moody Publishers in this genre and others, visit your favorite local or online bookstore.



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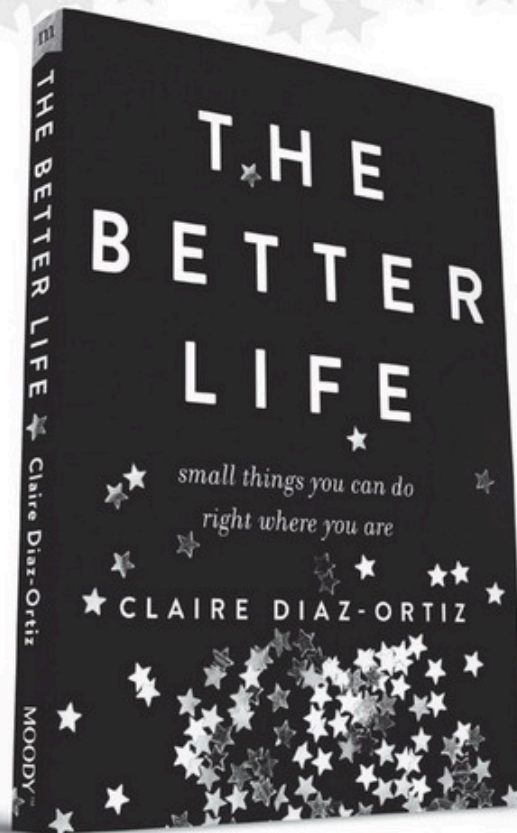
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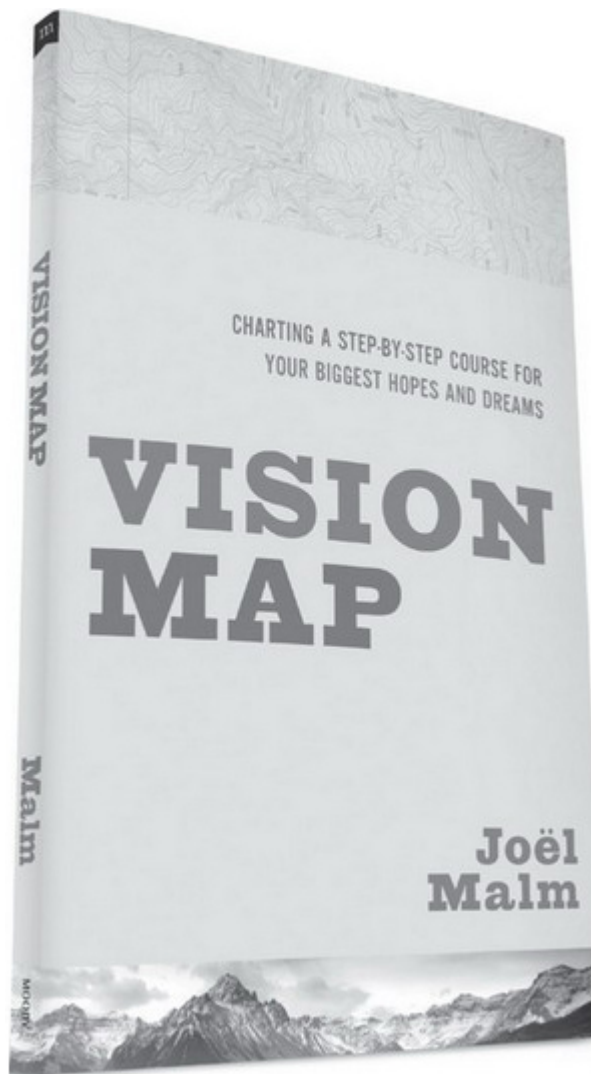


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From the Word to Life

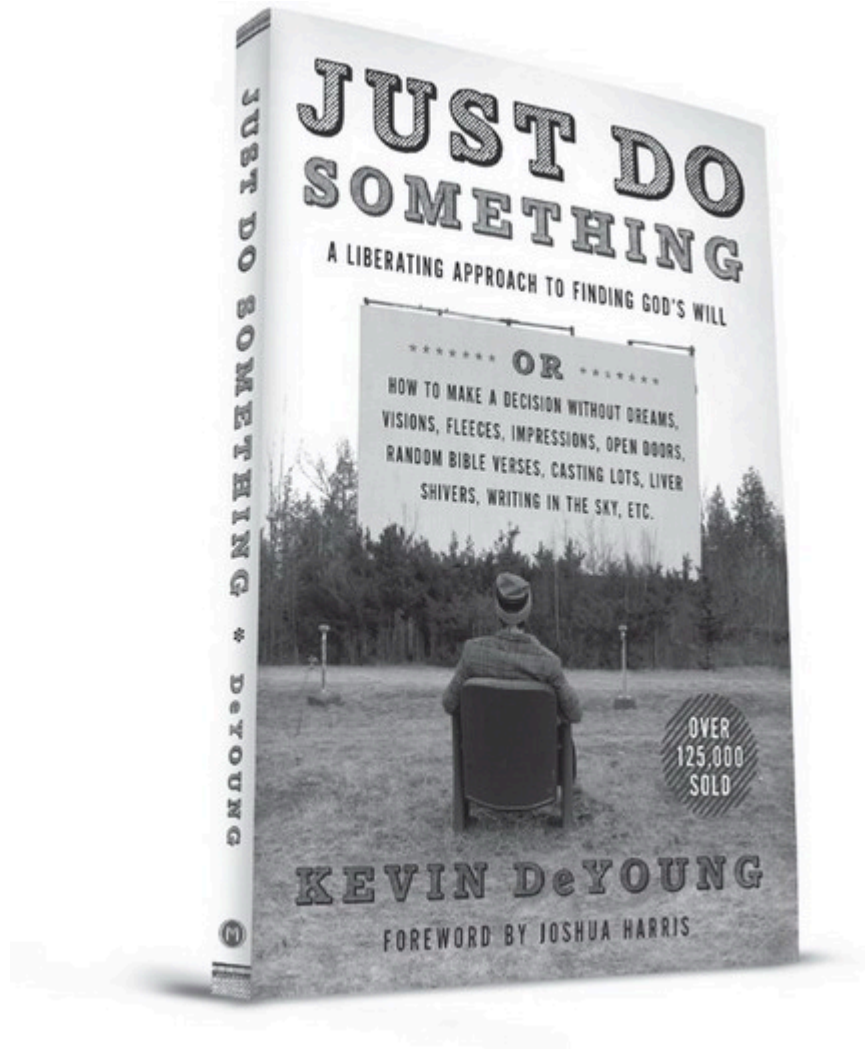
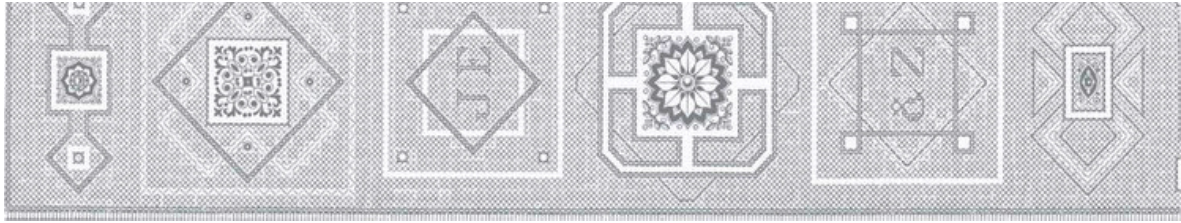
Vision Map is a template to start anyone on the path to envisioning and experiencing a God-given dream. God often gives us a difficult problem to solve, and we just need a push in the right direction to find the answer.

Where are you heading?



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From the Word to Life

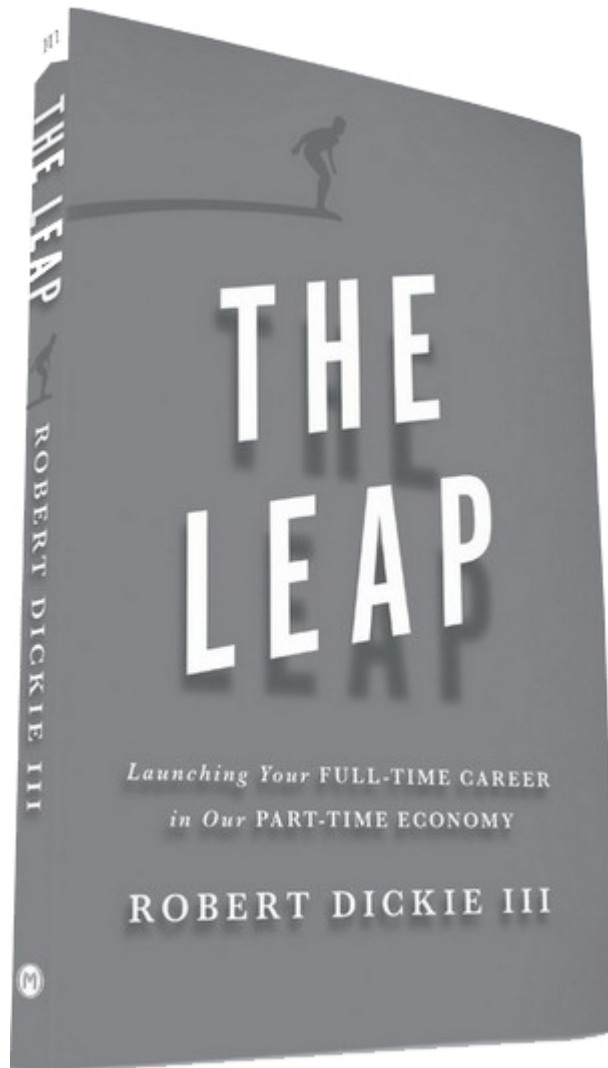


God doesn't need to tell us what to do at each fork in the road. He already revealed His plan for our lives: love Him with our whole hearts, obey His Word, and after that, do what we like. No reason to be directionally challenged. **Just do something.**



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From the Word to Life



College graduates are facing large student loans and high unemployment rates. Older generations are feeling the effects of the recession as they lose stable jobs and are forced to find new work. The old economy is fading away and a new economy is rising in its place. To succeed in the new economy, we must take a mental leap, rethinking our strategies for success.



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