

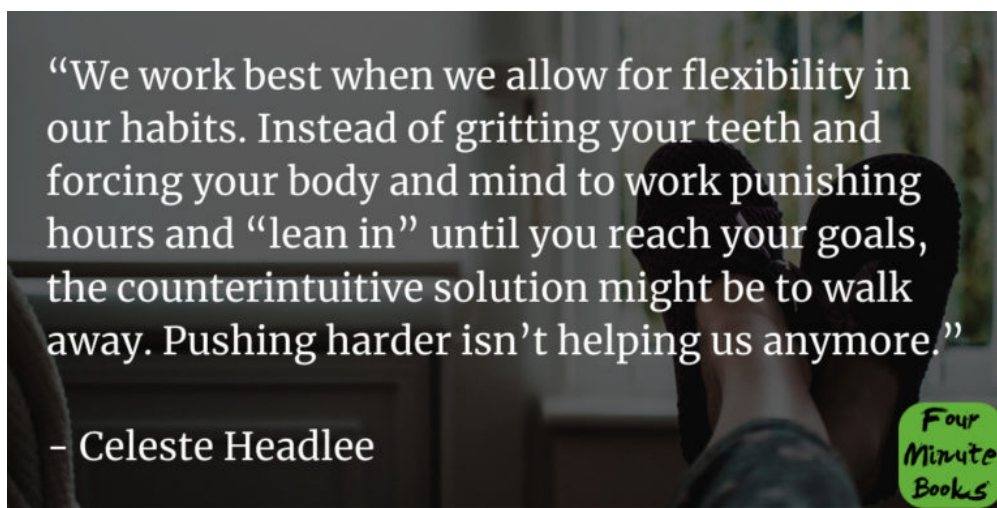
Do Nothing Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Do Nothing* explores the idea that our focus on being productive all the time is making us less effective because of how little rest we get, identifying how the consequences of overworking ourselves, and the benefits of taking time off, make a compelling argument that we should spend more time doing nothing.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Whether you're learning Spanish in the evenings after work, working out twice a day, or working overtime at a tech startup, many of us are finding ways to be more productive and efficient than ever. But the obsession we have with productivity in today's world comes at a cost.

Odds are it's making you feel stressed out, tired, unhappy, and sometimes even physically ill. Modern society leads us to believe that high productivity is the most important thing in life. But in reality, often, the only thing we succeed in is making ourselves miserable.

In *Do Nothing: How to Break Away from Overworking, Overdoing, and Underliving*, author Celeste Headlee offers the cure: make time for leisure. She traces the rise of our efficient way of life through history and details the consequences we face from constantly stretching ourselves too thin. She believes that if we are going to be truly happy, we need to first rediscover the joy of leisure.

Here are the 3 of the most helpful lessons this book taught me:

1. Our fixation with efficiency in today's culture can be traced back to the past.

2. Our preoccupation with efficiency means we can miss out on meaningful connections and feel guilty about leisure.
3. A few simple changes can help us slow down and recover our leisure time.

Ready to finally start feeling good about all those times you just have to do nothing? Let's go!

Lesson 1: Our obsession with being efficient is rooted in our past.

Look around, and you can see that people seem to be more and more productive. Everyone is busier than ever and reaching for more and more ambitious goals.

Part of the problem is that social media allows us to see the accomplishments of others and leads us to want to “keep up with the Joneses.” But now, instead of just keeping up with a few friends and neighbors, social media makes us feel like we need to keep up with the world. No wonder our ambitions seem to be getting loftier.

If you've found that you are constantly adding to your to-do list or are hoping for more hours in the day, chances are you're probably becoming part of the “cult of efficiency.” In this cult, the busier you are, the better. And it's only getting worse. But this obsession isn't entirely new.

Back in medieval times, peasants actually worked less than we do now, and they had more vacation time. But once the Industrial Revolution rolled around, people began to be paid by the hour rather than for each task. This dramatically increased the number of hours people worked.

The idea of the American Dream only fueled the trend to work grueling hours. **People believed that diligence would be rewarded with wealth, so shouldn't they just persevere through long work hours to get ahead?**

Unfortunately, the increase in efficiency has been much more beneficial for bosses than actual workers. Adjusted for inflation, workers aren't making much more comparatively, but bosses are richer than ever.

Lesson 2: Our fixation on working hard means we feel guilty about relaxation and miss out on meaningful connections with other people.

The shift from pay per task to pay per hour also had a dramatic psychological effect on workers. This is because when you start paying people for each hour, they see time in a different way—especially time off. When people put a dollar value toward an hour, each hour off felt increasingly indulgent.

Even people who don't work a 9 to 5 and have a more flexible schedule have a hard time feeling okay with taking a break. They often have “polluted time.” This is time off when you are still thinking about work and mulling over work things like emails. This leaves even less time for leisure or relaxation.

The effects can be profound. One of these is a lack of human connection. Before the Industrial Revolution, people lived in close-knit communities and enjoyed a lot of human connections. After came big cities and little free time, which took away a lot of the human connection.

In today's world of technology, this has only gotten worse. Emails and texts are convenient ways to communicate with other people, but they often come at the cost of meaningful connections. **One of the strengths of hearing an actual human voice is that it humanizes the person speaking and connects you with them in a way text cannot.**

The consequences of isolation can be very negative. For one, it's emotionally painful. But what's more, is that it can increase your risk of heart attacks and cancer and as well as decrease your lifespan.

Lesson 3: There are a few easy things you can do to slow down and rediscover leisure.

Our obsession with productivity is actually one of the only problems we can fix by simply doing nothing. But doing nothing is surprisingly hard to do— it usually takes conscious planning.

One of the first things we can do is improve our perception of time. Studies show that people with better time perception are less overwhelmed and less likely to spend time scrolling through social media and watching TV. Because of this, they have the ability to spend time on actual leisurely activities.

The best way to begin improving your time perception is to start an activity log to track the things you do. **When you log everything, even mindless smartphone use, you will get a much clearer picture of where your time is going, so you can plan how to use your time how you actually want to.**

When we focus on getting as much done as possible, we often neglect to look at what we actually are getting done. Sometimes we are so consumed with checking out tasks that we forget to consider whether the things we're doing actually make us happier.

Instead, we should look at the things we do as a means to an end goal. For instance, eating healthy can be a means of living a longer life. In contrast, just clocking in tons of hours for the sake of proving you can work hard may not have an end goal in mind. This can come at

the cost of other goals you might have, like having good family relationships.

So how can we fix the problem? Examine the “productive” things you do and make sure that they bring you closer to your long-term goals in life. Is looking at emails on a Sunday morning helping you achieve the things you want in life? If not, forget about it. Once you learn to drop unrewarding tasks, you’ll find you have much more time for leisure.

Do Nothing Review

Do Nothing was refreshing because it’s nice to finally hear someone saying it’s okay to relax and take a break. It makes you realize how important it is to spend time *not* working to maintain your health! No matter who you are, after reading this, you’ll make more of a conscious effort to save some time for leisure.

Who would I recommend the Do Nothing summary to?

The 31-year-old overworked mother who thinks she doesn’t deserve time for herself or the 56-year-old executive that works too much and feels bad about doing anything else. And anyone that wants to learn how to do more by doing less.