

DEEP

RULES FOR FOCUSED SUCCESS
IN A DISTRACTED WORLD

WORK

CAL NEWPORT
AUTHOR OF SO GOOD THEY CAN'T IGNORE YOU

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Notes

Introduction

“In my retiring room”; “I keep the key”; and “The feeling of repose and renewal”: Jung, Carl. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Trans. Richard Winston. New York: Pantheon, 1963.

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Chapter 1

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Information about David Heinemeier Hansson comes from the following websites:

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"We are in the early throes of a Great Restructuring" and "Our technologies are racing ahead": from page 9 of Brynjolfsson, Erik, and Andrew McAfee. *Race Against the Machine: How the Digital Revolution Is Accelerating Innovation, Driving Productivity, and Irreversibly Transforming Employment and the Economy*. Cambridge, MA: Digital Frontier Press, 2011.

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How to Become a Winner in the New Economy

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The SQL example I gave was from PostgreSQL, an open source database system popular in both industry and (especially) academia. I don’t know what specific system Silver uses, but it almost certainly requires some variant of the SQL language used in this example.

Deep Work Helps You Quickly Learn Hard Things

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Deep Work Helps You Produce at an Elite Level

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Grant, Adam. *Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success*. New York: Viking Adult, 2013.

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What About Jack Dorsey?

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Chapter 2

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Here is the October 4, 2013, *Slate* piece, by Katy Waldman, that ended up titled “Jonathan Franzen’s Lonely War on the Internet Continues.” Notice from the URL that the original title was even harsher: http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2013/10/04/jonathan_franzen_says_twitter_is_a_coercive_development_is_grumpy_and_out.html.

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The Metric Black Hole

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“undoubtedly true”: Manzi, Jim. “Piketty’s Can Opener.” *National Review*, July 7, 2014. <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/382084/pikettys-can-opener-jim-manzi>. This careful and critical review of Piketty’s book by Jim Manzi is where I originally came across the Piketty citation.

The Principle of Least Resistance

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Allen, David. *Getting Things Done*. New York: Viking, 2001.

Allen’s *fifteen-element* task management flowchart can be found in Allen, *Getting Things Done*, as well as online: http://gettingthingsdone.com/pdfs/tt_workflow_chart.pdf.

Busyness as a Proxy for Productivity

The h-index for an academic is (roughly speaking) the largest value x that satisfies the following rule: “I have published at least x papers with x or more citations.” Notice, this value manages to capture both how many papers you have written and how often you are cited. You cannot gain a high h-index value simply by pumping out a lot of low-value papers, *or* by having a small number of papers that are cited often. This metric tends to grow over careers, which is why in many fields h-index goals are tied to certain career milestones.

“**To do real good physics work**”: comes around the 28:20 mark in a 1981 TV interview with Richard Feynman for the BBC *Horizon* program (the interview aired in the United States as an episode of *NOVA*). The YouTube video of this interview that I watched when researching this book has since been removed due to a copyright complaint by the BBC (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bgaw9qe7DEE>). Transcripts of the relevant quote, however, can be found at http://articles.latimes.com/1988-02-16/news/mn-42968_1_nobel-prize/2 and <http://calnewport.com/blog/2014/04/20/richard-feynman-didnt-win-a-nobel-by-responding-promptly-to-e-mails/> and <http://www.worldcat.org/wcpa/servlet/DCARead?standardNo=0738201081&standardNoType=1&excerpt=true>.

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The Cult of the Internet

Alissa Rubin tweets at @Alissanyt. I don’t have specific evidence that Alissa Rubin was pressured to tweet. But I can make a circumstantial case: She includes “nyt” in her Twitter handle, and the *Times* maintains a social media desk that helps educate its employees about how to use social media (c.f. https://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/new-york-times-social-media-desk_b53783), a focus that has led to more than eight hundred employees tweeting: <https://twitter.com/nytimes/nyt-journalists/members>.

Here is an example of one of Alissa Rubin’s articles that I encountered when writing this chapter: Rubin, Alissa J., and Maïa de la Baume, “Claims of French Complicity in Rwanda’s Genocide Rekindle Mutual Resentment.” *New York Times*, April 8, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/world/africa/claims-of-french-complicity-in-rwandas-genocide-rekindle-mutual-resentment.html?ref=alissajo-hannsenrubin>.

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

“It does not make them illegal”: Ibid., 48.

“It’s this propensity to view ‘the Internet’ as a source of wisdom”: from page 25 of Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here*. New York: Public Affairs, 2013.

Chapter 3

“I do all my work by hand”: from Ric Furrer’s artist statement, which can be found online, along with general biographical details on Furrer and information about his business: <http://www.doorcountyforgeworks.com>.

“This part, the initial breakdown”; **“You have to be very gentle”;** **“It’s ready”;** and **“To do it right, it is the most complicated thing”:** from the PBS documentary “Secrets of the Viking Swords,” which is an episode of *NOVA* that first aired on September 25, 2013. For more information on the episode and online streaming see: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/secrets-viking-sword.html>.

“The satisfactions of manifesting oneself concretely”: from page 15 of Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*.

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A Neurological Argument for Depth

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“Like fingers pointing to the moon”: Ibid., 2.

“Who you are”: Ibid., 1.

“reset button”: Ibid., 48.

“Rather than continuing to focus”: Ibid., 49.

Though *Rapt* provides a good summary of Barbara Fredrickson’s research on positivity (see pages 48–49), more details can be found in Fredrickson’s 2009 book on the topic: Frederickson, Barbara. *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive*. New York: Crown Archetype, 2009.

The Laura Carstensen research was featured in *Rapt* (see pages 50–51). For more information, see the following article: Carstensen, Laura L., and Joseph A. Mikels. “At the Intersection of Emotion and Cognition: Aging and the Positivity Effect.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14.3 (2005): 117–121.

“concentration so intense”: from page 71 of Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990.

“Five years of reporting”: from page 13 of Gallagher, *Rapt*.

“I’ll choose my targets with care”: Ibid., 14.

A Psychological Argument for Depth

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You can also find a short summary of the technique at Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experience_sampling_method.

“The best moments usually occur”: from page 3 of Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*.

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A Philosophical Argument for Depth

“The world used to be”: from page xi of Dreyfus, Hubert, and Sean Dorrance Kelly. *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*. New York: Free Press, 2011.

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“Because each piece of wood is distinct”: Ibid., 210.

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Homo Sapiens Deepensis

“I’ll live the focused life”: from page 14 of Gallagher, *Rapt*.

Rule #1

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“Desire turned out to be the norm, not the exception”: from page 3 of Baumeister, Roy F., and John Tierney. *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011.

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Original study: Baumeister, R., E. Bratlavsky, M. Muraven, and D. M. Tice. “Ego Depletion: Is the Active Self a Limited Resource?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 1252–1265.

Decide on Your Depth Philosophy

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“Persons who wish to interfere with my concentration”: from Neal Stephenson’s old website, in a page titled “My Ongoing Battle with Continuous Partial Attention,” archived in December 2003: <http://web.archive.org/web/20031231203738/http://www.well.com/~neal/>.

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“richly textured account” and “fashioned a Cold War Plutarch”:

from the excerpts of reviews of Walter Isaacson’s *The Wise Men* that I found in the book jacket blurbs reproduced on Simon and Schuster’s official website for the book: <http://books.simonandschuster.com/The-Wise-Men/Walter-Isaacson/9781476728827>.

Ritualize

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Make Grand Gestures

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Harry Potter's Page: <http://www.harrypotterspage.com/2010/10/03/transcript-of-oprah-interview-with-j-k-rowling/>.

Details regarding J.K. Rowling working at the Balmoral Hotel: Johnson, Simon. "Harry Potter Fans Pay £1,000 a Night to Stay in Hotel Room Where JK Rowling Finished Series." *Telegraph*, July 20, 2008. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/2437835/Harry-Potter-fans-pay-1000-a-night-to-stay-in-hotel-room-where-JK-Rowling-finished-series.html>.

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Don't Work Alone

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Execute Like a Business

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Clayton Christensen also talks more about his experience with Andy Grove in a July–August 2010 *Harvard Business Review* article, “How Will You Measure Your Life?” that he later expanded into

a book of the same name: <http://hbr.org/2010/07/how-will-you-measure-your-life/ar1>.

“The more you try to do”: from page 10 of McChesney, Covey, and Huling, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*.

“If you want to win the war for attention”: Brooks, David. “The Art of Focus.” *New York Times*, June 3, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/opinion/brooks-the-art-of-focus.html?hp&rref=opinion&_r=2.

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Be Lazy

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"Committing to a specific plan for a goal": from Masicampo, E.J., and Roy F. Baumeister. "Consider It Done! Plan Making Can Eliminate the Cognitive Effects of Unfulfilled Goals." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101.4 (2011): 667.

Rule #2

My estimate of “hundreds of thousands” of daily Talmud studiers comes from an article by Shmuel Rosner, “A Page a Day,” *New York Times*, August 1, 2012 (<http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/01/considering-seven-and-a-half-years-of-daily-talmud-study/>), as well as my personal correspondence with Adam Marlin.

“So we have scales that allow us to divide” and “The people we talk with continually said”: Clifford Nass’s May 10, 2013, interview with Ira Flatow, on NPR’s *Talk of the Nation: Science Friday* show. Audio and transcript are available online: “The Myth of Multitasking.” <http://www.npr.org/2013/05/10/182861382/the-myth-of-multitasking>. In a tragic twist, Nass died unexpectedly just six months after this interview.

Don't Take Breaks from Distraction. Instead Take Breaks from Focus.

Powers, William. *Hamlet's BlackBerry: Building a Good Life in a Digital Age*. New York: Harper, 2010.

“Do what Thoreau did”: “Author Disconnects from Communication Devices to Reconnect with Life.” *PBS NewsHour*, August 16, 2010. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/science-july-dec10-hamlets_08-16/.

Work Like Teddy Roosevelt

The general information about Theodore Roosevelt’s Harvard habits comes from Edmund Morris’s fantastic biography: Morris, Edmund. *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. New York: Random House, 2001. In

particular, pages 61–65 include Morris's catalog of Roosevelt's collegiate activities and an excerpt from a letter from Roosevelt to his mother that outlines his work habits. The specific calculation that Roosevelt dedicates a quarter of his typical day to schoolwork comes from page 64.

“amazing array of interests”: from page 64 of Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*.

The positive receipt of Roosevelt's book by the *Nuttall Bulletin* comes from Morris's endnotes: in particular, note 37 in the chapter titled “The Man with the Morning in His Face.”

“one of the most knowledgeable”: from page 67 of Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. I ascribed this assessment to Morris, though this is somewhat indirect, as Morris here is actually arguing that Roosevelt's father, after the publication of *The Summer Birds of the Adirondacks*, must have felt this about his son.

“The amount of time he spent at his desk”: from page 64 of Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*.

Memorize a Deck of Cards

Quotes from Daniel Kilov came from personal correspondence. Some background on his story was taken from his online biography, <http://mentalathlete.wordpress.com/about/>, and Lieu Thi Pham. “In Melbourne, Memory Athletes Open Up Shop.” ZDNet, August 21, 2013. <http://www.smartplanet.com/blog/global-observer/in-melbourne-memory-athletes-open-up-shop/>. More on Kilov's scores (memory feats) from his two medal-winning championship bouts can be found on the World Memory Statistics website: <http://www.world-memory-statistics.com/competitor.php?id=1102>.

Foer, Joshua. *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*. New York: Penguin, 2011.

“We found that one of the biggest differences”: Carey, Benedict. “Remembering, as an Extreme Sport.” *New York Times* Well Blog, May 19, 2014.

For more interesting connections between memorization and general thought, see: *The Art of Memory*, by Frances A. Yates, which was first published in 1966. The most accessible version seems to be the handsome 2001 reprint by the University of Chicago Press.

Rule #3

“the most connected man in the world”; “**I was burnt out**”; “**By the end of that first week**”; “**The end came too soon**”; and general information about Baratunde Thurston’s experiment: from the Baratunde Thurston article “#UnPlug” that appeared in the July–August 2013 issue of *Fast Company*. <http://www.fastcompany.com/3012521/unplug/baratunde-thurston-leaves-the-internet>.

The reference to Thurston’s Twitter usage refers to the tweets on March 13, 2014, from the Twitter handle @Baratunde.

“Entertainment was my initial draw”; “[When] I first joined”; and “[I use] Facebook because”: drawn from comments sections of the following two blog posts I wrote in the fall of 2013:

- “Why I’m (Still) Not Going to Join Facebook: Four Arguments That Failed to Convince Me.” <http://calnewport.com/blog/2013/10/03/why-im-still-not-going-to-join-facebook-four-arguments-that-failed-to-convince-me/>.
- “Why I Never Joined Facebook.” <http://calnewport.com/blog/2013/09/18/why-i-never-joined-facebook/>.

For more on Forrest Pritchard and Smith Meadows Farms: <http://smithmeadows.com/>.

Apply the Law of the Vital Few to Your Internet Habits

“Who says my fans want to hear from me”: from a Malcolm Gladwell talk that took place at the International Digital Publishing Forum as part of the 2013 BookExpo America Convention, held in May 2013, in New York City. A summary of the talk, including the quotes excerpted in this chapter, and some video excerpts, can be found in “Malcolm Gladwell Attacks NYPL: ‘Luxury Condos Would Look Wonderful There,’” Huffington Post, May 29, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/29/malcolm-gladwell_attacks-_n_3355041.html.

“I don’t tweet” and **“It’s amazing how overly accessible”**: from the following Michael Lewis interview: Allan, Nicole. “Michael Lewis: What I Read.” The Wire, March 1, 2010. <http://www.thewire.com/entertainment/2010/03/michael-lewis-what-i-read/20129/>.

“And now, nearly a year later”: from “Why Twitter Will Endure,” by David Carr for the *New York Times* in January 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/weekinreview/03carr.html>.

“Twitter is crack for media addicts”: from an online opinion piece written for the *New Yorker* website: Packer, George. “Stop the World.” *The New Yorker*, January 29, 2010. <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/georgepacker/2010/01/stop-the-world.html>.

The law of the vital few is discussed in many sources. Richard Koch’s 1998 book, *The 80/20 Principle* (New York: Crown, 1998), seems to have helped reintroduce the idea to a business market. Tim Ferriss’s 2007 mega-seller, *The 4-Hour Workweek* (New York: Crown, 2007), popularized it further, especially among the technology entrepreneur community. The Wikipedia page on the Pareto principle has a good summary of various places where this general idea applies (I drew many of my examples from here): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareto_principle.

Quit Social Media

“Everything’s more exciting when it’s a party” and general information on Ryan Nicodemus’s “packing party”: “Day 3: Packing Party.” The Minimalists. <http://www.theminimalists.com/21days/day3/>.

Average number of Twitter followers statistic comes from: “Average Twitter User Is an American Woman with an iPhone and 208 Followers.” *Telegraph*, October 11, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/9601327/Average-Twitter-user-is-an-American-woman-with-an-iPhone-and-208-followers.html>.

Take this statistic with a grain of salt. A small number of Twitter users have such a large following that the average skews high. Presumably the median would be much lower. But then again, both statistics include users who signed up just to try out the service or read tweets, and who made no serious attempt to ever gain followers or write tweets. If we confined our attention to those who actually tweet and want followers, then the follower numbers would be higher.

Don’t Use the Internet to Entertain Yourself

“Take the case of a Londoner who works”; “great and profound mistake”; “during those sixteen hours he is free”; and “What? You say that full energy”: from Chapter 4 in Bennett, Arnold. *How to*

Live on 24 Hours a Day. Originally published in 1910. Quotes are from the free version of the text maintained in HTML format at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2274/2274-h/2274-h.htm>.

Rule #4

“People should enjoy the weather in the summer” and general notes on Jason Fried’s decision to move 37signals (now Basecamp) to a four-day workweek: “Workplace Experiments: A Month to Yourself.” Signal v. Noise, May 31, 2012. <https://signalvnoise.com/posts/3186-workplace-experiments-a-month-to-yourself>.

“Packing 40 hours into four days”: from a Forbes.com critique of Fried: Weiss, Tara. “Why a Four-Day Work Week Doesn’t Work.” Forbes. August 18, 2008. www.forbes.com/2008/08/18/careers-leadership-work-leadership-cx_tw_0818workweek.html.

“The point of the 4-day work week is” and **“Very few people work even 8 hours a day”**: from Fried’s response on his company’s blog: “Forbes Misses the Point of the 4-Day Work Week.” Signal v. Noise, August 20, 2008. <http://signalvnoise.com/posts/1209-forbes-misses-the-point-of-the-4-day-work-week>.

“I’d take 5 days in a row”: from Fried’s company’s blog: “Workplace Experiments.” <https://signalvnoise.com/posts/3186-workplace-experiments-a-month-to-yourself>.

“How can we afford to”: from an Inc.com article: Fried, Jason. “Why I Gave My Company a Month Off.” Inc., August 22, 2012. <http://www.inc.com/magazine/201209/jason-fried/why-company-a-month-off.html>.

The notes on how many hours a day of deliberate practice are possible come from page 370 of: Ericsson, K.A., R.T. Krampe, and C. Tesch-Römer. “The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance.” *Psychological Review* 100.3 (1993): 363–406.

Schedule Every Minute of Your Day

The statistics about British TV habits come from this *Guardian* article, by Mona Chalabi, published on October 8, 2013: “Do We Spend More Time Online or Watching TV?” <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/reality-check/2013/oct/08/spend-more-time-online-or-watching-tv-internet>.

The Laura Vanderkam article in the *Wall Street Journal*: “Overestimating Our Overworking,” May 29, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB124355233998464405>.

“I think you far underestimate”: from comment #6 of the blog post “Deep Habits: Plan Your Week in Advance,” August 8, 2014. <http://calnewport.com/blog/2014/08/08/deep-habits-plan-your-week-in-advance>.

Finish Your Work by Five Thirty

“Scary myths and scary data abound” and general information about Radhika Nagpal’s fixed-schedule productivity habit: “The Awesomest 7-Year Postdoc or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Tenure-Track Faculty Life,” *Scientific American*, July 21, 2013. <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/2013/07/21/the-awesomest-7-year-postdoc-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-the-tenure-track-faculty-life/>.

Matt Welsh’s quote about typical travel for junior faculty: “The Fame Trap.” Volatile and Decentralized, August 4, 2014. <http://matt-welsh.blogspot.com/2014/08/the-fame-trap.html>.

The issue of *Science* where Radhika Nagpal’s work appears on the cover: <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/343/6172.toc>; *Science* 343.6172 (February 14, 2014): 701–808.

Become Hard to Reach

“we are slowly eroding our ability to explain”: from page 13 of Freedman, John. *The Tyranny of E-mail: The Four-Thousand-Year Journey to Your Inbox*. New York: Scribner, 2009.

To see my sender filters in action: <http://calnewport.com/contact/>.

“So, when I emailed Cal to ask if he”: Glei, Jocelyn. “Stop the Insanity: How to Crush Communication Overload.” 99U, <http://99u.com/articles/7002/stop-the-insanity-how-to-crush-communication-overload>.

“At some point, the number of people reaching out” and more details on Clay Herbert and Antonio Centeno’s filters: Simmons, Michael. “Open Relationship Building: The 15-Minute Habit That Transforms Your Network.” Forbes, June 24, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelsimmons/2014/06/24/open-relationship-building-the-15-minute-habit-that-transforms-your-network/>.

Notice, this Forbes.com article also talks about my own sender filter habit. (I suggested the name “sender filter” to the article’s author, Michael Simmons, who is also a longtime friend of mine.)

See Antonio’s filters in action: <http://www.realmenrealstyle.com/contact/>.

“Develop the habit of letting small bad things happen”: from Tim Ferriss’ blog: “The Art of Letting Bad Things Happen.” The Tim Ferriss Experiment, October 25, 2007. <http://fourhourworkweek.com/2007/10/25/weapons-of-mass-distractions-and-the-art-of-letting-bad-things-happen/>.

Conclusion

“a prodigious feat of concentration”: from an article for the *Harvard Gazette*: Isaacson, Walter. “Dawn of a Revolution,” September 2013. <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2013/09/dawn-of-a-revolution/>.

“The one trait that differentiated [Gates from Allen] was focus”: Isaacson, Walter. *The Innovators*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014. The quote came from 9:55 into Chapter 6 of Part 2 in the unabridged Audible.com audio version of the book.

The details of the Bill Gates story came mainly from Isaacson, “Dawn of a Revolution,” article, which Walter Isaacson excerpted (with modification) from his *Innovators*. I also pulled some background details, however, from Stephen Manes’s excellent 1994 business biography. Manes, Stephen. *Gates: How Microsoft’s Mogul Reinvented an Industry—and Made Himself the Richest Man in America*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Newport, Cal. *So Good They Can’t Ignore You: Why Skill Trumps Passion in the Quest for Work You Love*. New York: Business Plus, 2012.

You can find a list of my computer science publications, organized by year, at my academic website: <http://people.cs.georgetown.edu/~cnewport>. The publications from my year of living deeply are listed under 2014. Notice that theoretical computer scientists, like myself, publish mainly in competitive conferences, not journals, and that we tend to list authors alphabetically, not in order of contribution.

“I’ll live the focused life”: from page 14 of Gallagher, *Rapt*.



Author: Cal Newport
Credit: none