

MANAGE YOUR DAY TO DAY BY 99U | BOOK SUMMARY

Should you answer that email, or answer your calling? Tune into social media, or tune in to your own voice? Respond to other people's needs or actively set your own agenda? When it comes to creative work, every decision, every day, matters. 99U brings together the insights of 20 creative experts to produce "Manage Your Day to Day". Learn how to build a rock solid routine, find focus and sharpen your creative mind.

BUILDING A ROCK-SOLID ROUTINE

Laying the Groundwork for an Effective Routine by Mark McGuinness

Focus on great work before everything else. Do your most meaningful creative work at the beginning of your day, and leave "reactive work"—like responding to e-mail or other messages—for later.

Follow the building blocks of a great daily routine:

- 1) Start with the rhythm of your energy levels. If you work better in the morning, dedicate this time to your most important work.
- 2) Establish "associative triggers"—such as listening to the same music or arranging your desk in a certain way—that tell your mind it's time to get down to work.
- 3) Manage to-do list creep by limiting your to-dos to what you can fit on a post-it note.
- 4) Capture every commitment that you make somewhere that you'll see it.
- 5) Establish hard edges in your day i.e. When do you start and finish your workday?

Harnessing the Power of Frequency by Gretchen Rubin

Commit to working on your project at consistent intervals—ideally every day—to build creative muscle and momentum over time. Frequency makes starting on a task each day easier, keeps ideas fresh, keeps the pressure off and sparks creativity. Making steady progress towards a goal is the best way to sustain productivity. Don't wait for your mood to be right, show up for work each day regardless of how you feel.

Q&A: Honing Your Creative Practice with Seth Godin

The best way to create a daily routine is to have a practice which means regularly and reliably doing the work in a habitual way. It's important to have symbols of your practice e.g. Wearing a lab coat or always going to the same place.

One of the reasons our short-term routines can not align with long-term goals comes down to fear. People fear putting themselves out there and instead practice self-sabotage. They are afraid of being a fraud and don't position themselves as experts because putting yourself out there opens you up for criticism.

Building Renewal into Your Workday by Tony Schwartz

Move rhythmically between spending and renewing your energy by working in ninety-minute bursts and then taking a break. Make sure you get enough sleep at night and don't be afraid of taking regular 5/10 minute breaks during the day. With lower energy it's easy to prioritise smaller, easier to complete tasks to make it feel like you're being productive. This is like having a sugar high. Instead, spend the first part of your day working on your most important or difficult task that is going to contribute to your long-term goals.

Making Room for Solitude by Leo Babauta

Make a point of spending some time alone each day. It's a way to observe unproductive habits and thought processes, and to calm your mind. Doing this allows you to work out what really matters and unlock your creative voice. Block out some time early in the morning when others are asleep or get into the office early. Incorporate some meditation into your day. This allows you to better control your thoughts on not get distracted by them.

FINDING FOCUS IN A DISTRACTED WORLD

Scheduling in Time for Creative Thinking by Cal Newport

Block out time for creative thinking or a specific task and defend it. Respect those blocks of time as you would any client meeting. Start with a smaller amount of time if you need to and work up. It's also a good idea to use a different environment for this creative thinking

Banishing Multitasking from Our Repertoire by Christian Jarrett

Studies show that the only time you can effectively multitask is when you're doing automatic tasks like walking. For activities that require conscious attention, there's only task-switching. Kill the background noise; turn off your phone, e-mail, and any apps unrelated to your task. Even the presence of background activity (and temptation) can drain your focus. Even if you're not using the Internet, because it's there it requires willpower to ignore it, which reduces our mental power. i.e. Ignoring distractions isn't enough, we have to remove them. Tackle the projects that require "hard focus" early in your day. Self-control—and our ability to resist distractions—declines as the day goes on.

Q&A: Understanding Our Compulsions with Dan Ariely

Often we make bad decisions unintentionally. For example, most people get into work and check email first thing to make it seem like they're doing work. Email is so tempting because we can literally push the refresh button and often something exciting will come up. Instead of opening your email first thing, leave it until later. If it's open and you see an email come in, it's going to be very hard to ignore.

One way of combatting our compulsions is to make progress visible. With email it's easy because you can see all of the replies. But with problem solving you may be thinking for 30 hours before the idea hits you and it doesn't feel like progress. Marking progress is a huge motivator for long-term projects. Make your daily achievements visible by saving iterations, posting milestones, or keeping a daily journal.

Learning to Create Amidst Chaos by Erin Rooney Doland

Use positive distractions to help you ignore the negative distractions (e.g. Social media or email). For example, race the clock to see how quickly you can do a task or reward yourself with 3 minutes social media time as a reward for focused work. Practice strengthening your willpower to help you ignore negative distractions. For example, improve your posture or say "yes" instead of "yeah". Your concentration levels and the amount of time we can focus for weakens throughout the day. Give your brain a break. Alternate challenging creative work with more "mindless" tasks to give your brain time to rest and refuel.

Tuning In to You by Scott Belsky

These days, when a meeting, movie or lecture comes to an end we immediately check in to social channels to see what's going on. Take a break from checking your smartphone during transitional moments, and open yourself up to opportunity and serendipity. Take the time to see how you're feeling, be in the present and chat to someone you don't know. It's amazing what secrets you can unlock in your mind and around you.

TAMING YOUR TOOLS

Making E-mail Matter by Aaron Dignan

The average office worker now spends approximately 28% of their time sorting, responding to and sending email. No matter what kind of work you do, chances are you spend too much time in your Inbox. Keep your long-term goals in view by posting your complex, long-term goals by your workstation to keep them top of mind when prioritising your tasks. Then connect the dots between the emails you receive and the goals you've set. Let go of anything that doesn't advance you

towards these goals. Be conscious of your own bandwidth and practice letting go of certain e-mail and social media conversations. There will always be more opportunities than you actually can take on.

Using Social Media Mindfully by Lori Deschene

Be mindful when logging on to social media by clarifying your intention. Being mindful allows you to engage authentically and reduces our dependency on the connection which can otherwise limit our effectiveness and ability to be present. Part of being mindful with social media is using it consciously vs compulsively. Ask yourself, who are you trying to engage with and add value to? Or am I logging on because I'm feeling lonely or bored? Distinguish between compulsive and conscious behaviours.

Q&A: Reconsidering Constant Connectivity with Tiffany Shlain

Be sure to take a technology break every now and then (aim for once a week). Make a ritual of unplugging on a regular basis. Turning everything off is like hitting the "reset" button on your mind—it gives you a fresh start. Don't take technology into the bedroom. Sending emails right before bed or as soon as you wake up isn't healthy. It doesn't set you up well for sleep or for your day.

Awakening to Conscious Computing by Linda Stone

"Information overload"? More like "information over consumption". In most areas of our lives we've learned how to filter and select. But in the digital sense, we're still very inexperienced. It's time to open up to the idea of conscious computing.

Studies have shown that by many people actually hold their breath or breathe very shallowly when sitting in front of a screen. This lack of oxygen contributes to many stress related diseases. The body becomes acidic, the kidneys begin to reabsorb sodium and the imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide throws off our biochemistry. This all leads to poorer quality focus and decision making. With this in mind, it's important to check-in with yourself regularly and practice proper deep breathing. Stand up desks can be a great way of freeing the body from the constraints of a chair and encourage healthier breathing while at the computer.

Reclaiming Our Self-Respect by James Victore

It's now quite common to be expected to work at home, after hours and even on vacation. People expect their emails and phone calls to be responded to immediately. This has led to the problem that we cannot make a distinction between urgent and important. Everything is now urgent. It's often easier to do the trivial things that are urgent vs. the important and more difficult things. This results in us spending more time on other people's goals than our own. A healthier

relationship with your devices is to take ownership of your time and invest in your own life. Don't trust technology over your own instincts and imagination. Doing busywork is easy; doing your best work is hard. You have a choice in where to direct your attention. Choose wisely. The world will wait. And if it's important, they'll call back.

SHARPENING YOUR CREATIVE MIND

Creating for You and You Alone by Todd Henry

Most of the time, creatives are asked to produce a creative outcome for a client that is being paid for. Remember that it's important to take time to create for yourself as well. Block out some time each week to pursue unnecessary creative projects that enhance your skills and allow you to take risks. Without these risks you can't push your boundaries and hone your skills (which can later be applied to on-demand creating).

Training Your Mind to be Ready for Insight by Scott McDowell

As a beginning it's easy to think you can beat, pummel and thrash an idea into existence. In reality this isn't the case. So what do you do when you need to be creative but creativity isn't coming? The most successful creative minds consistently lay the ground work for ideas to germinate and evolve. They are always refine their personal approach to hijacking the brains neural pathways, developing a tool kit of tricks to spark creativity. Often when working on a tricky problem, often the solution is to become disengaged with the problem. For example going for a walk to take a time out. If you're always working, you don't allow time for new ideas to come to fruition. Down time it key for letting this happen. Creating limitations can also be an effective route forward. Whether these come from a client or yourself, they can help give parameters to your creativity.

Q&A: Tricking Your Brain into Creativity with Stefan Sagmeister

This Q& A with Stefan Sagmeister focuses brain hacks that can be used to lead us to aha moments and why it's important to map creative projects into your daily schedule. The first tip is to start with the difficult tasks first thing in the morning. It's hard to later refocus and convince yourself to do something hard if you've started with the easy things like email. Secondly, your brain naturally wants to think in repetition as it's easy. This means it's harder to find new ideas as your brain uses these shortcuts. Try thinking of a problem from a different perspective in order to trick your brain into breaking this repetition and spark creativity. Start with an endpoint that has nothing to do with the project. It's important to carve out time in your schedule to work on your own. Don't touch this time, for example, block out Friday's and if anyone asks for a meeting on Friday at 10am you can suggest an alternative. Be precious and protect these clocks of time.

Letting Go of Perfectionism by Elizabeth Grace Saunders

As a perfectionist, if you achieve the perfect outcome you're looking for, you feel on top of the world. On the flip side, if you fall even just a little bit short perfect you are crushed. An overemphasis on perfection can lead to an enormous amount of stress which can make you hesitant about taking on new projects, or even worse you abandon creative pursuits due to the physical, mental and emotional stress it brings. Ironically, perfectionism can inhibit your ability to reach your full potential. The trick to overcoming this is to recognise that there's no perfect time to start a new project instead of waiting for the ideal moment. Instead of sweating over every detail, recognise the amount of time that's been allocated to a project and the steps involved for completion and evenly divide your time between these steps. At the even bear in mind that you are doing your best with the time given vs. spending an eternity going back trying to improve each element again until perfect. By taking the less-than-perfect approach you're able to do more and far better work than taking a perfectionist approach that may mean you do nothing at all.

Getting Unstuck by Mark McGuinness

When you get stuck and are suffering from a creative block, just remember that it happens to the pros all the time and try and think about what's causing the problem. The most common problems are: 1) Inspiration drought. This can be solved by taking a break for a while and letting your subconscious find the answer. 2) Emotional barriers. Give yourself permission to write, draw or express what you like, without worrying about peoples opinions. Once you have the first draft done you can refine your work. 3) Mixed motivations. Once the deal is done, put all motivations out of your head and focus on nothing but the work. 4) Personal problems. Use your work as refuge and give yourself credit for showing up and doing some work, even if it's just a small amount. 5) Poverty. Set yourself the creative challenge of doing the most with what you have; whether that's time, energy or money. 6) Presentation problems. This is where creativity blends with communication. You need to be able to communicate your ideas, so beef up your presentation skills.