

Win at Work and Succeed at Life

What's in it for me? Be more by doing less.

Has work taken over your life? Do you struggle to remember the last time you mentally checked out of the office or had a good night's sleep? If this sounds familiar, then you're overworking – and damaging your life and your career in the process. That's where these blinks come in. You'll discover the dangers of working long hours and explore the hidden costs to your health, family, and productivity. You'll also discover how you can reclaim your personal life and set yourself up to win at the office and at home. From sleep to marriage to vacations, these blinks reveal the pleasures and benefits of leading a truly balanced life. In these blinks, you'll learn

why working long hours is counterproductive; the power of a wandering mind; and how to reclaim your sleep.

Don't let your whole life revolve around work.

Michael Hyatt couldn't wait to tell his wife the good news. Earlier that day, his boss had handed him a bonus that was double his yearly salary. The bonus represented success, security, and a big pat on the back. But to Hyatt's surprise, his wife didn't see it that way. When she found out about his bonus, she burst into tears. Instead of being happy, she explained to him that she was near breaking point. She felt like a single mother raising their five kids alone, she said; something about their lives needed to change. Hyatt was shocked. Without realizing it, he'd fallen into the dangerous trap of overwork. The key message here is: Don't let your whole life revolve around work. Hyatt told himself that he always needed to be busy, that sleep was a waste of valuable time. He thought there was no such thing as a work-life balance – not if he wanted to reach his full potential. Millions of Americans are doing exactly the same thing. They're working extremely long hours, and their health and families are falling apart. Consider these disturbing statistics. People who work over 55 hours a week are 33 percent more likely to suffer a stroke, and 13 percent more likely to have a heart attack than those who work 40 hours or less. What's more, CEOs and entrepreneurs are much more likely to get divorced than the rest of the population. Why? The number one reason their marriages fail is because they don't dedicate enough time to their family life. With all these worrying statistics, why don't high achievers take their feet off the gas more? Well, when overworked people feel their lives are falling apart outside of work, their answer is often to work even harder. Hyatt calls this phenomenon the Hustle Fallacy. It might sound counterintuitive, but high achievers are so used to hard work being their go-to solution, they think that if they can just double down on their efforts, somehow they'll be able to push past the pressure and friction in their personal lives and things will get better. But the answer to overwork is never more work. Luckily, as you'll learn in the following blinks, there's a real solution to the conundrum of work-life balance.

The modern workplace can be addictive.

In the twentieth century, experts were predicting that by the year 2000, humanity would be working less, not more. With the advent of computing power and faster communication, it was assumed that we'd be working only two or three days a week. The big question, experts thought, was what we'd do with our vast amounts of free time when we didn't have to work so much. But you probably need only look at your own life today to see how wrong these predictions were. As it turns out, modern technology has given us more work to do, not less. Smartphones have added an average of eleven hours to a typical professional's working week, meaning that many professionals now spend around 80 hours a week working. The key message here is: The modern workplace can be addictive. But we can't entirely blame technology for overwork. There's another, more surprising, reason why the modern workplace has us glued to our desks. The fact is that a lot of the work that people do these days is fun! If you're a successful professional, then it's likely that your daily work tasks are challenging, stimulating, and give you a sense of fulfillment. Once you reach a certain rung on the career ladder, you shrug off a lot of the more boring, administrative tasks attached to your work, and spend the bulk of your time solving interesting problems. When you find something fun, it can be tempting to spend a lot of time on it. But shouldn't your personal life offer just as much fun and stimulation? Well, perhaps not. The reality is that your personal life and relationships are complicated in a way that your work life isn't. When you're in the office, your boss has clearly defined tasks for you to complete. These tasks have a clear end point, and when you've finished, you receive positive feedback and validation for a job well done. But at home, things are a little different. Typical home tasks, like doing laundry, cooking, or putting your children to bed, might not feel so stimulating. It can also be harder to understand what's required of us in our personal relationships than in our work ones, and positive feedback might not be so forthcoming. So instead of clocking out on time, many professionals find it more satisfying to simply stay at their desks. And their personal lives, and their families, suffer as a result.

Prioritize your well-being and your relationships.

When you're a high-powered professional, it's easy to throw your work-life balance off-kilter. There are only 168 hours in every week, and before you know it, you're dipping into your personal time to achieve more of your professional goals. Luckily, there's a way to ensure that you don't neglect your personal life completely. It all comes down to being clear on your nonnegotiable priorities. No matter who you are, or how packed your work schedule is, there are a few nonnegotiables that you need to focus on. The key message here is: Prioritize your well-being and your relationships. The first nonnegotiable is self-care. Self-care refers to activities that help to improve your personal life – activities like eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, or exercising regularly. Making time to connect with the people you love, or focusing on a hobby you enjoy are also ways to take care of yourself. Self-care is so important because you are the common denominator in every single aspect of your life. If you're not functioning at your best, then neither can your career or your family. The second nonnegotiable is your relationships. For instance, Megan Hyatt Miller makes it nonnegotiable that she has a family dinner with her children five days a week. She also makes it nonnegotiable that she has a date with her husband once a week and goes to church every Sunday. Many overworked professionals do prioritize their relationships, but only their working relationships. They allow their personal connections to fall by the wayside. And although this is tempting, it isn't healthy. After all, jobs change. When they do, many people realize that their social life has disappeared overnight. If you need any more encouragement to stay in touch with the people in your life, consider some valuable advice from former palliative care nurse, Bronnie Ware. After years of nursing and talking to people at the end of their lives, Ware noticed that one of the biggest regrets of the dying wasn't staying in touch with old friends. Another top regret, especially among male patients, was wishing that they hadn't worked so hard. So the next time you're wondering whether to skip that fishing trip with old friends to spend the weekend on that work project, remember that in your final days, you might deeply regret it.

To work smarter, work fewer hours.

Work and water have a lot in common. Just like we need water to live, most of us need to work to live, too. Both water and work are most useful to us when we put limits on them. Water that flows down a river is helpful. But when the river bursts its banks and floods, it becomes a problem. Work is exactly the same; it needs limits and constraints to be useful. Many career gurus give us the message that our working week should be unlimited. They tell us that more work means more productivity. But this is wrong. The key message here is: To work smarter, work fewer hours. Not convinced? Then consider that research has found that there are zero benefits to working anything over 50 hours a week. Absolutely none. Studies have shown that workers who put in more than 50 hours don't do anything productive during this extra time. Not only that, one fascinating study found that bosses couldn't tell the difference in performance between workers who worked 80-hour weeks, and those who just pretended to work 80 hours a week. So why do we work better under constraints? Hyatt found the answer when he started leaving his office at 6 p.m. every day, and taking his weekends off. At first, he was worried that he wouldn't be able to fit in everything he needed to do. And he was right – some tasks were left undone when he constrained himself like this. But here's the thing: even if he'd worked longer each week, some tasks would still be left undone. Why? Because, as CEO, he always had more demands on his time than he had hours in the day. So in that sense, it didn't make all that much difference. What's more, when he knew he only had a certain amount of time to devote to work, he found himself focusing on his top priorities. Instead of spending time on tasks that weren't important, he immediately got down to doing the tasks that really mattered. That's the beauty of putting limits on your workweek. Just like a river that's channeled in the right direction, your work limits will keep you focused, and ensure that you keep going in the right direction, too.

Work-life balance means purposefully distributing your time between competing demands.

How can you achieve a work-life balance? Perhaps you think it's a mythical concept that can never truly be reached, as imaginary as the fountain of youth. But the authors believe that work-life balance is real. And what's more, anyone can have it. You just have to be really clear about what balance actually means. Let's start by looking at what work-life balance doesn't mean. It doesn't mean taking a break. This might sound obvious, but often when people talk about their desire for balance, they talk about how stressed and burned out they are. What these people really mean is that they need a rest. Resting is important, but for different reasons that we'll talk about in the next blink. But when it comes to getting a better balance, a rest isn't what you need. That's because achieving a true work-life balance isn't about stopping, it's about being able to go further and faster

than before. The key message here is: Work-life balance means purposefully distributing your time between competing demands. Albert Einstein, the renowned physicist, once said that life was like riding a bicycle – you have to keep your balance in order to keep moving. This simple analogy gets to the heart of what work-life balance means. Leading a truly full life means continually making small adjustments as you go forward, so that you can keep all the different spheres of your life in the air. Work-life balance doesn't mean that you need to devote the same amount of time to each area of your life. Instead, it's about devoting the appropriate amount of time. There'll be years when you'll have a lot of professional opportunities that you need to focus on. During these times, you might focus more on the office. But there'll also be years when it'll be appropriate for you to carve out more time to spend at home. Perhaps, for example, when you have young children. With this in mind, the most important thing is to be intentional about your work-life balance. You must make mindful decisions about how to spend your time. Don't just go on autopilot, expecting balance to happen by itself. If you do, you'll probably find that work takes over. Before you know it, years will go by, and you'll be left wondering why you didn't choose to spend more time with the people you love.

When you stand still, your creativity runs wild.

Inspiration can strike when you least expect it. In 1990, a young writer was on a train between Manchester and London, England. To her annoyance, the train was delayed for four long hours. She was left staring out of the window with nothing to do, and without even a pen. But during those hours, something remarkable happened. An idea for a story arrived in her mind and she spent the time figuring out the plot points and characters. By the time she reached her destination, she had the whole concept ready to go. That writer was J.K. Rowling and the story was Harry Potter. This just goes to show how important it is to take a pause. The key message here is: When you stand still, your creativity runs wild. If you're a high-powered professional, you might not like the idea of taking a break, even if it's just for a few hours. And why would you? After all, the modern workplace is geared toward relentless achievement, and it's pretty hard to achieve your goals when you're not working. But what you may not realize is that the benefits of pausing far outweigh the short-term costs to your productivity. When you take a break, your brain doesn't switch off. Instead, it simply works in a different way. Subconsciously, it'll work through all of your challenges and arrive at more creative solutions. Of course, you may not come up with something as mind blowing as Harry Potter during your pause. Nevertheless, your perspective will change as your mind wanders, and you'll be able to look at your goals with fresh eyes when you return to work. Letting your mind wander might sound simple, or even lazy, but it's actually your superpower. That's because it's one of the few things that human workers will always be able to do that computers can't. When you switch off a computer, it turns off, but when you switch off from work, you turn on. You make creative connections and play around with ideas as you do other unrelated activities like cooking, or gardening, or even simply showering. In this way, the ability to take a pause isn't a hindrance to your productivity. Rather, it's your secret weapon, and the well from which all your human ingenuity springs.

Poor sleep equals poorer performance.

If you listen to the advice dished out by modern celebrities, you might get the impression that sleep doesn't matter all that much. Public figures like Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and entrepreneur Elon Musk boast of getting by on just a few hours of sleep a night, so that they can maximize time spent on their career goals. But just like the myth of the 80-hour superweek, the legend of the permanently awake CEO also needs a reality check. There's probably no better strategy for winning in both your personal and professional life than getting more sleep. Unfortunately, many Americans aren't getting enough. Research suggests that people in the United States are the most sleep-deprived in the Western world. But why is sleep so important, anyway? The key message here is: Poor sleep equals poorer performance. Not only does skipping sleep reduce your immunity and make you more susceptible to weight gain, it also reduces your ability to do your job. Sleep-deprived workers exercise poorer judgment and are more likely to use business strategies that have been proven not to work. Even worse, as soon as you have a sleep deficit, the first skill you lose is the ability to realize that you're not on top of your game. So you're performing poorly, but you won't even notice because you're so tired! And that's not all. When you don't get enough sleep you're more likely to express yourself in a hostile or negative tone, leading to greater interpersonal conflict with people at work. So with all the dangers of sleep deprivation, why do some of the brightest and best minds choose to burn the candle at both ends? Sadly, being sleep-deprived is often a surefire way for people to demonstrate their high social status. Going without sleep signals to others that you're in high demand and have so many responsibilities that you don't have time to rest. If you're looking to sleep more and perform better, then try and switch off from work in the hours before you go to bed. One way to practice this is to stop taking work calls after 7 p.m. That way, you don't risk losing a good night's sleep by worrying about whatever it is that someone called you about. Learn to recognize the activities that interrupt your relaxation in the evening, and make sure you set a clear cutoff point for dealing with them.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks: You don't work in a vacuum; when you arrive at the office, you bring the rest of your life with you. And if that life is in disarray, then sooner or later, your career will be, too. To build sustainable success, you need to look after yourself and your relationships, carve out leisure time, and learn to put limits on your professional life so that it doesn't become your whole life. Actionable advice: You can't always measure what matters. High achievers love to compare their performance to other people's, to see how they measure up. This being said, some of the most meaningful things you can do simply can't be measured. There are no performance metrics for enjoying a hobby, or loving your children, or sitting with friends and savoring a bottle of wine. In fact, these activities won't lead to achievement at all. But even so, they're incredibly important. So the next time you wonder how you can spend the day "winning," ask yourself how you might spend the day meaningfully, instead. Got feedback? We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to with Win at Work and Succeed at Life as the subject line and share your thoughts!