

Effortless

What's in it for me?

Not everything in life has to be difficult. And yet many believe that achieving anything worthwhile requires maximum effort. Just think of how people say that “hard work pays off,” or refer to putting “blood, sweat, and tears” into a project. But working this hard doesn't always guarantee great results. So how about trying a different approach? Instead of exhausting yourself and burning out, why not take the effortless route, and get more by doing less? It may sound too good to be true, but it is possible. And these blinks will show you how. In these blinks, you'll discover

how a bathtub can make your work easier; the small step that launched Netflix; and why a bad start can be a good thing.

Making things effortless starts with getting into the Effortless State, and ends in Effortless Results.

Have you ever marveled at how top athletes make everything look easy? Think of basketball players taking shots, for example. They dribble the ball for a few seconds, bend their knees, and then flick the ball straight into the net. They make this shot over and over again, and it seems completely effortless. Now, there's definitely a lot of practice involved in perfecting basketball shots. But something else that helps is getting into the right state of mind. With this approach, anything you do can look and feel effortless, too. The key message here is: Making things effortless starts with getting into the Effortless State, and ends in Effortless Results. To perform as effortlessly as a seasoned basketball player, you first need to get into the Effortless State. Here, your mind is focused and free of limiting assumptions, and your body is well-rested and full of energy. In this state, anything you attempt is a breeze. Achieving the Effortless State requires you to overcome mental clutter. In the same way that a powerful computer slows down when the hard drive is full, your mind also slows down when it's packed with unhelpful patterns and assumptions. And, just as clearing the hard drive speeds up the computer, freeing your mind of negative thoughts puts you in the Effortless State. In the Effortless State you can take Effortless Action. This means doing less, but achieving more. Many believe that putting in more work leads to better results – but this isn't true. After a certain point, working harder actually reduces performance, making the additional effort pointless. For instance, the author writes two pages in two hours – so you'd assume that doubling the time would double the output. However, a four-hour-long session results in only three pages. Economists call this phenomenon the law of diminishing returns, and, in addition to producing disappointing results, it leads to exhaustion. But with Effortless Action, you reach your goal without doing more work than necessary. And when you apply Effortless Action to the right activities, the results will keep rolling in. This is what it means to achieve Effortless Results, and it's how Kiva, a crowdfunding platform, helps millions of entrepreneurs. Kiva allows anyone to lend money to entrepreneurs, and once the money is repaid, it's lent to other entrepreneurs. So a single action produces results over and over again. Through the Effortless State, Effortless Actions, and Effortless Results, you can make anything easy to accomplish.

Looking for easier or more enjoyable methods gets us into the Effortless State.

Sometimes, we rack our brains over problems, only to realize that we're making things more complicated than they need to be. This was the case when Kim, a multimedia designer at a university, was asked to record a semester's worth of lectures for her course. Already overwhelmed by work, Kim decided to look for an easy way to fulfill the request. Instead of filming and editing videos every week, she first asked what the videos were for. After learning they were for a student who couldn't attend class in person, she suggested that another student record the lectures on a smartphone. By releasing the assumption that the solution was complicated, Kim achieved her goal effortlessly. This is just one way of getting into the Effortless State. Here's the key message: Looking for easier or more enjoyable methods gets us into the Effortless State. When we stop assuming everything is complex, and, instead, ask, "What if this could be easy?", we become more aware of simple, effortless solutions. This is Effortless Inversion, and it's how Kim found a painless way to handle what seemed like a challenging request. Effortless Inversion is the difference between feeling like we're pushing a boulder uphill and rolling it downhill with a quick nudge. But there won't always be an easier way to tackle something, and in these scenarios we can get into the Effortless State by making the activity fun. Think about it: we put off doing certain things because they're difficult or tedious. But if we pair these activities with things we enjoy, ticking them off the to-do list isn't so taxing. For example, when the author came home to a backlog of voicemails after a long trip, he called everyone back while relaxing in the tub. And he enjoyed it so much that he wished he had had more calls to make! In addition to changing our approach to tasks and challenges, we can also get into the Effortless State by allowing our minds and bodies to rest. A lot of us power through even when we're tired and unfocused, making tasks feel more difficult, and exhausting ourselves in the process. But studies show that people in various fields all perform better when they work in three sessions of up to 90 minutes, separated by short breaks. Another good approach is limiting our daily workload to what we can fully recover from by the following day.

Use Effortless Action to accomplish a lot without overexerting yourself.

Imagine this: You've been assigned a big project at work, and, eager to impress, you start planning right away. You brainstorm ideas, figure out what resources you'll need, and create timelines. By the time you're done planning, the project has so many different aspects that you're already overwhelmed by how much effort it will require. But with a few Effortless Action techniques, working on this project - or any other, for that matter - doesn't have to be overwhelming. The key message is this: Use Effortless Action to accomplish a lot without overexerting yourself. The first step to Effortless Action is defining what "done" looks like. Having a clear idea of the final outcome allows you to do only as much work as you need to. If you don't know what the end looks like, it's easy to continue working long after you've reached it, or wear yourself out by chasing a vague goal. So, before kicking off a project, take a minute to establish

what you're working toward. Defining the ultimate goal isn't just for projects. It's also useful for tackling to-do lists. Instead of having a long list that he can never get through, the author writes a "Done for the Day" list. This consists of activities that, if completed by the end of the day, will result in the most meaningful progress and satisfaction. Now, even when you've defined "done," getting started can still be difficult. A helpful tactic is to identify the smallest obvious step, and then take it. This is called the Minimum Viable Action - it requires little effort and saves you from overthinking. Reed Hastings started with a Minimum Viable Action when he first thought of launching a DVD rental service that could evolve into a streaming platform. He posted a DVD to learn whether DVDs could be mailed without being damaged. This small action informed his next steps, and, over 20 years later, Netflix is a streaming giant. Another method for taking Effortless Action is simplifying a process by removing unnecessary steps. Many steps included in tasks and projects call for additional effort, but don't add much value. A good way to avoid this is by considering the ultimate goal, and then asking how you can achieve it in the fewest steps.

Progress is effortless when you're not afraid to start with rubbish.

In 1959, industrialist Henry Kremer created a prize for anyone who could build a human-powered airplane. This was about 50 years after the first successful flight, so the challenge seemed doable. But the prize went unclaimed for over 17 years. The man who finally won it was Paul MacCready. He realized that participants were building expensive machines that looked impressive but failed the flight test. His approach was to build something cheap and easy to fix. This way, he could test and crash the plane several times, and use the lessons from each attempt to redesign and build a better version. This is a great example of making progress through Effortless Action. The key message here is: Progress is effortless when you're not afraid to start with rubbish. Many of us believe that our work has to be perfect right from the start. But this only slows our progress. The Effortless Action that counters this belief is being courageous enough to start with an imperfect version. If we allow ourselves to start with a rough product, we can learn from our mistakes and make good progress. To make starting with rubbish easier, we should look for low-risk opportunities to learn from failure. Think of how some children receive small allowances to manage, in preparation for adult financial responsibilities. It also helps to be less critical when our work isn't so perfect. Instead of criticizing what we've done, we should congratulate ourselves for trying in the first place. Each attempt will lead to effortless improvement, and, from that, progress. Progress is closely tied to pace, and this is another aspect to which we can apply Effortless Action. As tempting as it is to work incredibly hard right at the beginning of a project, this approach actually hurts our progress in the long run. We end up exhausted very quickly, and then we're hard on ourselves for not doing as much work as we intended to. A better strategy is to work at a slow but consistent pace. Doing this requires establishing a range that keeps us moving forward without tiring us out. For instance, a writer can decide that she won't produce fewer than 500 words or more than 1000 words daily. This rule applies even when she has the energy to keep writing past the upper limit. If she gets into this rhythm, she'll see slow but steady progress.

"Slow is smooth, smooth is fast."

Knowledge and automation are levers that produce Effortless Results.

You know how some things require constant effort in order to maintain results? For instance, employees work every month for a salary. They can't do one month's worth of work and expect to keep getting paid when they stop. The output will never exceed the input. Such linear results are inevitable in certain situations, but they're not the only possible results. You can apply effort once, and reap the rewards over and over again. Think of how authors get royalties for years after writing one book. These recurring benefits are examples of Effortless Results, and you can achieve them with the help of levers. Here's the key message: Knowledge and automation are levers that produce Effortless Results. Levers are tools that multiply any effort that's applied to them, and learning is an incredibly powerful lever, if used correctly. To use learning effectively, prioritize fundamental principles – that is, why things happen and how things work. These are the building blocks of knowledge. Learn them once and you can apply them repeatedly, and in different ways. For example, if a student crams for a test, she'll forget the information in a few days or weeks. But if she invests time in understanding the principles, she'll be able to apply them long after the test is done. And she can further maximize the impact of learning by putting the information in her own words, and then explaining it to someone else. This cements her understanding. You can also leverage learning by gaining knowledge from different people and fields. As researchers at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management found, connecting knowledge from different areas leads to creative ideas. They assessed almost 18 million research papers and discovered that the best ideas came from combining knowledge from different fields. Another lever that produces Effortless Results is automating as many tasks as possible. This not only frees up time and mental energy, but it also reduces the chance of errors. You simply have to set up a process once, and you can execute tasks correctly multiple times. One good automation method is creating a checklist ahead of time. This allows you to perform tasks easily without having to remember the process each time. There are also various tech tools to automate things like your monthly budget, grocery shopping, or regular catch-ups with loved ones. These one-time choices will save you from having to make the same decisions over and over again.

You can ensure Effortless Results by working with trustworthy people, and solving problems before they happen.

We all work and interact with other people in one way or another. And, unfortunately, navigating these relationships and making them productive can be hard. We might struggle to get on the same page, or to communicate. Sometimes, there's conflict that makes every interaction difficult. Or we might not be sure that those around us are capable of doing what's needed. Because of this, reaching a goal or getting results requires a lot more effort. But it doesn't have to be this way. Even when other people are involved, there are levers we can use to minimize our efforts and maximize the results. The key message is this: You can ensure Effortless Results by working with trustworthy people, and solving problems before they happen. Trust is a great lever for getting Effortless Results when we're working with others. It's like the oil that keeps

different parts of an engine working together smoothly. When there's trust, we don't have to spend time and effort managing people or relationships. We can assign tasks with the confidence that they'll be completed. And we know that any problems will be raised and addressed as soon as possible. This trust starts with choosing the right people, and, to do so, we can follow business tycoon Warren Buffett's example. He looks for integrity, intelligence, and initiative in those he works with. This one-time decision leads to effortless results, because such people will constantly add value. It's also useful to establish a high-trust agreement. This acts as a foundation of trust by clearly outlining elements of the relationship, such as expectations, roles, and goals. Creating a high-trust agreement involves defining the desired results, agreeing on who does what, and setting rules and standards. The agreement should also indicate any available resources, as well as how progress will be measured and rewarded. Now, even with the best people around, we'll still encounter problems from time to time. And while it's good to manage problems as they arise, it's even better to solve them before they happen. For instance, if recurring issues constantly frustrate us, taking a few minutes to solve them permanently saves us from repeatedly finding quick fixes. Think of it like cutting a tree at the root instead of hacking at the branches. Investing the time and effort once means never having to deal with the same problem again.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks: The road to achieving great results doesn't have to be tortuous. When you embrace the idea that things can be easy, and even enjoyable, you open yourself up to effortless solutions. And by clearly defining your goal and identifying a small yet significant first step, you launch yourself into a series of effortless actions that lead to steady and meaningful progress. Finally, when you leverage knowledge, automation, and trust, you create a system that produces recurring results. Actionable advice: Turn tasks into rituals with meaning. The tasks you find tedious can become things you enjoy doing. All you have to do is combine them with an action that gives them soul and meaning. For example, organization guru Marie Kondo suggests thanking your clothes for protecting your body each time you fold them. And in the author's home, the entire family sings along to Disney classics while cleaning up after dinner. So pick something on your to-do list and think of how you can turn it into a meaningful ritual. Got feedback? We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to with Effortless as the subject line and share your thoughts!