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Deep Work
Cal Newport

Z3stra

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Deep Work: Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit.
p. 7

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These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.
p. 7

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Shallow Work: Noncognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted.
p. 10

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These efforts tend not to create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate.
p. 10

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See on Glose

In an age of network tools, in other words, knowledge workers increasingly replace deep work with the shallow alternative—constantly sending and receiving e-mail messages like human network routers, with frequent breaks for quick hits of distraction.
p. 10

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See on Glose

Deep work is not, in other words, an old-fashioned skill falling into irrelevance.
p. 19

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It’s instead a crucial ability for anyone looking to move ahead in a globally competitive information economy that tends to chew up and spit out those who aren’t earning their keep.
p. 19

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The Deep Work Hypothesis: The ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy.
p. 19

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As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive.
p. 19

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Let’s pull together the threads spun so far: Current economic thinking, as I’ve surveyed, argues that the unprecedented growth and impact of technology are creating a massive restructuring of our economy.
p. 30

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In this new economy, three groups will have a particular advantage: those who can work well and creatively with intelligent machines, those who are the best at what they do, and those with access to capital.
p. 30

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Two Core Abilities for Thriving in the New Economy
p. 32

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The ability to quickly master hard things.
p. 32

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The ability to produce at an elite level, in terms of both quality and speed.
p. 32

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The point of providing these details is to emphasize that intelligent machines are complicated and hard to master.
p. 33

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To join the group of those who can work well with these machines, therefore, requires that you hone your ability to master hard things.
p. 34

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And because these technologies change rapidly, this process of mastering hard things never ends: You must be able to do it quickly, again and again.
p. 34

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This ability to learn hard things quickly, of course, isn't just necessary for working well with intelligent machines; it also plays a key role in the attempt to become a superstar in just about any field—even those that have little to do with technology.
p. 34

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It's here that we arrive at a central thesis of this book: The two core abilities just described depend on your ability to perform deep work.
p. 35

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This brings us to the question of what deliberate practice actually requires.
p. 37

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Its core components are usually identified as follows: (1) your attention is focused tightly on a specific skill you're trying to improve or an idea you're trying to master; (2) you receive feedback so you can correct your approach to keep your attention exactly where it's most productive.
p. 38

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This new science of performance argues that you get better at a skill as you develop more myelin around the relevant neurons, allowing the corresponding circuit to fire more effortlessly and effectively.
p. 38

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See on Glose

To be great at something is to be well myelinated.
p. 38

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But this sequence of thinking about thinking points to an inescapable conclusion: To learn hard things quickly, you must focus intensely without distraction.
p. 39

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The results from this and her similar experiments were clear: “People experiencing attention residue after switching tasks are likely to demonstrate poor performance on that next task,” and the more intense the residue, the worse the performance.
p. 45

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When we step back from these individual observations, we see a clear argument form: To produce at your peak level you need to work for extended periods with full concentration on a single task free from distraction.
p. 46

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Put another way, the type of work that optimizes your performance is deep work.
p. 46

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To summarize, big trends in business today actively decrease people’s ability to perform deep work, even though the benefits promised by these trends (e.g., increased serendipity, faster responses to requests, and more exposure) are arguably dwarfed by the benefits that flow from a commitment to deep work (e.g., the ability to learn hard things fast and produce at an elite level).
p. 54

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My objective is to convince you that although our current embrace of distraction is a real phenomenon, it's built on an unstable foundation and can be easily dismissed once you decide to cultivate a deep work ethic.
p. 55

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This example generalizes to most behaviors that potentially impede or improve deep work.
p. 57

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See on Glose

Even though we abstractly accept that distraction has costs and depth has value, these impacts, as Tom Cochran discovered, are difficult to measure.
p. 57

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The Principle of Least Resistance: In a business setting, without clear feedback on the impact of various behaviors to the bottom line, we will tend toward behaviors that are easiest in the moment.
p. 59

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See on Glose

To return to our question about why cultures of connectivity persist, the answer, according to our principle, is because it's easier.
p. 60

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See on Glose

The Principle of Least Resistance, protected from scrutiny by the metric black hole, supports work cultures that save us from the short-term discomfort of concentration and planning, at the expense of long-term satisfaction and the production of real value.
p. 62

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Busyness as Proxy for Productivity: In the absence of clear indicators of what it means to be productive and valuable in their jobs, many knowledge workers turn back toward an industrial indicator of productivity: doing lots of stuff in a visible manner.
p. 65

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See on Glose

If it’s high-tech, we began to instead assume, then it’s good. Case closed.
p. 69

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See on Glose

He called such a culture a technopoly, and he didn’t mince words in warning against it.
p. 69

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See on Glose

If you believe in the value of depth, this reality spells bad news for businesses in general, as it’s leading them to miss out on potentially massive increases in their value production.
p. 73

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But for you, as an individual, good news lurks.
p. 73

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The goal of this chapter is to convince you that deep work can generate as much satisfaction in an information economy as it so clearly does in a craft economy.
p. 78

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See on Glose

These elderly subjects were not happier because their life circumstances were better than those of the young subjects; they were instead happier because they had rewired their brains to ignore the negative and savor the positive.
p. 80

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See on Glose

By skillfully managing their attention, they improved their world without changing anything concrete about it.
p. 81

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See on Glose

In work (and especially knowledge work), to increase the time you spend in a state of depth is to leverage the complex machinery of the human brain in a way that for several different neurological reasons maximizes the meaning and satisfaction you'll associate with your working life.
p. 83

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Among many breakthroughs, Csikszentmihalyi's work with ESM helped validate a theory he had been developing over the preceding decade: "The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile." Csikszentmihalyi calls this mental state flow (a term he popularized with a 1990 book of the same title).
p. 85

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Ironically, jobs are actually easier to enjoy than free time, because like flow activities they have built-in goals, feedback rules, and challenges, all of which encourage one to become involved in one's work, to concentrate and lose oneself in it.
p. 86

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See on Glose

Free time, on the other hand, is unstructured, and requires much greater effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed.

p. 86

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Both point toward the importance of depth over shallowness, but they focus on two different explanations for this importance.
p. 86

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Gallagher’s writing emphasizes that the content of what we focus on matters.
p. 86

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See on Glose

If we give rapt attention to important things, and therefore also ignore shallow negative things, we’ll experience our working life as more important and positive.
p. 86

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See on Glose

Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow, by contrast, is mostly agnostic to the content of our attention.
p. 86

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See on Glose

Though he would likely agree with the research cited by Gallagher, his theory notes that the feeling of going deep is in itself very rewarding.
p. 87

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See on Glose

Our minds like this challenge, regardless of the subject.
p. 87

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See on Glose

This, ultimately, is the lesson to come away with from our brief foray into the world of experimental psychology: To build your working life around the experience of flow produced by deep work is a proven path to deep satisfaction.
p. 87

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See on Glose

In a post-Enlightenment world we have tasked ourselves to identify what's meaningful and what's not, an exercise that can seem arbitrary and induce a creeping nihilism.
p. 88

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See on Glose

Beautiful code is short and concise, so if you were to give that code to another programmer they would say, "oh, that's well written code." It's much like as if you were writing a poem.
p. 91

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See on Glose

Within the overall structure of a project there is always room for individuality and craftsmanship … One hundred years from now, our engineering may seem as archaic as the techniques used by medieval cathedral builders seem to today's civil engineers, while our craftsmanship will still be honored.
p. 91

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See on Glose

Whether you're a writer, marketer, consultant, or lawyer: Your work is craft, and if you hone your ability and apply it with respect and care, then like the skilled wheelwright you can generate meaning in the daily efforts of your professional life.
p. 91

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See on Glose

I earlier quoted Winifred Gallagher, the converted disciple of depth, saying, “I’ll live the focused life, because it’s the best kind there is.” This is perhaps the best way to sum up the argument of this chapter and of Part 1 more broadly: A deep life is a good life, any way you look at it.
p. 94

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A now voluminous line of inquiry, initiated in a series of pioneering papers also written by Roy Baumeister, has established the following important (and at the time, unexpected) truth about willpower: You have a finite amount of willpower that becomes depleted as you use it.
p. 100

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This brings me to the motivating idea behind the strategies that follow: The key to developing a deep work habit is to move beyond good intentions and add routines and rituals to your working life designed to minimize the amount of your limited willpower necessary to transition into and maintain a state of unbroken concentration.
p. 101

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With this in mind, the six strategies that follow can be understood as an arsenal of routines and rituals designed with the science of limited willpower in mind to maximize the amount of deep work you consistently accomplish in your schedule.
p. 101

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You need your own philosophy for integrating deep work into your professional life.
p. 102

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See on Glose

Knuth deploys what I call the monastic philosophy of deep work scheduling.
p. 104

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See on Glose

This philosophy attempts to maximize deep efforts by eliminating or radically minimizing shallow obligations.
p. 104

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See on Glose

In recalling this story I want to emphasize something important: Jung did not deploy a monastic approach to deep work.
p. 107

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See on Glose

Jung, by contrast, sought this elimination only during the periods he spent at his retreat.
p. 107

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Jung’s approach is what I call the bimodal philosophy of deep work.
p. 108

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See on Glose

During the deep time, the bimodal worker will act monastically—seeking intense and uninterrupted concentration.
p. 108

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See on Glose

To put aside a few hours in the morning, for example, is too short to count as a deep work stretch for an adherent of this approach.
p. 109

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See on Glose

For our purposes, it provides a specific example of a general approach to integrating depth into your life: the rhythmic philosophy.
p. 112

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See on Glose

This philosophy argues that the easiest way to consistently start deep work sessions is to transform them into a simple regular habit.
p. 112

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See on Glose

This strategy suggests the following: To make the most out of your deep work sessions, build rituals of the same level of strictness and idiosyncrasy as the important thinkers mentioned previously.
p. 121

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See on Glose

There’s no one correct deep work ritual—the right fit depends on both the person and the type of project pursued.
p. 121

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See on Glose

• Where you’ll work and for how long. Your ritual needs to specify a location for your deep work efforts.
p. 121

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See on Glose

• How you’ll work once you start to work.
p. 122

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See on Glose

Your ritual needs rules and processes to keep your efforts structured.
p. 122

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See on Glose

• How you'll support your work. Your ritual needs to ensure your brain gets the support it needs to keep operating at a high level of depth.
p. 122

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See on Glose

Rowling's decision to check into a luxurious hotel suite near Edinburgh Castle is an example of a curious but effective strategy in the world of deep work: the grand gesture.
p. 125

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See on Glose

The concept is simple: By leveraging a radical change to your normal environment, coupled perhaps with a significant investment of effort or money, all dedicated toward supporting a deep work task, you increase the perceived importance of the task.
p. 125

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See on Glose

The dominant force is the psychology of committing so seriously to the task at hand.
p. 128

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See on Glose

For the sake of discussion, let's call this principle—that when you allow people to bump into each other smart collaborations and new ideas emerge—the theory of serendipitous creativity.
p. 130

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See on Glose

This back-and-forth represents a collaborative form of deep work (common in academic circles) that leverages what I call the whiteboard effect.
p. 135

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See on Glose

For some types of problems, working with someone else at the proverbial shared whiteboard can push you deeper than if you were working alone.
p. 136

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See on Glose

First, distraction remains a destroyer of depth.
p. 136

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See on Glose

Therefore, the hub-and-spoke model provides a crucial template.
p. 136

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See on Glose

Second, even when you retreat to a spoke to think deeply, when it’s reasonable to leverage the whiteboard effect, do so.
p. 137

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See on Glose

With this in mind, I’ve summarized in the following sections the four disciplines of the 4DX framework, and for each I describe how I adapted it to the specific concerns of developing a deep work habit.
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See on Glose

The general exhortation to “spend more time working deeply” doesn’t spark a lot of enthusiasm.
p. 139

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See on Glose

To instead have a specific goal that would return tangible and substantial professional benefits will generate a steadier stream of enthusiasm.
p. 140

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See on Glose

Lag measures describe the thing you’re ultimately trying to improve.
p. 140

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See on Glose

Lead measures, on the other hand, “measure the new behaviors that will drive success on the lag measures.” In the bakery example, a good lead measure might be the number of customers who receive free samples.
p. 141

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This scoreboard creates a sense of competition that drives them to focus on these measures, even when other demands vie for their attention.
p. 142

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See on Glose

The 4DX authors elaborate that the final step to help maintain a focus on lead measures is to put in place “a rhythm of regular and frequent meetings of any team that owns a wildly important goal.” During these meetings, the team members must confront their scoreboard, commit to specific actions to help improve the score before the next meeting, and describe what happened with the commitments they made at the last meeting.
p. 143

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See on Glose

Instead, I want to suggest a more applicable but still quite powerful heuristic: At the end of the workday, shut down your consideration of work issues until the next morning—no after-dinner e-mail check, no mental replays of conversations, and no scheming about how you'll handle an upcoming challenge; shut down work thinking completely.
p. 147

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See on Glose

The implication of this line of research is that providing your conscious brain time to rest enables your unconscious mind to take a shift sorting through your most complex professional challenges.
p. 149

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See on Glose

A shutdown habit, therefore, is not necessarily reducing the amount of time you're engaged in productive work, but is instead diversifying the type of work you deploy.
p. 149

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See on Glose

This study, it turns out, is one of many that validate attention restoration theory (ART), which claims that spending time in nature can improve your ability to concentrate.
p. 150

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See on Glose

Only the confidence that you're done with work until the next day can convince your brain to downshift to the level where it can begin to recharge for the next day to follow.
p. 152

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See on Glose

Ericsson notes that for a novice, somewhere around an hour a day of intense concentration seems to be a limit, while for experts this number can expand to as many as four hours—but rarely more.
p. 153

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See on Glose

Any work you do fit into the night, therefore, won't be the type of high-value activities that really advance your career; your efforts will instead likely be confined to low-value shallow tasks (executed at a slow, low-energy pace).
p. 154

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See on Glose

To succeed with this strategy, you must first accept the commitment that once your workday shuts down, you cannot allow even the smallest incursion of professional concerns into your field of attention.
p. 154

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See on Glose

Another key commitment for succeeding with this strategy is to support your commitment to shutting down with a strict shutdown ritual that you use at the end of the workday to maximize the probability that you succeed.
p. 154

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See on Glose

The shutdown ritual described earlier leverages this tactic to battle the Zeigarnik effect.
p. 157

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See on Glose

While it doesn't force you to explicitly identify a plan for every single task in your task list (a burdensome requirement), it does force you to capture every task in a common list, and then review these tasks before making a plan for the next day.
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See on Glose

Adam Marlin's experience underscores an important reality about deep work: The ability to concentrate intensely is a skill that must be trained.

p. 160

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See on Glose

Once your brain has become accustomed to on-demand distraction, Nass discovered, it's hard to shake the addiction even when you want to concentrate.
p. 162

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See on Glose

To put this more concretely: If every moment of potential boredom in your life—say, having to wait five minutes in line or sit alone in a restaurant until a friend arrives—is relieved with a quick glance at your smartphone, then your brain has likely been rewired to a point where, like the "mental wrecks" in Nass's research, it's not ready for deep work—even if you regularly schedule time to practice this concentration.
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See on Glose

I propose an alternative to the Internet Sabbath.
p. 164

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See on Glose

Instead of scheduling the occasional break from distraction so you can focus, you should instead schedule the occasional break from focus to give in to distraction.
p. 164

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See on Glose

To simplify matters, when scheduling Internet use after work, you can allow time-sensitive communication into your offline blocks (e.g., texting with a friend to agree on where you'll meet for dinner), as well as time-sensitive information retrieval (e.g., looking up the location of the restaurant on your phone).
p. 168

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See on Glose

This doesn’t mean that you have to eliminate distracting behaviors; it’s sufficient that you instead eliminate the ability of such behaviors to hijack your attention.
p. 169

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See on Glose

The simple strategy proposed here of scheduling Internet blocks goes a long way toward helping you regain this attention autonomy.
p. 169

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See on Glose

Deep work requires levels of concentration well beyond where most knowledge workers are comfortable.
p. 172

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See on Glose

Roosevelt dashes leverage artificial deadlines to help you systematically increase the level you can regularly achieve—providing, in some sense, interval training for the attention centers of your brain.
p. 172

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See on Glose

It was this reality that led me to develop the practice that I’ll now suggest you adopt in your own deep work training: productive meditation.
p. 173

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See on Glose

The goal of productive meditation is to take a period in which you’re occupied physically but not mentally—walking, jogging, driving, showering—and focus your attention on a single well-defined professional problem.
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See on Glose

A side effect of memory training, in other words, is an improvement in your general ability to concentrate.
p. 180

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See on Glose

This ability can then be fruitfully applied to any task demanding deep work.
p. 180

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See on Glose

The first point is that we increasingly recognize that these tools fragment our time and reduce our ability to concentrate.
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See on Glose

To master the art of deep work, therefore, you must take back control of your time and attention from the many diversions that attempt to steal them.
p. 187

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The Any-Benefit Approach to Network Tool Selection: You're justified in using a network tool if you can identify any possible benefit to its use, or anything you might possibly miss out on if you don't use it.
p. 190

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See on Glose

Throughout history, skilled laborers have applied sophistication and skepticism to their encounters with new tools and their decisions about whether to adopt them.
p. 191

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See on Glose

There’s no reason why knowledge workers cannot do the same when it comes to the Internet—the fact that the skilled labor here now involves digital bits doesn’t change this reality.
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Following is my attempt to generalize this assessment strategy.
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I call it the craftsman approach to tool selection, a name that emphasizes that tools are ultimately aids to the larger goals of one’s craft.
p. 196

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The Craftsman Approach to Tool Selection: Identify the core factors that determine success and happiness in your professional and personal life.
p. 196

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Adopt a tool only if its positive impacts on these factors substantially outweigh its negative impacts.
p. 196

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Apply the Law of the Vital Few to Your Internet Habits
p. 197

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The goal of this strategy, therefore, is to offer some structure to this thought process—a way to reduce some of the complexity of deciding which tools really matter to you.
p. 198

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See on Glose

The first step of this strategy is to identify the main high-level goals in both your professional and your personal life.
p. 199

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Once you've identified these goals, list for each the two or three most important activities that help you satisfy the goal.
p. 199

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The next step in this strategy is to consider the network tools you currently use.
p. 200

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For each such tool, go through the key activities you identified and ask whether the use of the tool has a substantially positive impact, a substantially negative impact, or little impact on your regular and successful participation in the activity.
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Now comes the important decision: Keep using this tool only if you concluded that it has substantial positive impacts and that these outweigh the negative impacts.
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The Law of the Vital Few*: In many settings, 80 percent of a given effect is due to just 20 percent of the possible causes.
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Quit Social Media
p. 208

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Instead of “packing,” however, you’ll instead ban yourself from using them for thirty days.
p. 209

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After thirty days of this self-imposed network isolation, ask yourself the following two questions about each of the services you temporarily quit:
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Would the last thirty days have been notably better if I had been able to use this service?
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Did people care that I wasn’t using this service?
p. 210

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If your answer is “no” to both questions, quit the service permanently.
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If your answer was a clear “yes,” then return to using the service.
p. 210

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See on Glose

They offer personalized information arriving on an unpredictable intermittent schedule—making them massively addictive and therefore capable of severely damaging your attempts to schedule and succeed with any act of concentration.
p. 210

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See on Glose

Given these dangers, you might expect that more knowledge workers would avoid these tools altogether—especially those like computer programmers or writers whose livelihood explicitly depends on the outcome of deep work.
p. 211

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See on Glose

They’re just products, developed by private companies, funded lavishly, marketed carefully, and designed ultimately to capture then sell your personal information and attention to advertisers.
p. 214

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See on Glose

But it has not. If anything, with the rise of the Internet and the low-brow attention economy it supports, the average forty-hour-a-week employee—especially those in my tech-savvy Millennial generation—has seen the quality of his or her leisure time remain degraded, consisting primarily of a blur of distracted clicks on least-common-denominator digital entertainment.
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In other words, this strategy suggests that when it comes to your relaxation, don't default to whatever catches your attention at the moment, but instead dedicate some advance thinking to the question of how you want to spend your "day within a day." Addictive websites of the type mentioned previously thrive in a vacuum: If you haven't given yourself something to do in a given moment, they'll always beckon as an appealing option.
p. 217

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To summarize, if you want to eliminate the addictive pull of entertainment sites on your time and attention, give your brain a quality alternative.
p. 219

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37signals' experiments highlight an important reality: The shallow work that increasingly dominates the time and attention of knowledge workers is less vital than it often seems in the moment.
p. 224

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See on Glose

To summarize, I'm asking you to treat shallow work with suspicion because its damage is often vastly underestimated and its importance vastly overestimated.
p. 226

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See on Glose

These examples underscore an important point: We spend much of our day on autopilot—not giving much thought to what we're doing with our time.
p. 228

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

It's an idea that might seem extreme at first but will soon prove indispensable in your quest to take full advantage of the value of deep work: Schedule every minute of your day.
p. 228

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

To summarize, the motivation for this strategy is the recognition that a deep work habit requires you to treat your time with respect.
p. 234

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

A good first step toward this respectful handling is the advice outlined here: Decide in advance what you're going to do with every minute of your workday.
p. 234

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

To summarize these observations, Nagpal and I can both succeed in academia without Tom-style overload due to two reasons.
p. 247

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

First, we're asymmetric in the culling forced by our fixed-schedule commitment.
p. 247

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

By ruthlessly reducing the shallow while preserving the deep, this strategy frees up our time without diminishing the amount of new value we generate.
p. 247

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that the reduction in shallow frees up more energy for the deep alternative, allowing us to produce more than if we had defaulted to a more typical crowded schedule.
p. 247

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose

Fixed-schedule productivity, in other words, is a meta-habit that’s simple to adopt but broad in its impact.
p. 248

This passage has been highlighted in Yellow

See on Glose