

The Power of Less by Leo Babauta | Book Summary by Paul Minors

INTRODUCTION

Who is this summary for?

The Power of Less by Leo Babauta is a guide on how to de-clutter your life and work to create more time for the important things. Leo explains how identifying the essential aspects of your life and eliminating all of the non-essentials can allow you to focus on goals and aspirations that can continue to change your life for the better. We live in a fast-paced world, this book is a great read for anyone looking to slow down a little and get rid of the clutter with the aim of focusing on only the important aspects of life. .

About the author

Leo Babauta is an author and blogger. His popular blog [Zen Habits](#) focuses on the simplicity and mindfulness that we need to find in order to manage our chaotic lives. Babauta began to make some dramatic changes in his life as of December 2005 and credits the simple way of life and a lot of mindfulness for his progress. As a husband and father of 6, Babauta lives in California, enjoys running, writing and eating vegan food.

In this summary

We'll begin this summary by discussing why less is powerful and the art of setting limits. Then we'll summarise how you can choose only the essential, simplifying and creating new habits. Next, we'll introduce the power of less challenge before we dive into discussing the simple approach to many daily tasks such as time management, email, and filing. Finally, we'll discuss slowing down and simple health and fitness concepts.

BOOK SUMMARY

HAVING LESS CAN BE POWERFUL

We live in a consumer society, it's hard to escape the intensity of the advertising bombarding us daily, encouraging us to continue to consume. We are constantly told that we need to have more and do more. However, Babauta explains that the time in our day is limited, as is the space in our lives. Doing more doesn't mean you are being more productive, it likely means that you're doing more things that are unimportant resulting in more stress. And having more doesn't make you a better person. It simply means that you own more possessions.

Babauta introduces two key principles (there's more to come):

- Principle 1: Set limitations: in setting your own limitations you are choosing the essential. In every area of your life, no matter what you do, set limitations for yourself.
- Principle 2: Choose the essential: by doing this you can use minimal resources but actually have an impressive impact. It's a clever strategy to maximise both your energy and time.

Choosing to have an impact

By choosing only the essential things to do, it's important that you assess what things will have the most impact. Whenever you consider taking on a new task, identify whether it has a high or a low impact. For example, something with high-impact could have a long-term positive effect on your career, or make you a lot of money.

Babauta encourages you to examine your task list and identify any tasks that have an impact that will last longer than this week. Then consider next month and even next year. These are the kinds of tasks you should be focusing on. If something's impact is going to last less than a week, then it isn't worth your time.

Also, Babauta recommends you can consider all of your goals and anything you want to achieve within the next year. Ensure that all tasks you take on are benefiting these long-term goals.

How to apply limitations

Babauta believes that every area of your life could do with limitations. A couple of questions you can ask yourself to get started are:

- Are there areas of your life that you find overwhelming? What are then?
- Which areas of your life do you wish were simpler?
- Do you think you have too many possessions and you want to reduce these?
- Are you receiving too much information/do you have too many responsibilities?

Email is a common complaint and Babauta has an effective way of simplifying the potential overwhelm you can face with busy inboxes. If you set your limitation to only checking your email twice a day, and responding to only a set amount of emails each time, you'll find you can focus only on the most important emails.

SETTING LIMITS

Babauta explains that most people have almost no limits, faced with too many possessions, too many tasks and an overwhelming intake of information. He believes that having limits is actually a sign of strength, being limitless shows weakness and vulnerability.

Babauta believes that limits can be truly beneficial. Limits mean that tasks become more manageable and as a result, less stressful. Limitations give you the ability to focus all of your time and energy on only the important things. You can focus on only the essential. By setting limits you are letting other people know that your time is valuable and not a resource anyone can take advantage of, people will respect your time. Overall, limitations help you become more effective in life.

What and how?

Babauta explains that every area of your life can have limits applied to it, but you shouldn't try and tackle it all at once. He recommends beginning with one key area and trying to simplify that first. A few suggestions are emails, phone times, email subscriptions or the items on your desk.

Set your limits by first assessing your current situation and usage. Identify a target limit that is lower. Try sticking to this new limit for a week to check it works for you. If it's not quite right after one week, adjust and re-test. Once you've established an achievable limit that is lower than your original, make it a habit and you can start tackling a different area of your life.

CHOOSE THE ESSENTIAL AND HOW TO SIMPLIFY

Identifying the essential is the first step to reducing the amount of projects, tasks, commitments and clutter you have. The key is to get rid of anything that isn't considered to be essential. Babauta explains that in choosing the essential it's important to consider the following questions:

- What are your values?
 - Do you have goals?
 - What do you love?
 - Identify the things most important to you.
 - What has the biggest impact?
 - Where is the most long-term impact
 - Needs vs. wants
 - Eliminate the nonessential
 - Continual editing

"Choosing the essential is almost never a one-time decision. It's something you have to re-visit regularly, as new things accumulate, as your values and goals change, as you learn that you can live with less and less."

Babauta introduces the next principle:

Principle 3: Simplifying and eliminating the nonessential. The first step, identifying the essential is that hard part. The next part, the simplification is simply getting rid of the rest, all of the non-essentials. Babauta explains that this gets easier the more you do it.

FOCUS

Babauta's 4th principle is fundamental to improving your effectiveness:

Principle 4: Focus is going to be the most important tool you can use to improve your productivity and effectiveness. Without focus, you'll never be able to establish new habits or achieve goals. By maintaining your focus, you can give all of your time and energy to the most important goals and habits. Babauta explains that it's also important to focus on the present, the right now. By focusing simply on the current task you can eliminate the feeling of overwhelm.

No more multitasking

Multitasking is something we all do, but none of us do it well. Babauta explains that multitasking is not efficient at all, the energy required to shift from task to task is bigger than you imagine. Multitasking also increases the risk of making errors. Multitasking is not a calm act, and Babuata stresses the importance of trying to find calm in our days, to escape the busyness of the world.

Rather than multitasking, Babauta encourages single-tasking. He explains that when you wake up in the morning, get started on the most important task you face, and don't stop until it's completed. This is a common tactic from many other productivity authors and specialists. It's about getting the most important thing done, with no distractions, don't even check your emails. Once this task is out of the way, you can move on to other tasks such as email. But remember, only one at a time.

NEW HABITS AND A CHALLENGE

Principle 5 – Create new habits to make long-lasting improvements: in order for a habit to truly stick, you can only focus on one habit at a time, month by month. This is another common theme among productivity and habit specialists, no-one ever encourages you to take on many habits at once. The less is more concept is pretty relevant here.

The challenge: identify one habit you want to take on. Write this down as a plan. Publicly reveal your goal. Make sure you report back on your progress. Do this for a month. Once complete, celebrate this is a new habit!

The only way you'll form long-lasting habits is by applying the power of less: focus on one habit, one month at a time.

Measurable habits with small increments of change

Babauta reminds us to choose habits that are measurable, it's important to be able to track your progress so you know you are moving in the right direction. And don't be too put off by any setbacks of missed days, these things happen, it's important to not let that stop you!

Principle 6: Start new habits in small increments to ensure success - by starting in small increments you will be able to maintain focus. You'll also be able to maintain enthusiasm and energy for your chosen habit. If you are spreading yourself too thin you are likely to struggle and give up early. Also, start with only gradual changes. Don't try anything too radical in the beginning. If you usually consume 4 cups of coffee a day, try to reduce this to 3. Don't go cold turkey. Babauta explains that a common habit people want to adopt is waking earlier every morning. But don't jump in and try to get up 2 hours earlier, start with 15 minutes and increase gradually.

GOALS AND PROJECTS

"It's easy to set goals, but extremely difficult to achieve them if they are goals worth achieving. The Power of Less is perfect for achieving goals: limit yourself to fewer goals and you'll achieve more."

One goal

Babauta emphasises the importance of selecting just one goal. Once you've established your goal you can channel all of your time and energy into achieving it. This means that your focus is stronger and you are more likely to achieve your goal. When first beginning, Babauta recommends identifying a key goal that will take about 6-12 months to complete. Once you've established this goal, the key is to break it down into actionable steps or sub-goals. Consider making a step-by-step list of how you can achieve your goal, and each step is a mini sub-goal. This way, you only have to focus on one step at a time and everything will feel much more achievable.

By achieving steps more regularly your motivation will remain high. Every week, assess your goals and identify what steps you will take each day to reach the end goal. Breaking your goals down like this will mean that you can keep crossing things off your list and visibly feel like you are making progress.

Remember that you need to stick with this goal until it is complete. Have a clear deadline and understand exactly what it is you want to achieve. Track your progress regularly to ensure you don't get distracted.

SIMPLIFYING TASKS

We all have tasks that we need to do daily, we also all have tasks that we could do today but aren't really that important. Babauta stresses the importance of identifying your most important tasks (MITs) each day. It's best to start with a maximum of three MITs and see how you go. The goal you should have each day is to complete all three MITs. Anything else you achieve can be considered a bonus. Babauta also recommends having one of your MITs dedicated to your own goal, the other two can be work-related. The best way to ensure that these tasks are achieved daily is to do them first. Never leave them until the end of the day.

"Focusing on fewer but more critical tasks is important, but to really simplify our tasks, break them down into small tasks that can be completed in an hour or less."

MANAGE YOUR TIME

A lot of productivity authors recommend scheduling your entire day and relying on your calendar. But for a lot of people, this can be overwhelming. Babauta actually recommends living in the moment rather than being ruled by a calendar. If you understand your priorities, and only ever have a few MITs and goals going at one time, you should be in a position to make decisions on what work needs to be done and where.

Reducing your tasks is a good way to manage your time better, delegate anything you can and eliminate the unnecessary. Continue to simplify and reduce your tasks. The less you have to do, the less you have to organise.

Babauta also recommends batching tasks together for optimum effectiveness. If you identify a period of time at some point in the day to make all phone calls then that means you don't have to interrupt your work throughout your day.

SIMPLIFY YOUR EMAIL

Email is one of the main ways we communicate these days and it's easy to get overwhelmed with full inboxes. Many people have multiple email addresses or chat services that deliver messages and information all day. Babauta explains that limiting your inboxes is going to be extremely beneficial in increasing your effectiveness. Do you really need more than one email address? Consider which sources of messages are the most important and eliminate the rest. Also, only check your emails and messages twice a day, no more. Babauta recommends doing this at 10 am and 4 pm.

It's important to deal with emails as quickly and effectively as possible. The best way to do this is from the bottom to the top. Take action on each email, never leave them sitting in the inbox. Your options are: delete, archive, reply, forward or add to your to-do list. Babauta recommends you use the delete key as much as possible, we often hold on to these kinds of things unnecessarily.

Be aware of your internet usage

There are three key things you need to consider when it comes to your internet usage. Awareness, consciousness, and focus.

Babauta recommends you track your online time to become aware of your usage. You can use an app or tool to do this. This can identify some of the top ways you are wasting time. Next, it's important to plan your online time. Understand why you are using the internet and what your purpose is. Once you have achieved the desired result, disconnect. Finally, focus is critical, you need to be able to work on tasks without distraction and the internet is a huge distraction. Eliminate the risk of distraction by shutting down your browsers and logging off. Plan a set amount of time to work on focused work without the internet.

SIMPLIFY FILING SYSTEMS

It's pretty common to see messy workspaces, piled high with paper, files and general clutter. Babauta stresses the importance of a clear and clean desk. It should be a calm workspace, not a place of chaos. The first step you should take when aiming to clear up your workspace is to establish an organisation system for all of your files and paperwork. The most obvious is always alphabetical, and group clients/projects together in folders or manilla files.

The key to maintaining this system is to never let paper pile up on your desk. As soon as you're finished with something, file it away immediately. Further to that, Babauta recommends reducing paper altogether when possible and storing information online and on your computer. Instead of printing out emails unnecessarily, keep them on the computer in a corresponding filing system.

Further to organising your workspace and your desk, you should also declutter your home. You want to keep your home as simple as possible. Having a simple home is beneficial because it is less stressful, easier to maintain and keep clean and is aesthetically pleasing. Babauta encourages everyone to set aside some time every day to ensure that both the home and workspace is clear. By doing this every day it will never pile up or get out of hand.

REDUCE YOUR COMMITMENTS

Something you'll see a lot of productivity authors talk about is minimising the number of commitments you say yes to. Babauta encourages you to reduce your commitments which will free up more of your time so you can focus on your goals.

The first step to reducing your commitments is to identify what commitments you currently have, consider work, family, religions, hobbies, home etc. Establish your most important commitments, no more than 4-5 and eliminate the rest. If something brings you no value then you shouldn't be doing it. Start by eliminating just one at a time and see how you go. And get comfortable with saying no when new things come up.

HAVE A SIMPLE DAILY ROUTINE

Establishing a simple routine for your day, especially your morning and evening can be really beneficial. Babauta believes that a morning routine can be really powerful and set you up for a productive day ahead. He recommends fitting in some exercise, reading or writing first thing. It's also a good time to do something that you find relaxing and calming. Don't pick a complicated or busy morning routine, keep it simple with a few steps you can follow every single day.

"Maybe you start with a cup of coffee while you watch the sunrise, followed by a quick stroll around the neighbourhood and a short planning session."

Babauta explains that an evening routine can be just as beneficial and set you up for a new day tomorrow. Use the time to wind down and reflect on your day. Before bed, it's best to relax and have some quality time with family. Again, use this time to engage in a calming activity such as reading or journaling.

"You can wind down your day by cooking dinner and eating with a loved one, reviewing your day, preparing for the day ahead and reading something enjoyable."

SLOW DOWN

Attention

Babauta stresses the pace of our lives these days, we are usually running on over-drive and at high speed. We usually have our attention on multiple things at once and are forced to switch between them. This can be an extremely negative approach and means that we can't give our full attention to the things that really need it.

Babauta encourages you to slow down and only give your attention to one thing at a time. Once you've dealt with something, move on to the next. Give yourself time to adjust and focus.

Working

Another thing that we often do at high speed is work. We believe that we need to work faster than ever before so that we can fit more in. Babauta believes that despite what you might think, working slower actually is more effective and can produce better results. By working at a slower pace you are able to focus better, are less likely to make errors and you are more likely to achieve quality results.

Eating

How many people eat their breakfast on the run as they get ready for work, or skip it all together? And how many lunches are scoffed down at the desk while focusing on work? This is unhealthy and promotes stress. Babauta highly recommends you slow down when you are eating your meals. Ensure that you sit down and focus only on the meal in front of you. Take small bites, chew your food and you'll find that you enjoy your food more than ever. Other positive side effects of eating slower are improved digestion, better nutrient absorption, and less stress.

MANAGE YOUR HEALTH AND FITNESS SIMPLY

Health and fitness is so important to living a quality life so it's important that you maintain a good level of both. Babauta explains that health and fitness doesn't happen overnight, it's something that develops over months and years. For this reason it is important to introduce habits that are maintainable and something you can continue doing for the rest of your life. Here are a few ways Babauta recommends you introduce some healthier habits into your life:

1. Commit to one month of a new exercise habit. Something simple and straightforward that you can do everyday. Start with something small like a quick jog around your block or a 10 minute circuit at home. Make it something you can do every day without fail. Don't miss a day!
2. After your first month of exercising, continue your new routine while adding new healthy habits into your diet. It's not about 'dieting' just ensure that you eat when you're hungry, eat until you are full. Eat foods that provide nutrients and nourishment.
3. Once you've completed your first two months you can set more short-term goals to track your progress in both health and fitness. For example aim to decrease your running time or include an extra serve of vegetables a day. Stay accountable and reward yourself when you reach your goals.

"Motivation is what drives you towards a goal, what keeps you going when things get tough. The best kind of motivation is for you to really want something, to get excited about it and be passionate."

CONCLUSION

Key Takeaways

- Principle 1: Set limitations: in setting your own limitations you are choosing the essential. In every area of your life, no matter what you do, set limitations for yourself.
- Principle 2: Choose the essential: by doing this you can use minimal resources but actually have impressive impact. It's a clever strategy to maximise both your energy and time.
- Principle 3: Simplifying and eliminating the nonessential. The first step, identifying the essential is that hard part. The next part, the simplification is simply getting rid of the rest, all of the non-essentials.
- Principle 4: Focus is going to be the most important tool you can use to improve your productivity and effectiveness. Without focus, you'll never be able to establish new habits or achieve goals. By maintaining your focus, you can give all of your time and energy to the most important goals and habits.
- Principle 5 – Create new habits to make long-lasting improvements: in order for a habit to truly stick, you can only focus on one habit at a time, month by month.
- Principle 6: Start new habits in small increments to ensure success - by starting in small increments you will be able to maintain focus. You'll also be able to maintain enthusiasm and energy for your chosen habit. If you are spreading yourself too thin you are likely to struggle and give up early. Also start with only gradual changes. Don't try anything too radical in the beginning.

Further Reading

By the same author is [Zen to Done](#). Zen to Done is Leo Babauta's response to two of the best and most popular productivity systems; David Allen's [Getting Things Done](#) and Stephen Covey's [7 Habits of Successful People](#). Allen and Covey's books have been summarised already on my site, Leo Babauta's guide is an interesting and

new take on the two systems, taking the best concepts from each and creating what Leo Babauta describes as 'The Ultimate Productivity System'.

If you enjoyed the concepts in this book you'll probably enjoy *Minimalism* by the Minimalists. This book is for anyone who's not completely content with their current life. Josh & Ryan's book questions what it means to be happy and explores how to live a meaningful life. If you can read this book with an open mind you may be able to take a step back and take inventory of your current life, you may discover that certain things you are doing or things that you own are getting in the way of your own happiness or freedom.

Essentialism by Greg McKeown is a must read for people interested in taking the minimalist attitude and applying it to work and productivity. It's a real eye-opener which challenges you to think about what's important and how you're spending your time. The book guides you through the process of saying "no" to the "trivial many" so you can focus more on the "essential few".

Guidelines is my eBook that summarises the main lessons from 33 of the best-selling self-help books in one place. It is the ultimate book summary; Available as a 80-page ebook and 115-minute audio book. Guidelines lists 31 rules (or guidelines) that you should follow to improve your productivity, become a better leader, do better in business, improve your health, succeed in life and become a happier person.

Action Steps

- Take on Babauta's habit challenge: identify one habit you want to take on. Write this down as a plan. Publicly reveal your goal. Make sure you report back on your progress. Do this for a month. Once complete, celebrate this is a new habit!
- Declutter your workspace and home.
- Work on your health and fitness by implementing new routines and healthy habits.
- Identify what commitments you have and try to reduce these to the bare minimum.
- Identify 1 goal that you can work towards for the next 6-12 months. Break the goal down into actionable tasks and track your progress

This summary is not intended as a replacement for the original book and all quotes are credited to the above mentioned author and publisher.