

# How to Stop being busy and become productive

Fabian Dablander & Lea Jakob

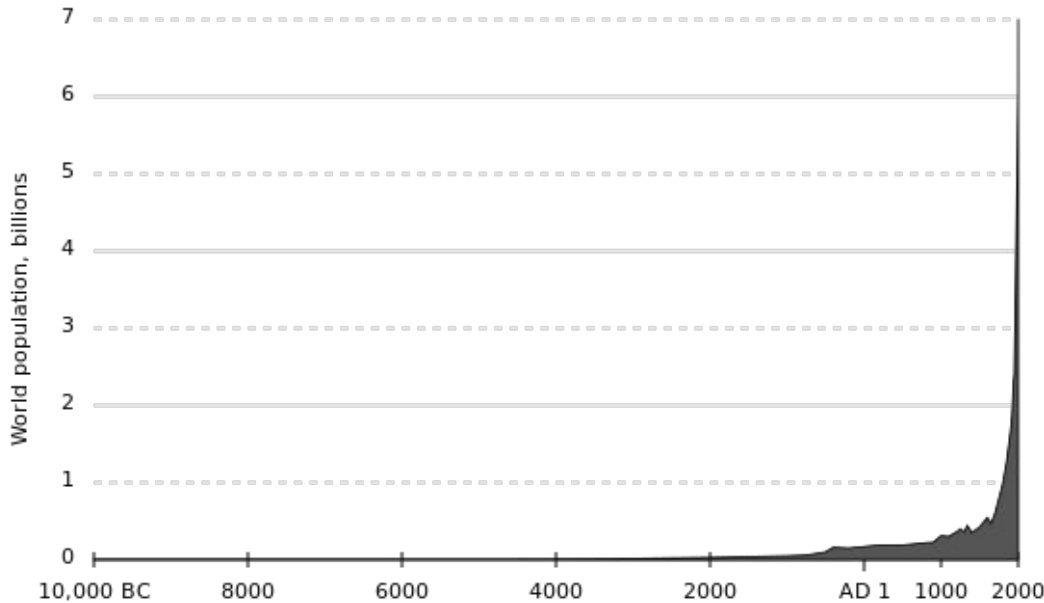
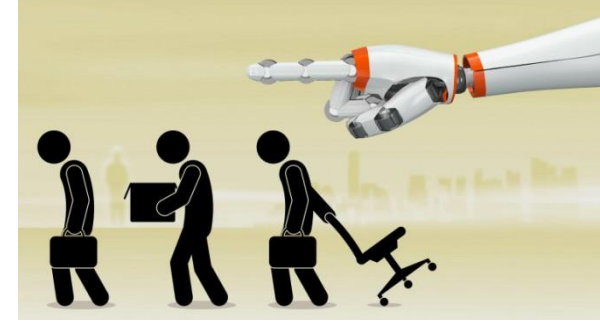
31<sup>st</sup> EFPSA Congress, Qakh, Azerbaijan

# A three point summary

- If you work, work hard. If you're done, be done.
- Never be the smartest person in the room.
- Be relevant.

# Humanity Today

- The three most important challenges of our time
  - Exploitation of the Earth (includes climate change)
  - Income inequality (includes world poverty)
  - Rise of robots and the future of work



**Who's gonna fix it?**

**We**

# How?

**By investing in ourselves**

# Outline

- The Attention Economy
- Being busy vs being productive
  - Contrasting the two
  - Interactive “bad habits” brainstorming
- High-achieving, productive people
  - Some hints on what distinguishes them from the rest



# Outline

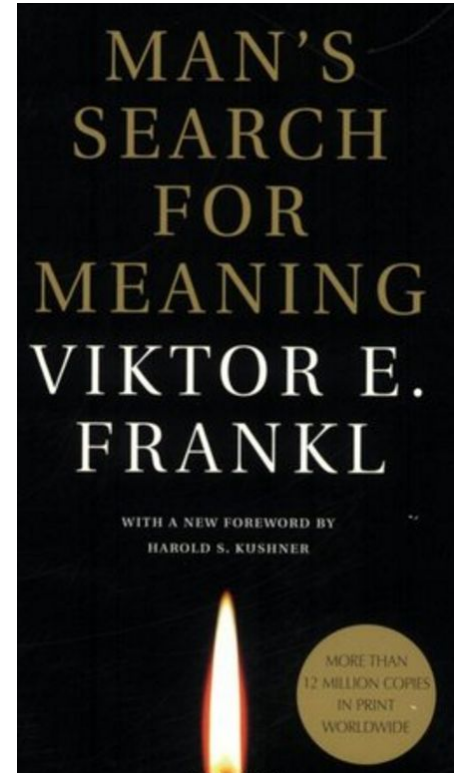
- Review of research on productivity
  - Learning How to Learn
  - Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise
  - Mindset: The new Psychology of Success
  - Deep Work: Rules for focused success in a distracted world
  - Reinvent Yourself
- Our approaches and tools we use
- How to stay motivated
  - An actionable 3-stage program
- The Final Problem
- Tips for working in teams

Before we start ...

# The Defining Decade

Why your  
**Twenties** matter—  
and how to  
make the most  
of them **now**

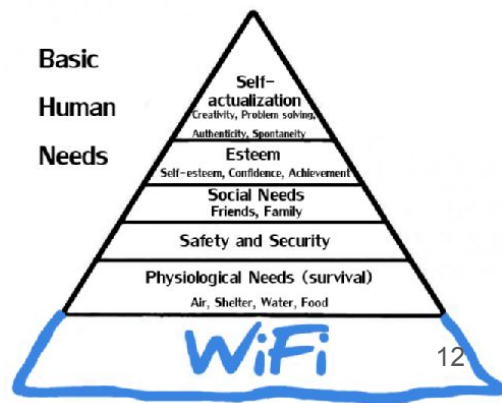
MEG JAY, PhD



**Attention is the new oil**

# The Attention Economy

- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Email, etc. all compete for your attention
- Your phone is a slot machine
  - Every time you scroll your news feed, you're playing a slot machine
  - Every time you check your email, Facebook, or Twitter, you're playing a slot machine
  - Thousands of engineers are working full time to get your attention
  - Attention is the new oil
- The metrics they are using are
  - Time spent on site
  - Number of active users
- They exploit our cognitive biases



# The Attention Economy

- Instant connectivity has made us impatient
- An army of disruptors such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat, Netflix, etc. rob us of our attention and time



- **Challenge:** Try to not check your phone during this workshop.

See <https://www.samharris.org/podcast/item/what-is-technology-doing-to-us> for more

# Goals of this workshop

- 1) Help you realize the difference between being busy and being productive
- 2) Brainstorm your bad habits and discuss actionable steps to overcome them
- 3) Introduce you to tools to help increase your productivity
- 4) Present a 3 stage program to motivate you beyond today

Being busy vs being productive

# Your thoughts on the difference (selection)

- *“The term “being busy” is used when a person spends his/her day on unnecessary things. The time schedule is not divided properly and productively. At the end of the day we think that we had a busy day, but actually we spend much time on irrelevant activities.”*
- *“The difference is output - you can be busy but there could be no work done and if you are productive there is always some output.”*
- *“Busy is referring to having loads of stuff to do. Being productive can also include loads of stuff, but in this case all activities are meaningful and you know why you do those things. Busy is more mindless.”*



# Busy

- Talk about how little time one has
- Have poorly specified goals
- Have multiple priorities; multitasking
- Seize every opportunity (impulsive “yes”)

# Productive

- Takes time to do things that matter
- Have clearly specified goals
- Have clear priorities, focus on single tasks
- Think hard before agreeing to take up another project (thoughtful “yes”)

# Busy

- Immediately responding to any given task
- Complain, talk a lot about how they will change
- Want others to value effort
- Involves being frustrated

# Productive

- Scheduling tasks
- Take concrete steps towards achieving the desired change
- Want others to value results
- Involves balance and joy

# Bad habits — Interactive Sessions

- What are bad habits that impede your productivity?



# Notes on high-achieving, productive people

# High achievers

- What does distinguish them from the general population?

# Your thoughts on productive people (selection)

- *“Good time management skills”*
- *“Good sleeping habits, excellent time management and prioritizing skills, self-awareness”*
- *“Exercise daily, never procrastinate, never underestimates the human needs (like sleep on time and eat), respects oneself's daily routines, good sleep pattern, healthy, social and productive”*
- *“He or she is very well organized. To be a high achieving person in every aspect you need to be good at managing time.”*
- *“They actually try to reach higher and not settle for what they've already got.”*

“What it boils down to is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

- Thomas Edison

“[...] creative people organize their lives according to repetitive, disciplined routines. **They think like artists but work like accountants.**”

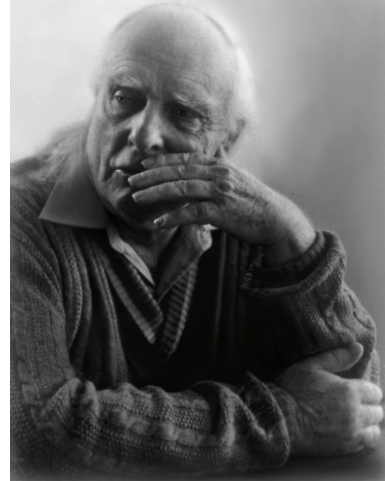
- David Brooks, reviewing *Daily Rituals: How Artists work*



“Men of genius themselves were great only by bringing all their power to bear on the point on which they had decided to show their full measure.”

- Antonin Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life* (1921)

- Maxim of Quality
  - Don't say anything you believe to be false.
  - Don't say anything for which you lack evidence.
  
- Maxim of Quantity
  - Make your utterances as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
  - Don't make your utterances more informative as is required.
  
- Maxim of Manner
  - Be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as possible.
  - Avoid ambiguity and obscurity.
  
- Maxim of Relevance
  - Be relevant.



# Review of research on productivity

# What are the most important skills to learn?

# What are the most important skills to learn?

Category	Components	Rank
Learning how to learn and personal productivity	Monitoring, time management, learning strategies, active learning	1
Persuasion and negotiation		2
Science		3
Communication	Active listening, speaking, writing, reading comprehension	4
Analysis and problem solving	Systems evaluation, operations analysis, critical thinking, systems analysis, complex problem solving, judgement and decision making	5
Management	Instructing, management of personnel, management of financial resources, coordination, management of material resources	6
Programming		7
Technology design		8
Service orientation		9
Mathematics		10
Manual skills	Operation and control, repairing, equipment maintenance, operation monitoring, installation, equipment selection, troubleshooting	11

- **Learning How to Learn**
- **Personal Productivity**

# Learning How to Learn

- Most popular (free!) course on Coursera of all time
- 4 important concepts
  - Illusion of Competence
  - Eat your frogs first
  - Process versus Product
  - Focused versus Diffuse mode



See also <https://medium.com/learn-love-code/learnings-from-learning-how-to-learn-19d149920dc4>

“The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance,  
it is the illusion of knowledge.”

- Stephen Hawking

**Antidote:** Learn to say “I don’t know”; always quiz yourself; discuss with colleagues; Feynman learning technique

# The Feynman Learning Technique

1. Pick a topic. Write everything you know about it in a notebook. Add to it everytime you learn more about it.

Pretend to teach the topic to a classroom of students. Speak and write things down as you go along. 2.

3. Go back to study when you get stuck. Your knowledge gaps should be obvious. Revisit those until you can explain them fully.

Simplify and use analogies. Repeat the process while simplifying your language; use analogies to strengthen your understanding. 4.

- 1. Pick a topic and write down everything you know about it.
- 2. Pretend to teach the topic to a classroom of students. Speak and write down things as you go along.
- 3. Go back to study when you get stuck. Your knowledge gaps should be obvious. Revisit those until you can explain them fully.
- 4. Simplify and use analogies. Repeat the process while simplifying your language; use analogies to strengthen your understanding.



“Swallow a frog in the morning if you want to encounter nothing more disgusting the rest of the day.”

- Nicolas Chamfort

**Antidote:** Exercise and cold shower in the morning; specify your most despised task on the day before and tackle it first thing the next day



“Focus on the process (the way you spend your time) instead of the product (what you want to accomplish).”

- Barbara Oakley

**Antidote:** Pomodoro technique; scheduling blocks for deep work

“Thiss sentence contains threee errors.”

- Barbara Oakley

**Antidote:** Do not work continuously; take breaks to let your mind wander; e.g., meet friends, go running, or meditate

# Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise

- Book written by Anders Ericsson
- **Deliberate practice beats natural talent**
- Deliberate practice
  - Focus on tasks that are just beyond what you are currently capable of
  - Is structured, focusing on small improvements in a stepwise manner
  - Requires constant feedback and improvement
  - Requires a mentor that can show you how to advance faster

PEAK

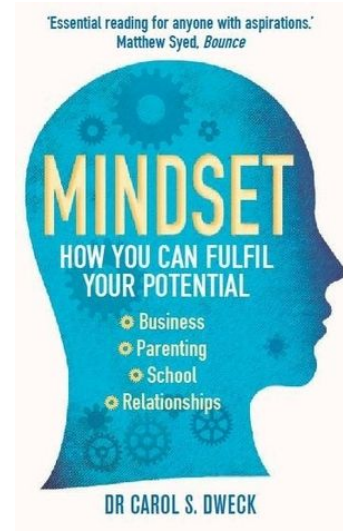
SECRETS FROM  
THE NEW SCIENCE  
OF EXPERTISE

Anders Ericsson  
and Robert Pool

See also <https://hbr.org/2007/07/the-making-of-an-expert>

# Mindset: The new Psychology of Success

- Book written by Carol Dweck
- Main points
  - You have your limitations. Everybody does. But don't limit yourself by being anxious.
  - Abandon **fixed mindset**, develop **growth mindset**



# Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset

Based on the work of Dr. Carol Dweck

I believe that my **[Intelligence, Personality, Character]** is inherent and static. Locked-down or fixed. My potential is determined at birth. It doesn't change.

Fixed  
Mindset



Avoid failure  
Desire to Look smart  
Avoids challenges  
Stick to what they know  
Feedback and criticism is personal  
They don't change or improve

I believe that my **[Intelligence, Personality, Character]** can be continuously developed. My true potential is unknown and unknowable.

Growth  
Mindset



Desire continuous learning  
Confront uncertainties.  
Embracing challenges  
Not afraid to fail  
Put lots of effort to learn  
Feedback is about current capabilities



From <https://goo.gl/w5Bmzz>

# Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World

- Book written by Cal Newport
- Deep work
  - Deeply focusing your mind on a specific task for a certain amount of time
  - It helps you accomplish the things that matter
- High-quality work produced =  
(Time spent working) \* (Intensity of Focus)



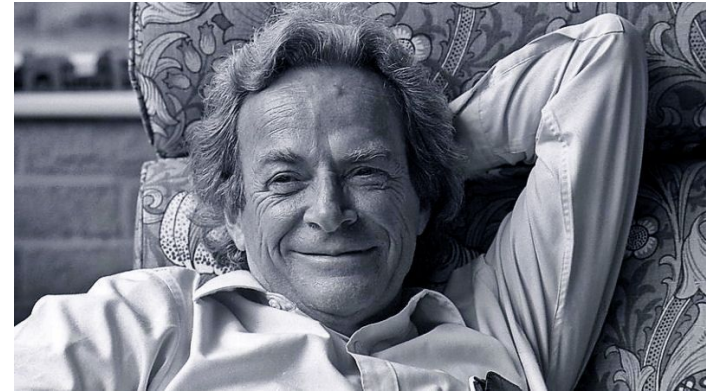
# Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World

- Deep Work is rare - why?
  - The Metric Black Hole
  - The Principle of Least Resistance
  - Busyness as a proxy for productivity
- “Yes” is the most dangerous word in the vocabulary of a productive person



“To do real good physics work, you need absolute solid length of time ... it needs a lot of concentration ... if you have a job administrating anything, you don't have the time. So I have invented another myth for myself: that I'm irresponsible. I'm actively irresponsible. I tell everyone I don't do anything. If anyone asks me to be on a committee for admissions, “no”, I tell them: I'm irresponsible.”

- Richard Feynman



# Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World

- The 4 Disciplines of Execution
  - Focus on the wildly important
  - Act on the lead measures (e.g., number of deep work blocks per week)
  - Keep a compelling scoreboard
  - Become accountable
- Quantify the depth of working activities
  - How long does it take a smart graduate student who is unfamiliar with the task to complete it?

# HOW TO BECOME A STRAIGHT-A STUDENT



The Unconventional Strategies  
Real Students Use to Score High  
While Studying Less

CAL NEWPORT

*Author of How to Win at College*

# Reinvent Yourself

- Book written by James Altucher
- Chapters with titles such as
  - “What I learned about negotiation from the FBI’s best hostage negotiator”
  - “Seven things Star Wars taught me about productivity”
  - “Six things I’ve learned from Charles Bukowski”
  - “The twenty things I’ve learned from Larry Page”
  - “Lessons I learned from playing poker for 365 straight days”
  - “What I learned from chess”



# Our approaches and tools we use

# Lea's productivity hacks

- Bullet journaling
  - Anti-stress way of organizing my thoughts and tasks
  - Analog, not digital; involves creativity
- Taking short, regular breaks to stretch or increase adrenaline (short intense workout or a sprint outside)
- Avoiding stimulants (coffee, energy drinks) and carbohydrates
- Delegating tasks

# Fabian's daily schedule before

## - Morning

- Between 0700 and 0800: waking up, getting ready, rushing outside, grabbing coffee and butter pretzel at a local bakery
- Arrived at the library at about 0830, arguing whether I can take my food inside (Every. Single. Day.)

## - Noon

- Scribbled things on my to do list
- Worked away on disparate things in bursts of thirty to sixty minutes
- Updated my to do list as I went along
- No detailed schedule of breaks
- Checked Emails and Twitter repeatedly, responded immediately if something cropped up

## - Lunch

- Usually at around 1300
- Some sandwiches, croissants, and coffee at the cafeteria
- No social interaction with other people whatsoever

## - Afternoon

- Continue working on disparate things, checking Emails, Twitter, Facebook
- Maybe watched a documentary or read a book or so
- Snack at 1600, again croissants and coffee

## - Evening

- Came home at about 1800 or 1900
- Frozen pizza and beer for dinner, ate in my room
- No social interaction with other people whatsoever
- After food, either (trying to) read some more papers, or watching some series
- Checking Twitter, Facebook, Email

## - Night

- Lying in bed scrolling through Twitter feed, reading the news
- Going to sleep between 2230 and 2330
- Having difficulties falling asleep (too many thoughts in my head), and having difficulties getting up the next morning (not feeling fit)



## Fabian's daily schedule now (at Daimler, on weekdays)

### Daily Schedule

- 0600-0615: rise and get ready for work out
- 0615-0645: work out & cold shower & getting dressed
- 0645-0700: meditating (guided or silent using Calm)
- 0700-0720: make breakfast (porridge) & pack snacks (peanut butter bread, nuts, sometimes smoothie)
- 0720-0750: enjoy breakfast, read a book, review tasks for <sup>today</sup>
- 0750-0845: commute to work (includes excellent discussions)
- 0845-0900: check emails, watch out for meetings, get ready for work
- 0900-1030: first block of deep, concentrated work
- 1030-1040: short break, refill water
- 1040-1220: second block of deep, concentrated work
- 1220-1230: check emails, get ready for lunch or running
- 1230-1330: either having lunch or going running
- 1330-1500: third block of deep, concentrated work
- 1500-1530: power napping
- 1530-1630: fourth block of deep, concentrated work
- 1630-1700: check emails, review of today's work, make tasks for tomorrow
- 1700-1800: commuting home (includes excellent discussions)

### Daily Schedule

- 1800-1900: groceries, preparing & eating dinner
- 1900-tomorrow: stop checking or writing emails for the day
- from here on, the evening is less structured but roughly looks like this
- 1900-2000: meeting friends, chatting with flat mates, engaging on social media, reading a book, working on side projects
- 2000-tomorrow: stop using social media for the day
- 2000-2100: playing the guitar, writing down ten ideas, reading a book
- 2100-2130: reflecting on the day, quantified self questionnaire, Habitica, gratitude journal
- 2130-2145: getting ready for bed
- 2145-2245: reading non-technical books (popular science, self-help, etc.)
- 2245-0600: Sleep like a baby :)

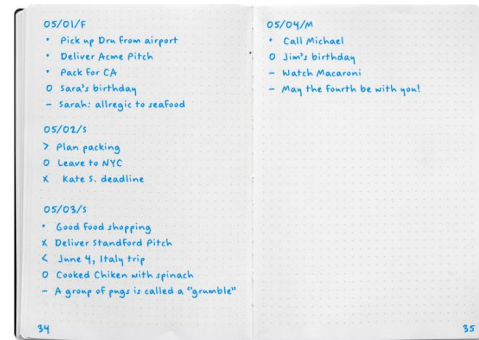
Note: On Tuesdays, I have dinner with Michael to catch up.  
On Wednesdays, I discuss "How the mind works" with Marcel  
I schedule other evening activities (eg. swimming, buddhist meditation) for the other days.

I go for a run during lunch time three times a week.  
The schedule is more relaxed on weekends & includes more time for family and friends, running, playing the guitar, and 3 hours of work only for personal projects.



# Tools we use I

- Time management
  - Bullet Journal
  - Google calendar
- Money management
  - Google spreadsheet (<https://www.moneyunder30.com/free-budget-spreadsheet>)



# Tools we use II

- **Habitica** to form habits
- Staying fit
  - **Calm** for meditation
  - **7 Minutes** for morning workout
- Staying focused
  - **Productivity Challenge Timer** as Pomodoro clock
  - **StayFocusd** Chrome app to constrain time on social media
- Google forms to reflect on my day (“Quantified Self”)

## Quantified Self

This is a form which asks several questions about your day.

Did you meditate today?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

How many bullets did your todo list have today?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	7

Did you socialize today?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Did you exercise today?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

What did you have for lunch today?

Your answer

What did you have for breakfast today?

Your answer

Overall, how good was your day?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Horrible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

How many bullets did you cross off your todo list today?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	7

Rate the quality of your social interactions today.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very good

Did you bite your nails today?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

What is the most important thing you have learned today?

Your answer

Please summarize your day in a few lines.

Your answer

How productive was your day?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely unproductive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely productive

How much time did you spend on Pomodoros?

Your answer

What did you have for dinner today?

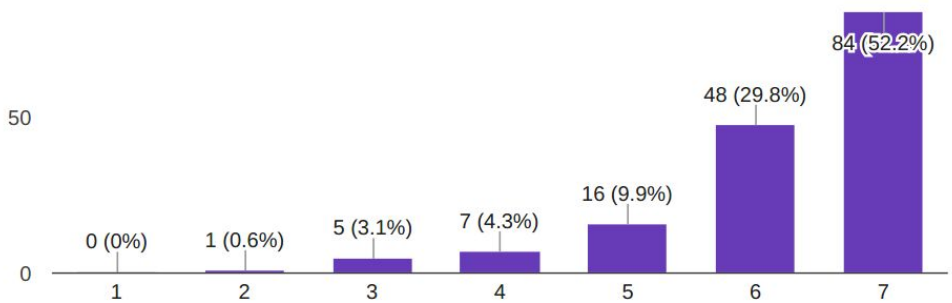
Your answer

SUBMIT

Page 1 of 1

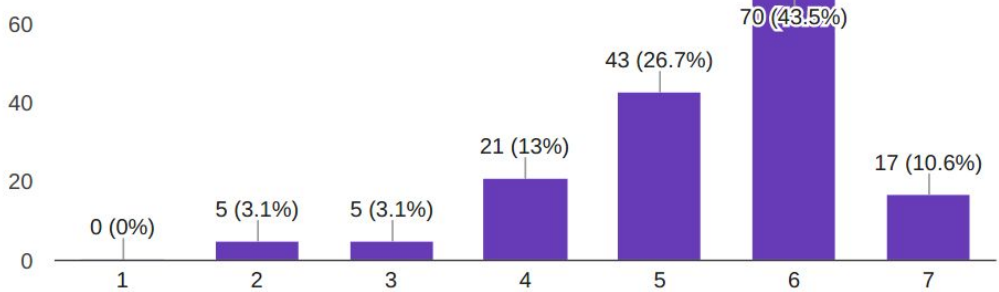
Rate the quality of your social interactions today.

161 responses



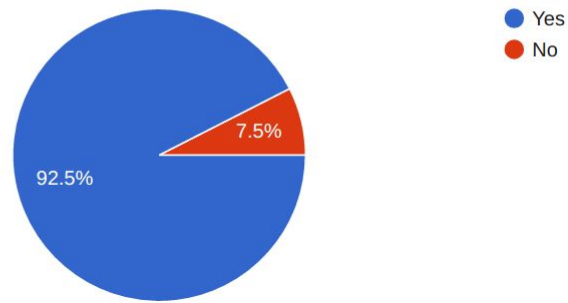
How productive was your day?

161 responses



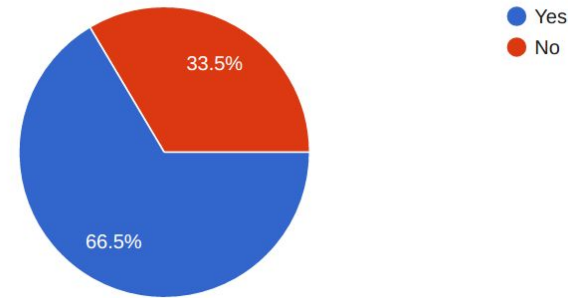
Did you socialize today?

160 responses



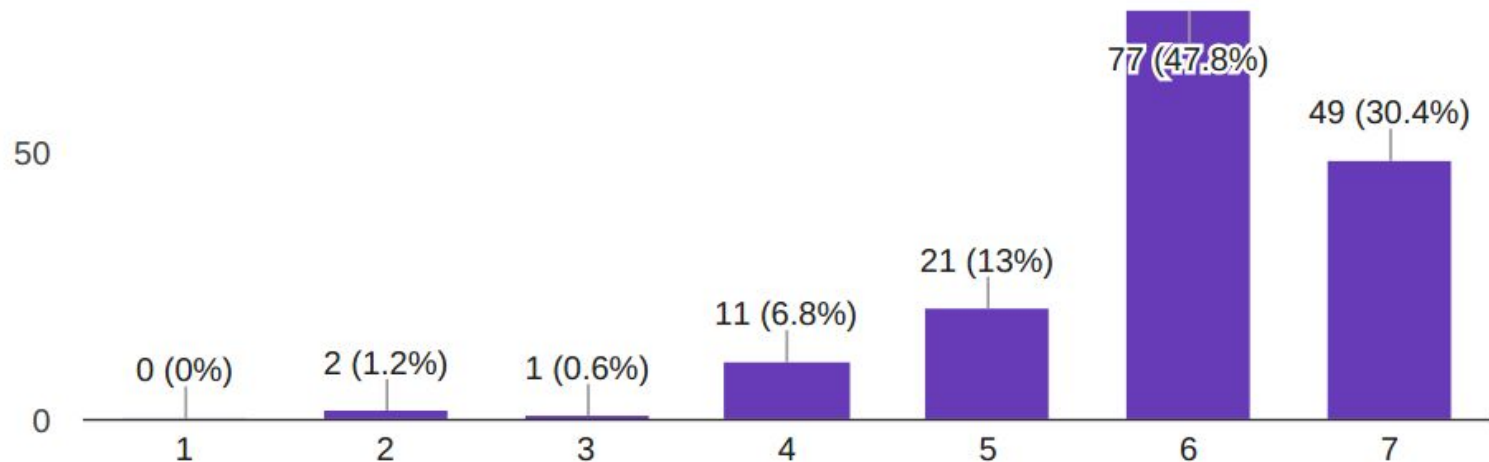
Did you exercise today?

161 responses







# Overall, how good was your day?




161 responses



**fdabl**



 35/50 Health  
 402/420 Experience  
 68/68 Mana




Lvl 19 Mage  0  333  30



- Ten ideas ▶▶ 20
- Morning workout ▶▶ 25
- Fill out quantified self survey ▶▶ 17
- Plan you next day ▶▶ 26

Profile

April

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

 longest streak  
39 days
  total meditation  
23h 39m
  total sessions  
179

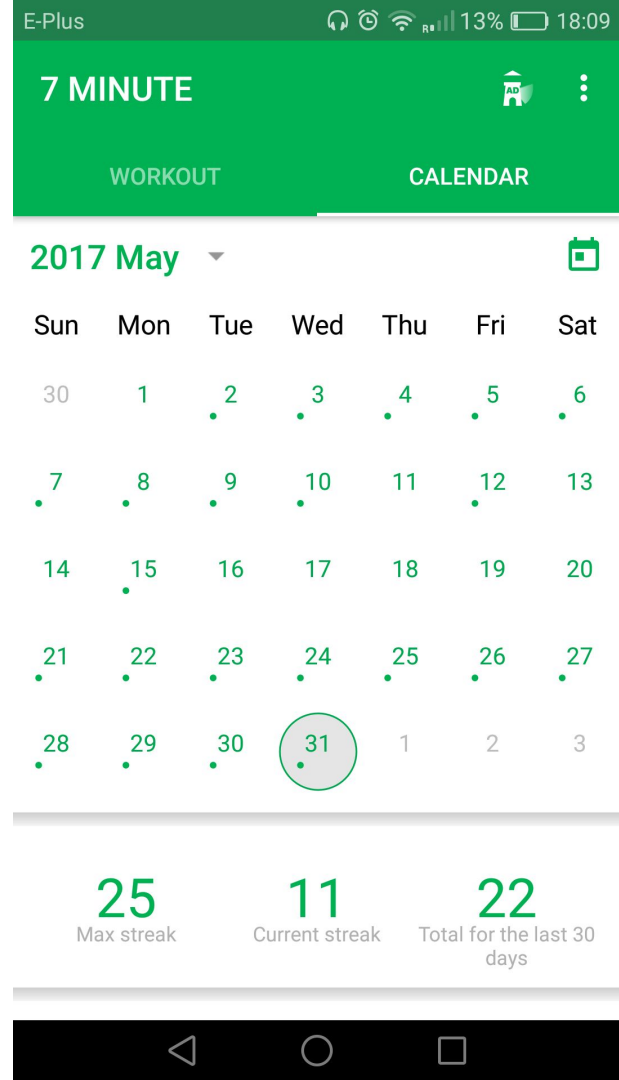
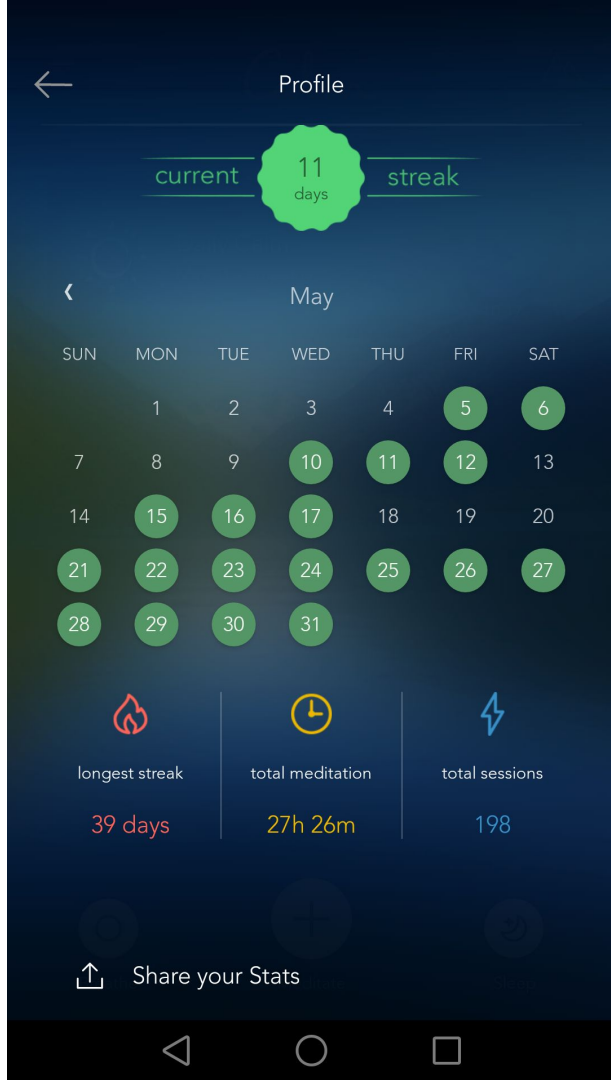
 Share your Stats
  Session History

7 MINUTE

WORKOUT CALENDAR

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1	2	3	4	5	6

25 Max streak
25 Current streak
28 Total for the last 30 days



**Don't break the chain.**



# Some further productivity hacks

- Power napping
- Hang out with productive people
  - You are the average of the five people you hang out with
- Have a book to read all the time
  - I suggest using Goodreads to structure your reading
- If a task can be done in two minutes, do it!
- Have a fixed time after which you do not work anymore
- Uninstall Facebook, Twitter, etc. from your phone
- 30 seconds habit



## 30 second habit

“Immediately after every lecture, meeting, or any significant experience, take 30 seconds—no more, no less—to write down the most important points. If you always do just this, and even if you only do this, with no other revision, you will be okay.”

# Staying Motivated - 3 Stages

**There are no quick fixes.**

**Life is not a sprint. It is a  
marathon.**

## Start!

(1 - 2 Months)

- Figure out your motivation for why you want to be productive
  - Why do you want to change your lifestyle?
  - What do you want to change?
  - Write it down
- Become aware of your social media use
- Enroll and complete *Learning how to Learn*
- Start using the *Pomodoro* technique
- Create an account on *Habitica*, adding habits you want to build or destroy
- Uninstall Facebook etc. from your phone
- Set a time point after which you will not check email or social media. Stick to it.

## **Stick!**

**(1 - 2 Months)**

- Stay committed to your habits
- Review your motivation
- Review what you have accomplished the last few months. How do you feel?
- Start a *Bullet Journal*
- Develop a consistent sleep-wake cycle
- Develop a morning ritual
- Eat healthy food. Not too much. Mostly plants.
- Exercise regularly (at least 3x a week)

## Surmount!

(2 - 4 Months)

- Stay committed to your habits
- Review what you have accomplished during the last few months
- Figure out what skills you want to develop. Write them down.
- Find mentors for the skills you want to develop (e.g., writing, programming)
- Read *Deep Work* and find a Deep Work routine that makes sense for you
- Engage with others and exchange ideas and practices
- Create a *Goodreads* account and organize your reading
- Read at least two books per month



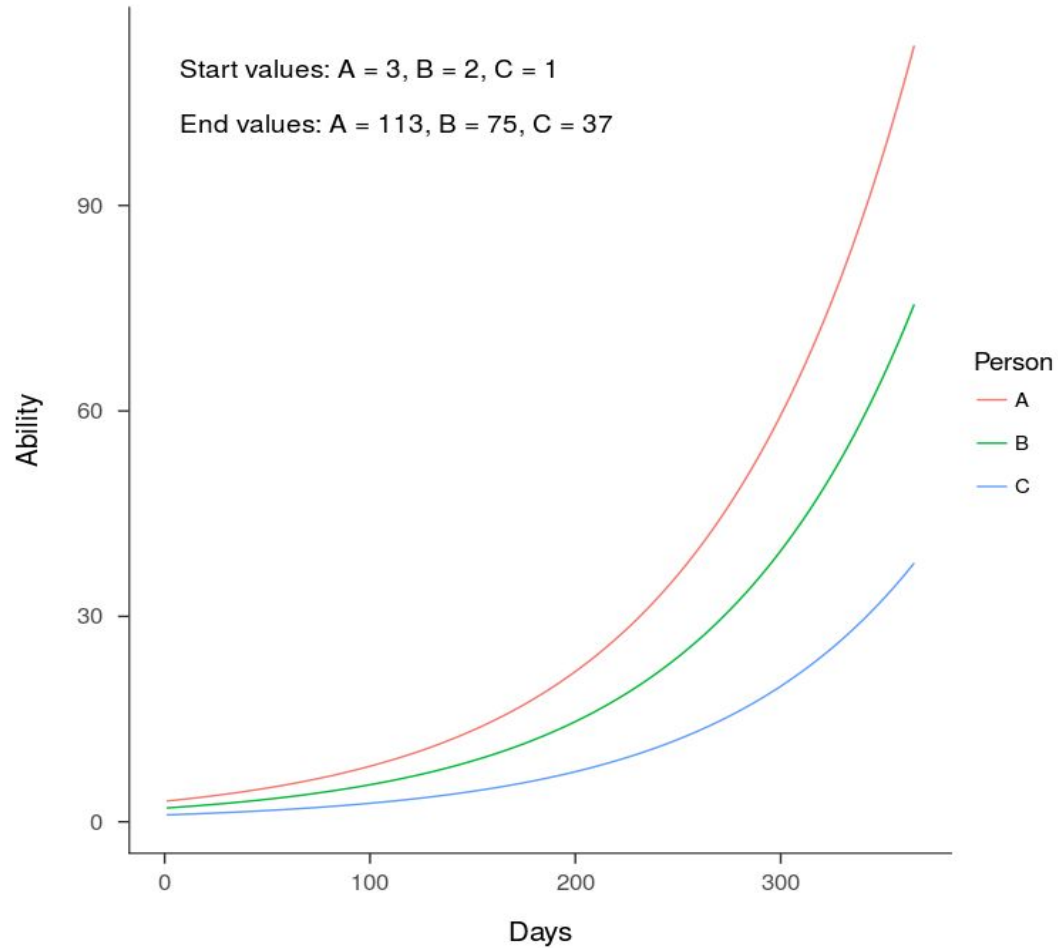
$$T_0 = X$$

$$\begin{aligned} T_1 &= T_0 + \frac{1}{100} T_0 \\ &= T_0 \cdot \left( 1 + \frac{1}{100} \right) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} T_2 &= T_1 \cdot \left( 1 + \frac{1}{100} \right) \\ &= T_0 \cdot \left( 1 + \frac{1}{100} \right) \cdot \left( 1 + \frac{1}{100} \right) \\ &= X \cdot \left( 1 + \frac{1}{100} \right)^2 \end{aligned}$$

$$\Rightarrow T_n = X \cdot \left( 1 + \frac{1}{100} \right)^n$$

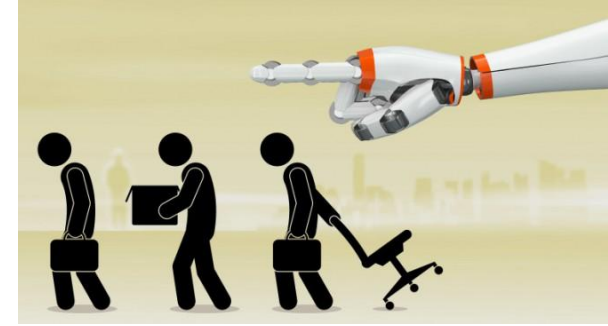
## Exponential effect of improving 1% every day



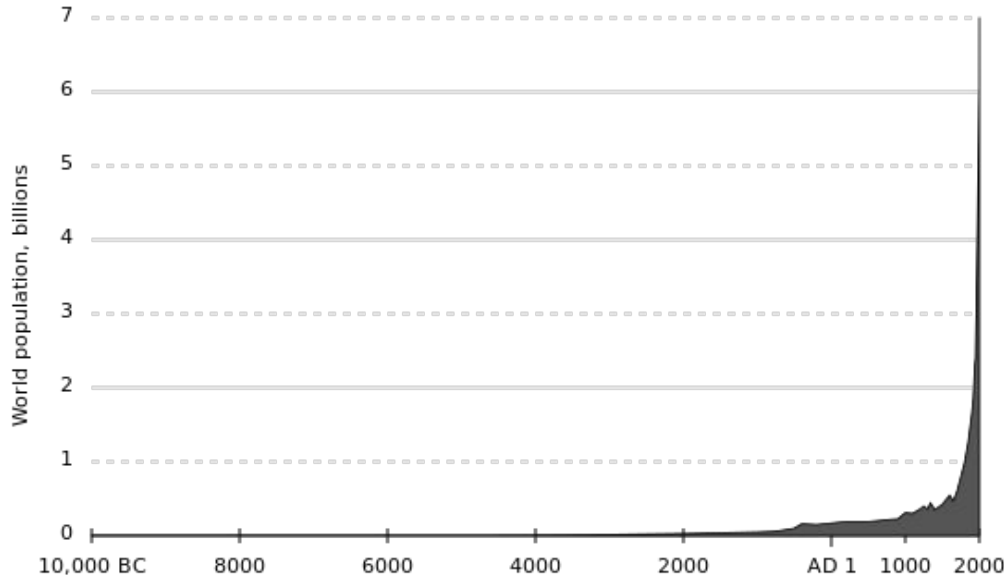
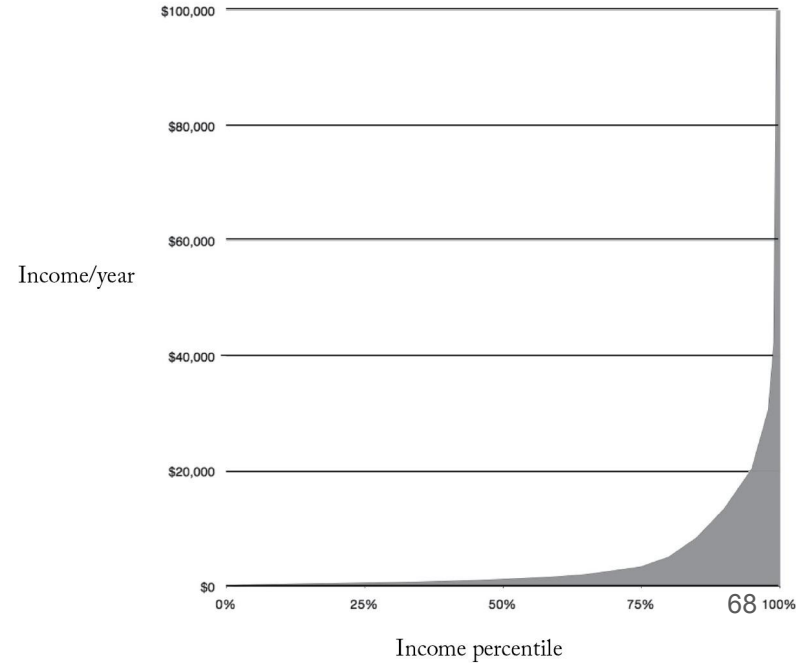
# The Final Problem

# Humanity Today

- The three most important challenges of our time
  - Exploitation of the earth (including climate change)
  - Income inequality (including world poverty)
  - Rise of robots and the future of work



GLOBAL INCOME DISTRIBUTION



# The Final Problem

- You can be extremely productive, but optimize the wrong objective
- You want your life to matter
  - Includes helping others
- You have about 80.000 hours in your career. How will you spend them?

# The Final Problem

- Career guide at <https://80000hours.org/>

# Tips for working in teams

## Problem

- Meetings taking too long, disorganized
- Emails with lots of words but little content; confusing ideas
- Poor group cohesion; lowered work ethic
- Lack of transparency in projects

## Solution

- Limit meeting to one hour; send out agenda beforehand, every team member has to contribute
- Omit needless words; stick to the point; one email one idea
- Social smalltalk; check-in, check-outs
- Continuous (e.g., monthly) update on Skype; CC'ing the whole team

# Tips for working in teams

## Problem

- Unrealistic goal setting; over-promising, under-delivering; being too excited
- Too many ideas, not enough action
- Not enough knowledge / expertise
- Lack of responsibility and accountability

## Solution

- Small actionable steps that can be measured, providing direct feedback
- Ruthless prioritizing; creating action plans; ideas freezer
- Seek out and engage with experts
- Be absolutely sure when taking on a project; ask for guidance; be honest and open



# Take Home Task

- Imagine it's the end of the year, and you review everything you have achieved
- What would you want to have achieved? Write it down!

Thank you for your attention.

# Links to resources

- Apps
  - [Google Forms](#) (for Quantified Self)
  - [Habitica](#), [Calm](#), [7 Minutes Workout](#)
  - [StayFocusd](#), [Pomodoro App](#)
- Time Management
  - [Bullet Journal](#) ([Ted Talk](#))
  - Google Calendar
  - [Fixed Schedule Productivity](#)
- Reading
  - [Goodreads](#)
  - [Doing Good Better](#), [80.000 Hours](#)
  - [A Mind for Numbers](#), [Peak](#), [Deep Work](#)
  - [Reinvent Yourself](#), [Mindset](#)
  - [Cal Newport's blog](#)
- Time Well Spent
  - [Tristan Harris Interview](#)
  - [Link to the Organization](#)
  - [Quit Social Media](#) (Newport's Tedx Talk)
- Slides
  - <https://github.com/fdabl/Productivity-Workshop>