How to
Stop being busy and become productive

Fabian Dablander & Lea Jakob
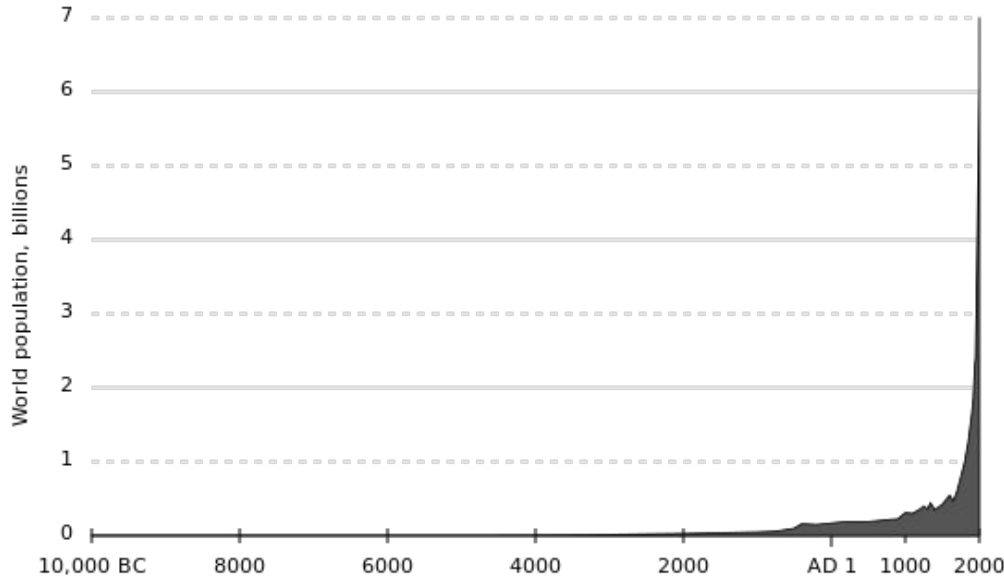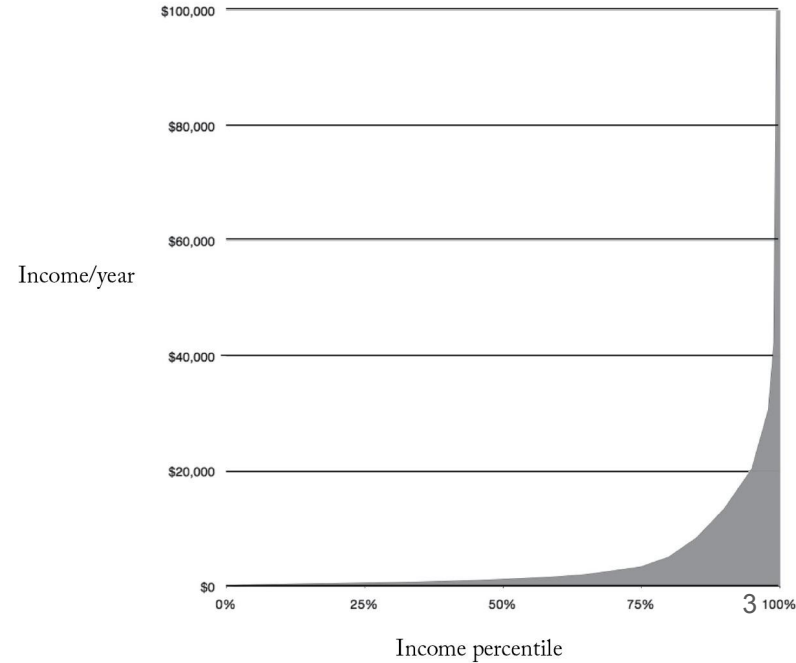31st EFPSA Congress, Qakh, Azerbaijan

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

GLOBAL INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Income/year

$100,000

$80,000

$60,000

$40,000

$20,000

$0

0%   25%   50%   75%   3 100%

Income percentile

World population, billions

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

0

10,000 BC   8000   6000   4000   2000   AD 1   1000   2000

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

Attention is the new oil

The Attention Economy

- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Email, etc. all compete for your attention

- You're 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

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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

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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 vs productive

- How long is your task list?
  - Saying "Yes" to everything - generates a huge task list - not enough time
  - Multitasking worsens the problem

- Do you have priorities?
  - As long as I am doing "something"

- Do you monitor your progress?
  - Action = Accomplishment
  - Results?

Busy

- I need to seem like I have a goal

- Multiple priorities

- Seize every opportunity (impulsive "yes")

Productive

- Develops a clear goal and take steps to achieve it

- Few priorities clearly specified

- Think hard before agreeing to take up another project (thoughtful "yes")

Busy

- Talking a lot about being busy

- Talking about how little time you have

- Focus on multiple tasks at a time

- Immediately responding to any given task

Productive

- Let your results speak for themselves

- Talking time to do things that are truly important

- Focus on single tasks at a time

- Scheduling tasks

Being busy involves ...

- Being frustrated
- Wanting others to value **effort**, not results
- A lot of talking about how you want or are going to **change**

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.
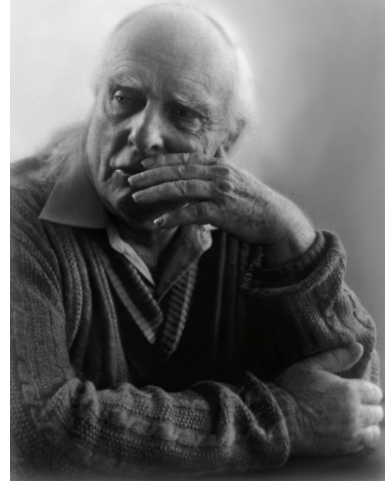
Review of research on productivity

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**

https://80000hours.org/2016/03/which-skills-make-you-most-employable

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 every time you learn a more about it.

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

- 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

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

PEAK

SECRETS FROM
THE NEW SCIENCE
OF EXPERTISE

Anders Ericsson
and Robert Pool

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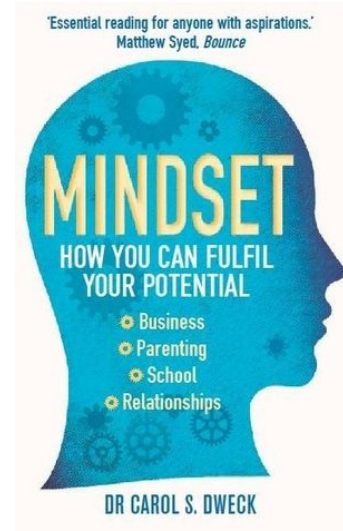
Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World

- 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

Cal Newport
Author of *So Good They Can't Ignore You*

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?

Reinvent Yourself

- Book written by James Altucher

- "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 Mick Jagger"

- "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 today

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)

130

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, gratefulness 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 (e.g. 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.

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Tools we use I

- Time management
    - Bullet Journal
    - Google calendar

- Money management
    - Google spreadsheet (https://www.moneyunder30.com/free-budget-spreadsheet)
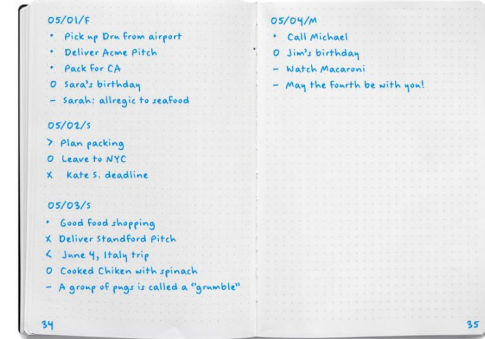
Tools we use II

- **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 exercise today?

○ Yes

○ No

What is the most important thing you have learned today?

Your answer

Rate the quality of your social interactions today.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very poor	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very good

Please summarize your day in a few lines.

Your answer

Did you bite your nails today?

○ Yes

○ No

Did you achieve your single goal today?

○ Yes

○ No

How many bullets did your todo list have today?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	7

Did you meditate today?

○ Yes

○ No

How much time did you spend on deep work?

Your answer

What did you have for lunch today?

Your answer

How productive was your day?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely unproductive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely productive

Did you socialize today?

○ Yes

○ No

What did you have for breakfast today?

Your answer

Overall, how good was your day?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Horrible	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent

What did you have for dinner today?

Your answer

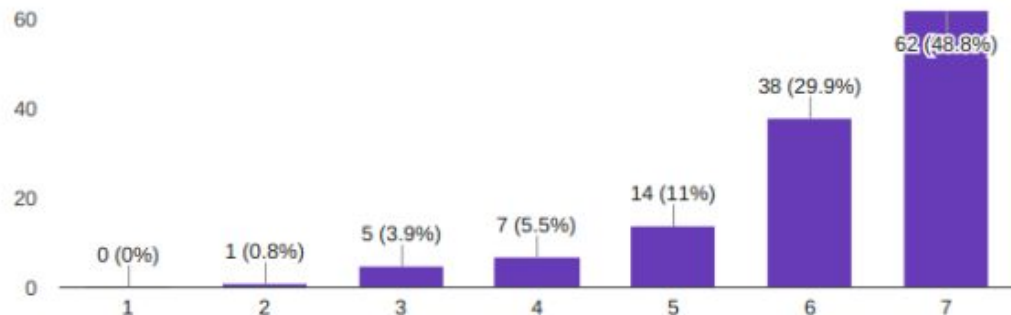**How many bullets did you cross off your todo list today?**

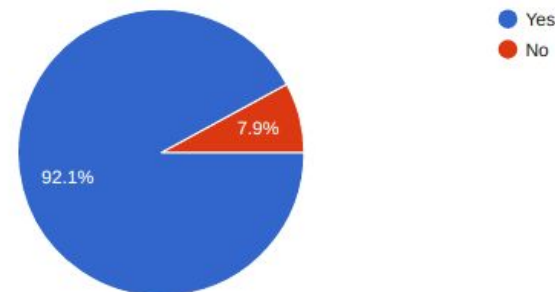|	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	7

SUBMIT

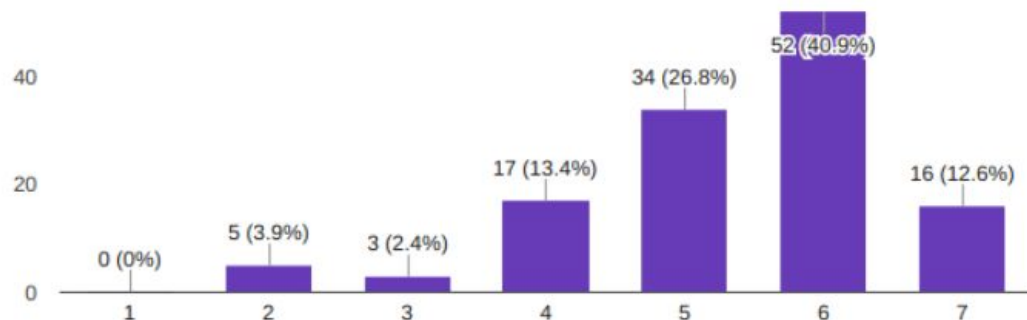# Rate the quality of your social interactions today. (127 responses)

Did you socialize today? (126 responses)

- Yes
- No

92.1%
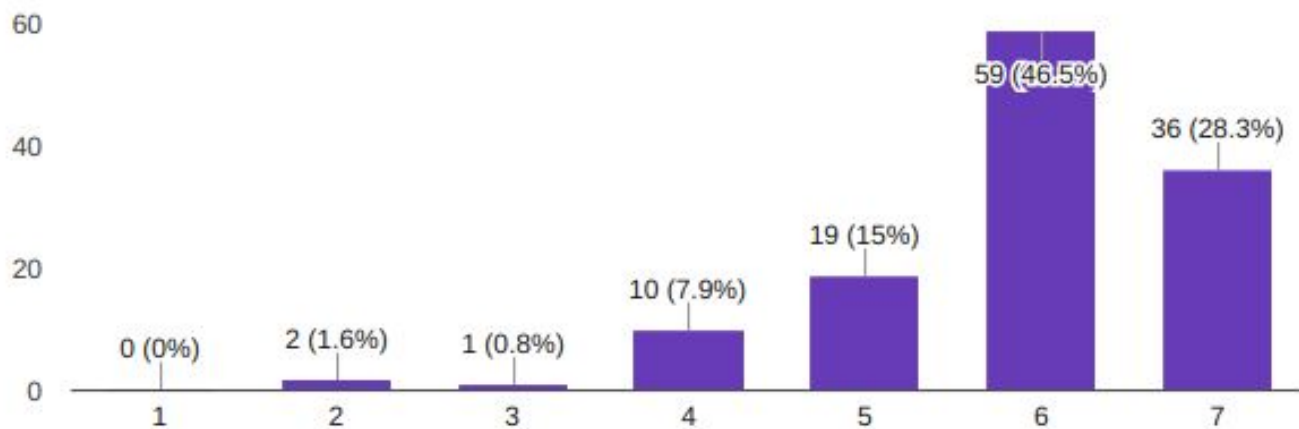7.9%

How productive was your day? (127 responses)

Did you exercise today? (127 responses)

- Yes
- No

65.4%
34.6%

51

Overall, how good was your day? (127 responses)

Screen 1 (left):

SimSim 61% 11:07
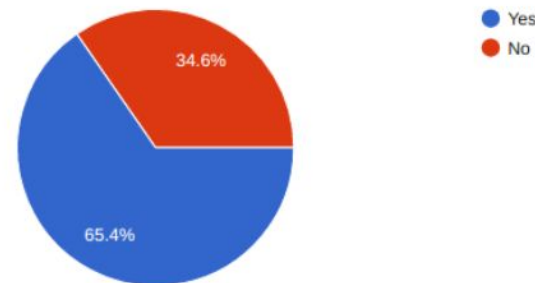
fdabl

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

Habits   **03 Dailies**   To-Dos   Rewards

Screen 2 (middle):

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   total meditation   total sessions
39 days   23h 39m   179

Share your Stats

Session History

Screen 3 (right):

SimSim 61% 11:08

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   25   28
Max streak   Current streak 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.

Stage 1: Start!

Theoretical

- 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 cognizant of your social media use

- **Estimated time: 1 - 2 Months**

Practical

- Enroll and complete "Learning how to Learn"

- Create an account on "Habitica", adding habits you want to build or destroy

- Set a time point after which you will not check email or social media. Stick to it.

Stage 2: Stick!

Theoretical

- Review your motivation

- Review what you have accomplished the last few months

- **Estimated time: 1 - 2 Months**

Practical

- Develop a consistent sleep-wake cycle

- Develop a morning ritual

- Exercise regularly (at least 3x a week)

- Start a Bullet Journal

Stage 3: Surmount!

Theoretical

- Stay committed to your habits

- Review your motivation and what you have accomplished the few months

- Figure out what skills you want to develop

- Talk to others, spread the word

- **Estimated time: 2 - 4 Months**

Practical

- Read Deep Work

- Find a deep work routine that makes sense for you

- Find mentors for the skills you want to develop (e.g., writing, programming)

- Create a Goodreads account and organize your reading
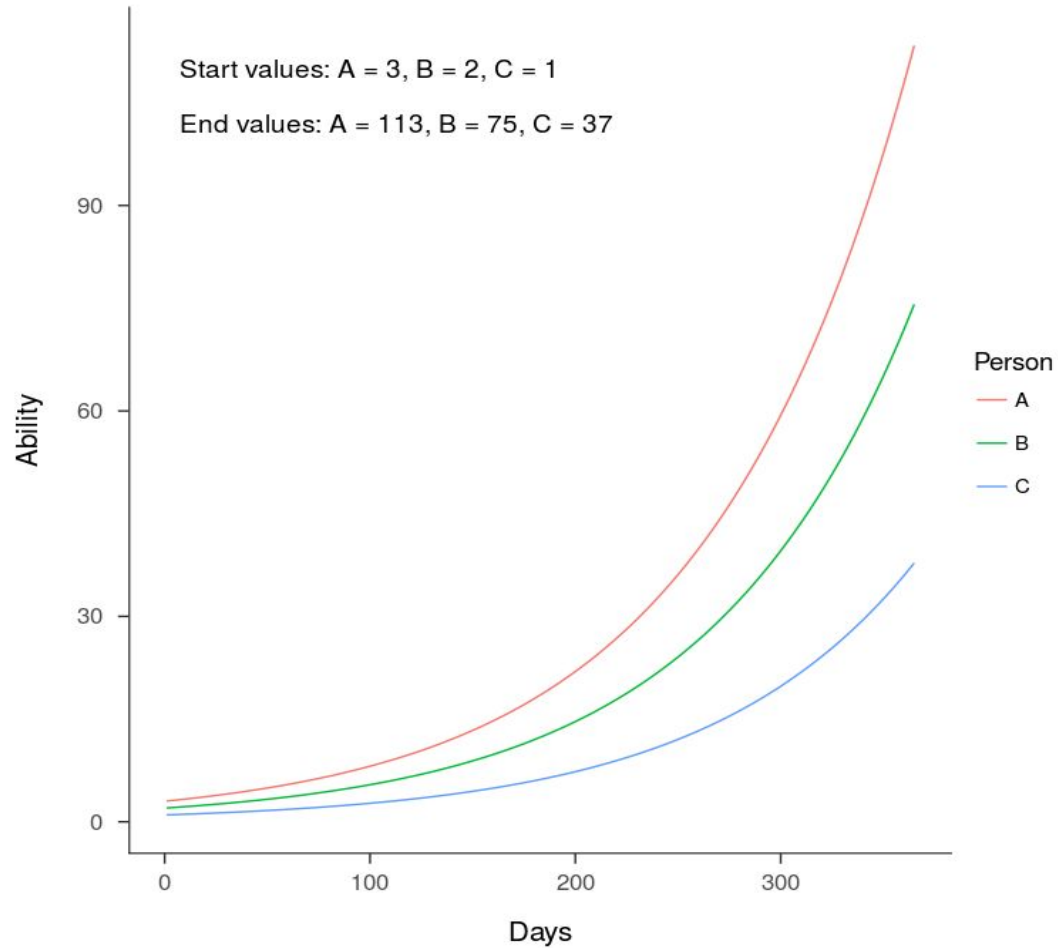
- Read at least one book per month

$$T_0 = X$$

$$T_1 = T_0 + \frac{1}{100} T_0$$

$$= T_0 \cdot \left(1 + \frac{1}{100} \right)$$

$$T_2 = T_1 \cdot \left(1 + \frac{1}{100} \right)$$

$$= T_0 \cdot \left(1 + \frac{1}{100} \right) \cdot \left(1 + \frac{1}{100} \right)$$

$$= X \cdot \left(1 + \frac{1}{100} \right)^2$$

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

Exponential effect of improving 1% every day

Start values: A = 3, B = 2, C = 1

End values: A = 113, B = 75, C = 37
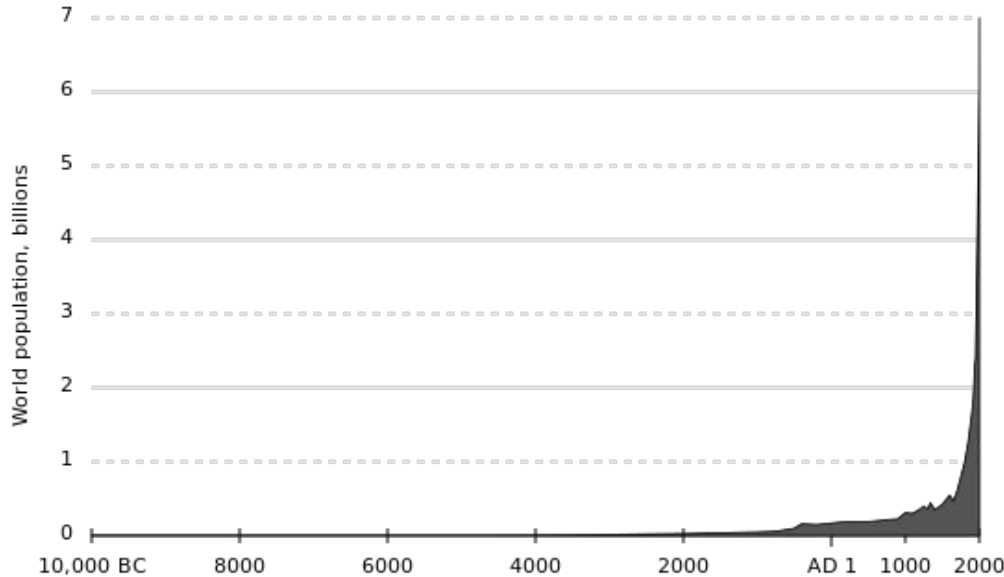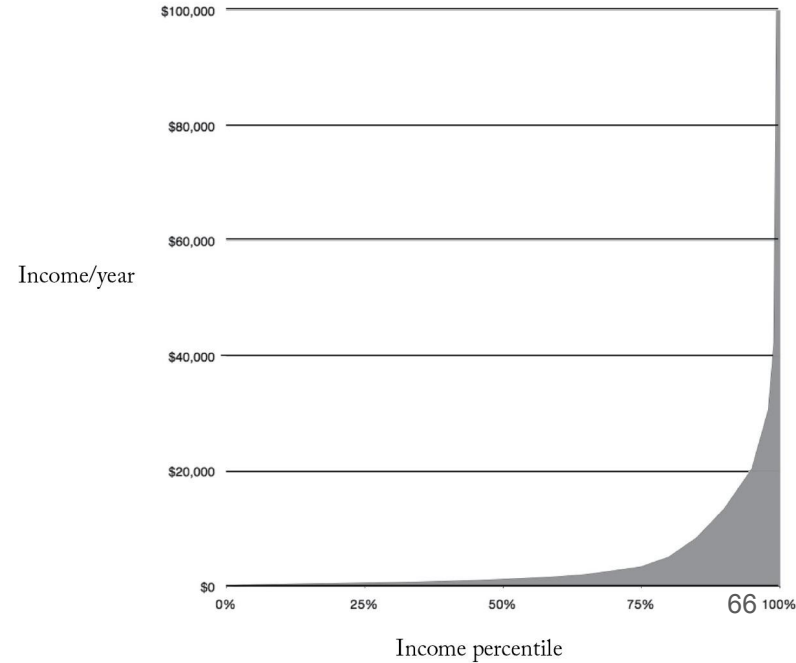
Person
— A
— B
— C

Ability

Days

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

- 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

- Slides
  - https://github.com/fdabl/Productivity-Workshop