

# Insights from *Four Thousand Weeks* by Oliver Burkeman

The average life is **4,000 weeks long**.

As the remaining weeks of our lives pass by, we live with the anxiety that we won't have enough time to do everything we need to do or want to do. Oliver Burkeman calls this **“existential overwhelm.”**

If you try to eliminate existential overwhelm with time management systems and efficiency hacks, you'll run into the **“efficiency trap.”** The faster you clear your deck of things you need to do, like emails you need to answer, tasks you need to complete, and things you need to clean and organize, the faster your deck is filled with new things to do. If efficiency is your goal, you'll never achieve peace of mind because you'll always be playing catch up.

The anxiety from existential overwhelm, the frustration generated by the efficiency trap, and the pressure to fill your remaining weeks with activity make your limited time on this planet unnecessarily stressful.

If you want to eliminate existential overwhelm, avoid the efficiency trap, and enjoy your remaining weeks while living a productive life, here's how:



## Eliminate existential overwhelm

The modern world provides us with an inexhaustible supply of things that seem worth doing, which leads to a bottomless bucket list. The irony is that the more we want to do, the less we accomplish because the more activities we can choose from, the more we overthink, perpetually plan, and live in a state of existential overwhelm.

Eliminate existential overwhelm by maintaining an “open” and “closed” life list. Capture everything you wish to do someday on the “open” list (the businesses you want to start, skills you want to learn, countries you want to visit, etc.). Now move three to five items from the “open” list to the “closed” list, and do NOT look at the “open” list until you complete or forever abandon one of the goals on your “closed” list.

Once you have moved three to five items from your “open” list to your “closed” list, fully accept that you may never complete the items on your “open” list. After emotionally accepting you may never get to the items on your “open” list, your only concern is getting the three to five things off your “closed” list before you die.

**Bonus benefit:** when you have a “closed” list, you're less likely to procrastinate because you know the only way to make room for exciting new goals is to get an item off your “closed” list to create a vacancy for a new life goal.



## Avoid the efficiency trap

As a highly driven individual, you want to be great at everything you do. However, if you take the time to be great at low-value activities will waste many of your 4,000 weeks.

Rather than excelling at everything, practice **“strategic underachievement.”** Identify all the low-return activities **you must do** to uphold your responsibilities at home and work. Then look at each of those activities and ask yourself, “What is the absolute bare minimum I can do so I can make time for what matters most?”

- Can you clean your house once a week, stop cleaning at 80% clean, and still feel satisfied?
- Can you cut your lawn half as often and still maintain your yard?
- Can you take twice as long to respond to email messages without angering anyone?

You'll find that doing **“just enough”** and being **“good enough”** at most activities will allow you to stay on top of your responsibilities and create time for what matters most. Your time is limited, so reduce your standards in many areas of life, make tradeoffs, and embrace strategic underachievement so you can be excellent in a select few areas. Jon Acuff, author of *Finish*, says, **“When you decide in advance what things you're going to bomb... you remove the sting of shame.”**



## Enrich your remaining weeks

The busier you are trying to fill your remaining weeks with activity, the faster life will pass by. But if you develop the habit of practicing “last time” reflections, you can subjectively slow down time, eliminate busyness, and savor your remaining weeks.

We don't know when our lives will end, so we should assume every experience is happening for the **last time**. This may sound gloomy, but when you experience each activity as if it's the **last time**, you stop rushing from activity to activity and soak in your experience.

When you treat a kiss with your partner or a cup of coffee with a friend as if it's the last one, you'll lose yourself in the moment and stop worrying about the passage of time.

**“(Attempting to master your time and urgently complete tasks) makes it all but impossible to experience ‘deep time,’ that sense of timeless time which depends on forgetting the abstract yardstick and plunging back into the vividness of reality instead.” – Oliver Burkeman**