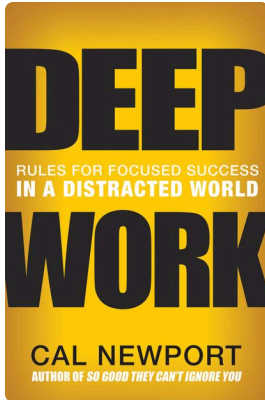


Deep Work

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Highlights

- Deep Work: Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.
- A 2012 McKinsey study found that the average knowledge worker now spends more than 60 percent of the workweek engaged in electronic communication and Internet searching, with close to 30 percent of a worker's time
- Shallow Work: Noncognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate.
- 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. As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive.
- Brynjolfsson and McAfee call the group personified by Nate Silver the "high-skilled" workers. Advances such as robotics and voice recognition are automating many low-

skilled positions, but as these economists emphasize, "other technologies like data visualization, analytics, high speed communications, and rapid prototyping have augmented the contributions of more abstract and data-driven reasoning, increasing the values of these jobs." In other words, those with the oracular ability to work with and tease valuable results out of increasingly complex machines will thrive. Tyler Cowen summarizes this reality more bluntly: "The key question will be: are you good at working with intelligent machines or not?"

- It no longer makes sense, for example, to hire a full-time programmer, put aside office space, and pay benefits, when you can instead pay one of the world's best programmers, like Hansson, for just enough time to complete the project at hand. In this scenario, you'll probably get a better result for less money, while Hansson can service many more clients per year, and will therefore also end up better off.
- Two Core Abilities for Thriving in the New Economy
 1. The ability to quickly master hard things.
 2. The ability to produce at an elite level, in terms of both quality and speed.
- The two core abilities just described depend on your ability to perform deep work. If
- $\text{High-Quality Work Produced} = (\text{Time Spent}) \times (\text{Intensity of Focus})$
- 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.
- Consider, for example, David Allen's Getting Things Done task-management methodology, which is a well-respected system for intelligently managing competing workplace obligations. This system proposes a fifteen-element flowchart for making a decision on what to do next! It's significantly easier to simply chime in on the latest cc'd e-mail thread.
 - Tags: [favorite](#)
- 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.
- The implication of these findings is clear. 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.
- 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). At

- 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. Free time, on the other hand, is unstructured, and requires much greater effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed.
- Discipline #1: Focus on the Wildly Important
- Discipline #2: Act on the Lead Measures
- Discipline #3: Keep a Compelling Scoreboard
- Discipline #4: Create a Cadence of Accountability
- The story of Microsoft's founding has been told so many times that it's entered the realm of legend. In the winter of 1974, a young Harvard student named Bill Gates sees the Altair, the world's first personal computer, on the cover of Popular Electronics. Gates realizes that there's an opportunity to design software for the machine, so he drops everything and with the help of Paul Allen and Monte Davidoff spends the next eight weeks hacking together a version of the BASIC programming language for the Altair. This story is often cited as an example of Gates's insight and boldness, but recent interviews have revealed another trait that played a crucial role in the tale's happy ending: Gates's preternatural deep work ability.
- Deep work is way more powerful than most people understand. It's a commitment to this skill that allowed Bill Gates to make the most of an unexpected opportunity to create a new industry, and that allowed me to double my academic productivity the same year I decided to concurrently write a book. To leave the distracted masses to join the focused few, I'm arguing, is a transformative experience.

The deep life, of course, is not for everybody. It requires hard work and drastic changes to your habits. For many, there's a comfort in the artificial busyness of rapid e-mail messaging and social media posturing, while the deep life demands that you leave much of that behind. There's also an uneasiness that surrounds any effort to produce the best things you're capable of producing, as this forces you to confront the possibility that your best is not (yet) that good. It's safer to comment on our culture than to step into the Rooseveltian ring and attempt to wrestle it into something better.

But if you're willing to sidestep these comforts and fears, and instead struggle to deploy your mind to its fullest capacity to create things that matter, then you'll discover, as others have before you, that depth generates a life rich with productivity and meaning. In Part 1, I quoted writer Winifred Gallagher saying, "I'll live the focused life, because it's the best kind there is." I agree. So does Bill Gates. And hopefully now that you've finished this book, you agree