

# The Do Guide

*How to Master Effectiveness & Overcome  
Procrastination*

by Leo Babauta

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No one has the right to deny the freedom of ideas.

## About

This guide was written by Leo Babauta as a companion to his book, Zen Habits.

Published by his Pipe Dreams Publishing house.

With love.

## *Chapter 1*

# Why master effectiveness & overcome procrastination?

Let's face it: we all procrastinate, we all give in to distraction, and we could all use help finding focus.

What's wrong with that? Isn't life to be enjoyed, and full of joy and play?

Yes, absolutely. There's nothing wrong with playing and finding joy in each moment — I encourage it.

But I've found that I'm rarely happy when I waste most of my day on distractions, when I avoid the important work that I really want to get done, when I put off creating because of fear of failure or fear of difficulty.

My life is better when I find focus and make the space to create. I feel better about myself when I'm making a real contribution to the world, and not merely consuming or hiding from hard work.

If you'd like help with this, then this is the guide for you.

In this guide, we'll look at what it means to be effective, how to find inspiration and do work that you love, where procrastination comes from and how to overcome it, how to work with focus and calm, how to clear your email inbox, how to find inspiration, how to make time to create something great in this world, and more.

## *Chapter 2*

# Become effective

Let's imagine for a moment two archers at target practice: Productive Archer and Effective Archer.

Productive Archer has dozens of arrows ready to go, and he doesn't waste any time: he starts shooting them in every direction, one after the other, non-stop. He frenetically shoots his dozens of arrows, then gets more and shoots all of those, ending up with hundreds of arrows shot. Not many hit the target, but that's OK, because he shot hundreds of arrows and was super productive.

Effective Archer, however, only has a few arrows in his quiver. He takes his time, aims carefully at the target, and shoots with focus each time. His arrows hit the target, and he calls it a day, only having shot a few arrows.

Which is a better model for you: the Productive Archer or the Effective Archer?

I choose the Effective Archer. Productivity doesn't matter if you're not hitting the important things.

So only have a few arrows, and make them count.

Take your time shooting those arrows, aiming at something important.

Focus, and do your best with each arrow.

Then call it a day.

## *Focus on what matters*

What if you only had a few arrows (tasks) you could shoot each day — what tasks would you choose?

What matters to you? What do you want to create? What kind of contribution do you want to make to the world? It's good to consider these questions, so you know what arrows to choose. If you don't know the answers, be sure to read the chapter on *Doing Work You Love* in this guide.

Now ask yourself: What matters today? What three things should you work on today – if you got nothing else done but these three things, it would be a great day?

Of those, what one thing should you work on right now? If you did nothing else but this one thing, would you be happy?

Ask yourself throughout the day: Does what you're doing right now matter?

## *The effectiveness technique*

We'll go deeper into overcoming procrastination (and what its causes are), but here's a simple technique to get you started practicing effectiveness:

Be forewarned: this takes a little practice. We'll talk about practice in a bit.

1. Identify the most important thing you have to do today.
2. Decide to do just the first little part of it — just the first minute, or even 30 seconds of it. Getting started is the only thing in the world that matters.
3. Clear away distractions. Turn everything off. Close all programs. There should just be you, and your task.
4. Sit there, and focus on getting started. Not doing the whole task, just starting.
5. Pay attention to your mind, as it starts to have urges to switch to another task. You will have urges to check email or Facebook or Twitter or your favorite

website. You will want to play a game or make a call or do another task. Notice these urges.

6. But don't move. Notice the urges, but sit still, and let them pass. Urges build up in intensity, then pass, like a wave. Let each one pass.
7. Notice also your mind trying to justify not doing the task. Also let these self-rationalizing thoughts pass.
8. Now just take one small action to get started. As tiny a step as possible.

Once you get started, after a few minutes, allow yourself a break. Get up and walk around, get some water, do a few exercises on the floor nearby, anything active, as your mind processes what you need to do.

Then repeat the technique.

## *Chapter 3*

# The root of procrastination is fear

We all procrastinate on difficult work, but procrastination doesn't just affect our work — it affects us in many other ways.

We struggle with new habits, for example, because of procrastination. Creating new habits is actually pretty easy: you pick a trigger (something already in your daily routine, like eating breakfast), do your habit right after the trigger, and repeat each day for about a month until it becomes automatic. Simple, right?

Except that it's not so easy in reality — because of procrastination. We want to exercise, but we're busy, so we keep putting off the exercise. Actually, we all have time for five minutes of exercise if we make it a priority, but it always seems uncomfortable, so we skip it.

Same thing with eating healthy, meditating, paying off debt, or doing any of the other things you know would make your life better. We know we should do it, we intend to do it, but when the time comes, we put it off.

Procrastination also causes problems with relationships — we put off difficult conversations that would address relationship problems. It causes clutter, because we put off putting things away immediately, or delay tackling a closet of clutter.

## *Why we procrastinate*

Procrastination is hurting us in many ways, but why do we procrastinate? Several reasons:



1. We fear we might fail or look bad.
2. We don't know exactly how to do it, or there's confusion with the task (uncertainty).
3. It's hard (discomfort).

These are all fears. Fear of failure or looking bad. Fear of uncertainty. Fear of discomfort.

And so fears are stopping us from making our lives better. We're going to look at how to overcome these fears soon, but for the moment let's acknowledge that procrastination is rooted in fear. Knowing this will help you get better not only at effectiveness, but any changes you want to make.

## *Chapter 4*

# The addictions of busyness & distractions

Almost everybody copes with an addiction of one kind or another: alcohol, cigarettes, online shopping, overeating, TV, porn, video games, social media, news, online reading, sex, coffee, drugs, busyness, distractions. Very few of us are free from the grip of addiction, though it's a problem for some more than others.

What is this addiction all about? It turns out, it's the wiring in our brains: when we find the reward of pleasure and comfort, we want more of it.

And the things we're addicted to tap into this system in our brains: we have a sweet treat, it gives us pleasure, and so we want more. Drugs are the best example of a substance hooking directly into this system, but digital distractions like social media and games come pretty close.

Let's take the allure of distractions or video games as an example: we go to an online distraction or a video game and immediately find some pleasure, some reward, in this activity. It's fun, social, interesting, comfortable, easy. Our brains enjoy the reward. Then we go and try to do the hard work we know we should do — but this work isn't fun, and it's uncomfortable. Our brains would rather have the comfort and pleasure of the distraction or game than the discomfort of the work.

So we go back to the distraction or game, and we get rewarded. This process gets repeated until we become addicted. We try to stop, but we can't, and we feel helpless. The pull is too strong, because now we've formed a habit that's going to be very hard to break.

How can an addiction be broken? Well, understand that breaking free from an addiction will cause discomfort. It will be a major change in your life, obviously. Our brains prefer comfort and pleasure to discomfort and change, so they will resist very strongly. They'll rationalize going back to the addiction, tell us we're not strong enough to quit, ask why we're making ourselves suffer. In short, anything to get back to comfort and pleasure.

The brains are very powerful rationalizers, and fighting against this is difficult. Most of us are unaware of what the brain does to keep us with our addictions, and doing its work in the dark only makes the brain more convincing and more powerful.

So we have to learn how to deal with change — and it can be done. We have to learn to be good in discomfort — and to my surprise, I've done it. Once you learn these skills, you can overcome an addiction.

I've done experiments to (at least temporarily) overcome numerous addictions using this method: smoking, TV, social media, online distractions, alcohol, coffee, junk food, procrastination. I don't claim to be a master at this, but I have proven to myself it can be done. You can do the same, with a few valuable skills.

What's the point of overcoming these addictions? In some cases, like coffee, the addiction isn't necessarily harmful if it isn't overdone. So I've allowed myself to drink coffee again after a break from it. In other cases, the addiction can stand in the way of happiness and effectiveness, preventing us from mastering the art of living.

As Seneca said about the busyness addiction, 2,000 years ago:

*'No activity can be successfully pursued by an individual who is preoccupied ... since the mind when distracted absorbs nothing deeply, but rejects everything which is, so to speak, crammed into it. Living is the least important activity of the preoccupied man; yet there is nothing which is harder to learn... Learning how to live takes a whole life, and, which may surprise you more, it takes a whole life to learn how to die.'*

An addiction to busyness and distraction isn't just a waste of time — it's a waste of life. It keeps us from doing creative, important, compassionate, mindful things in our lives. It's worth learning to be good at discomfort and change, so we can consciously live the lives we choose.

## *Chapter 5*

# Drop procrastination & distraction, work with focus

So we know that to deal with procrastination, and our addiction to distractions, we need to deal with:

1. Fear of discomfort.
2. Fear of uncertainty.

If we can learn to be OK with discomfort and uncertainty, we'll be able to find focus, peace, and effectiveness.

These fears stem from an ideal: we have an ideal that we'll be in comfort, that things will be easy and sure.

This ideal doesn't match reality, so we struggle. We get frustrated, we procrastinate and avoid, we seek distractions.

We need to let go of those ideals, and instead focus on what's in front of us. And learn that we'll be OK in discomfort.

Once you've dropped your ideals about your work, or any other task before you, you can find a place of peace. You can be OK with the discomfort and uncertainty, and simply work with focus.

This is a magical place to work from: you get into a state of flow that is unencumbered by fear or procrastination or distraction.

That doesn't mean that fear, distraction and procrastination never arise once you've learned this way of working. They will always come up, as part of the human condition. But if you notice them, and are mindful of their symptoms, you'll be more equipped to deal with them, and find focus instead.

Let's take a look at how to do that.

## *The signs of fear, distraction, procrastination*

You probably know procrastination when you see it, but it's useful to be mindful of the signs that your actions are being hampered by fear.

Outer actions are often good signals of what's going on unnoticed inside of us, so that we can turn inward and see what's happening.

Some signs to watch for:

- You're going to online distractions or looking at things on your phone.
- You stray from the task before you to check email or do other busywork.
- You've had an item on your to-do list but keep avoiding it.
- An important email has been sitting in your inbox, without you finding time to address it.
- You've been avoiding something difficult, like taxes or a big report.
- You say you're going to do something but don't end up doing it.
- You miss deadlines, or break commitments.
- A task makes you nervous.
- You're stressed out about a project or upcoming task.
- You start something and then immediately switch to something else.
- Things start piling up.
- You're dreading something.
- You don't find yourself in a state of focus and flow.

Those signs don't necessarily mean there is fear, distraction or procrastination occurring, but they're good signs to notice. Practice noticing these signs, being mindful that they're happening, as they're happening.

Once you notice the sign, it's a cue to drop down into yourself, and see what's going on.

### *See the suffering & ideals*

When you become aware of one of the signals above, pause and drop down into yourself. Look inside to see if there is suffering, which is simply a Buddhist term for feelings like fear, avoidance, dread, nervousness, anxiety, frustration, wishing things were different.

Take a close look at these feelings, and notice their qualities, their location, their intensity. Accept them as part of your experience, not trying to push them away. Face them, and see your suffering. See the ideal that might be causing them: an ideal that you'll be in comfort and not discomfort, an ideal that you'll succeed and not fail, an ideal that others will think highly of you.

Now you can comfort yourself, and wish yourself happiness. With this compassionate wish, you might try letting go of the ideal that's causing your suffering. See what the situation looks like when you aren't comparing it to the ideal.

Find the place of peace with the way things are.

### *Starting from the place of peace*

Once you've found peace with the task and situation as it is, you can respond appropriately, without the fear.

I find it useful to also stop and set your intention before you start on the task: why are you doing this? Are you doing it with the intention of compassion, gratitude, mindfulness, creating something good in the world, helping others?

Appropriate action varies with the situation, but if you have a task before you, you can just focus on that task and take action in the moment:

- If you're writing, you can just focus on the process of getting ideas from your head onto the page.
- If you don't know what ideas you want to put on the page, perhaps take a walk and give the topic some thought, until you've formulated some ideas to write about.
- If you have taxes to work on, just focus on the first step of working on the taxes — perhaps filling out your personal information on the tax form, or gathering together the documents you need. Then take the next small step, and the next.
- If you have an important email to answer, you can give the topic some thought, make some decisions, focus on communicating that decision and thoughts in the email reply.
- If you have something to clean, you can mindfully clean, one thing at a time.
- If you have papers to file, you can focus on each paper, one at a time. Make a decision, file the paper, focus on the next one.
- If you have someone to meet with, you can try to be mindful as you listen and talk to them, in the moment. You can approach them with compassion.

There are lots of other kinds of tasks, but the idea is generally the same:

1. Start from a place of peace.
2. Set your intention.
3. Focus on the first step of the task, in the moment.
4. Focus on the next task.

This takes practice, but you can get better at it once you learn to get into the flow of the moment, acting one step at a time without the fear. When you notice another sign of fear, distraction, procrastination, start again.



For the next few days, use your Unprocrastination Sessions to practice working on tasks with focus. For each task, try starting from a place of peace, set an intention, focus on the first step of the task.

## *Chapter 6*

# The Unprocrastination Session

We've looked at the roots of distraction and procrastination ... now let me share a method for overcoming them that I've found to work miracles with clients who are chronic procrastinators.

I call it the Unprocrastination Session.

This is something you can do today, for just 10 minutes, or 20 if you're feeling ambitious. You can do it every day for the next week, and see if this practice is helpful.

Remember the ideas of letting go of your ideals of comfort, and learning to be OK in discomfort and uncertainty. Remember the ideas we talked about in the last chapter, of starting from a place of peace, setting your intention, and focusing on one task at a time, in the moment.

Here's how to do an Unprocrastination Session:

1. Set aside the next 10 minutes for Unprocrastination (after you practice this a few times, gradually work your way to 20 minutes). Make a note of the time or set a timer on your phone for 10 minutes.
2. Make a list of 3 tasks you've been putting off. The tasks can be anything: answering an email that's been in your inbox for awhile, writing something you've been putting off, filling out tax forms, paying a bill, calling someone, sorting through mail, tidying up your desk, a task that's been sitting on your to-do list for a couple months, etc.
3. Reduce each task to just 2–3 minutes (or less) by writing them as “write the first two paragraphs of the Richardson Report” or something like that.

4. Tackle the first item on the list. Don't put it off, don't let your mind skip to the next thing. Don't order the list according to difficulty. Just do the first thing, right away.
5. When you finish the first item, take a breath, praise yourself, then tackle the second. Do not let yourself run away, to check email or social media or anything other than what's on your list. You'll want to put it off, but don't let yourself.

Watch your urges to procrastinate and run to distraction, but don't let yourself follow those urges. Watch your ideal of being in comfort, and practice being OK with discomfort.

Keep going with this method, until the 10 minutes is up. You don't have to finish the list, just stop (unless you feel like continuing). If you finish the three tasks before the time is up, you can stop, or you can add another task.

Do this every day for the next week. One 20-minute procrastination session with a list of 3–5 things you've been procrastinating on. During the day, if you find something you're avoiding, add it to your list for your next session.

You're going to feel great, and you'll be ready to work on other things on your habit list soon.

## *Make it easy to start*

How do you start on a task when you're procrastinating because it's too hard? You make it super easy.

If your task seems too hard to get started, make it even easier: just do one minute. If that's too hard, just do 20 seconds. That's so easy you can't say no.

Whatever the task, if you're procrastinating, make it easier. The key is to just get started. If you want to go beyond the 20 seconds, keep going. If not, do another 20 seconds after you've taken a break and wiped the hard-earned sweat off your brow.

## *Chapter 7*

# Work in the moment

One way to take on a task is to be attached to an outcome, to be hampered by fears and ideals, to act on urges to procrastinate or find distraction.

Another way is to start with your intention for the task — let's say an intention of, “create something good in the world” or “help others”. Then let go of ideals and fears, pause instead of acting on urges to go to distraction or to avoid discomfort, and just do the task in the present moment.

What is that like, to be in the moment with a task?

Imagine a dog chasing after a thrown ball. This dog isn't thinking, “I should check email” or “What if I fail?” or “I really really hope I catch this ball perfectly!” The dog is just running, just pursuing the ball.

The dog is completely in the moment with the activity, feeling its feet hitting the ground, letting its body move through space, keeping its eyes on the arc of the ball's flight. There are no other thoughts about success or failure or what people will think of him. He's completely present in this motion.

This is your model.

Imagine yourself going for a run, not worried about whether it will be a perfect run or whether you'll be uncomfortable, not worried about whether you're going to lose weight and look great ... just moving your body. You feel the ground under your feet, you feel your legs moving and your breath as it enters your body, you see the ground and the trees and everything around you.

You are acting in the moment.

Now try this with another task, say writing something or washing a dish or doing laundry. Let go of your ideals and expectations and goals, put aside your story about this activity and yourself, and just do the action in the moment.

If you're writing or drawing, let your fingers physically move to translate the ideas in your head to paper/computer. Just let yourself flow. Just do the physical actions, and feel your body move, be in your environment completely.

Thoughts will come up, doubts, worries. That's OK. See them, smile at them, then return to your body and the environment and the physical motions.

As I type this, my fingers are moving across a keyboard. I'm visualizing an idea and the fingers are translating them into motion, into words on a page. I am not thinking about what you'll think about this, but about how to express the idea using my fingers.

This takes practice, and you might not be good at it, but you'll get better. Start practicing today, and then tomorrow, and watch yourself get better.

## *Living in full-screen mode*

Most of us want to do more than one thing at once. It's hard to let go of one thing in order to do another.

We're doing one work task while trying to stay on top of email, text messages and social media. We're talking with a friend while seeing what we're missing on Facebook and Instagram. We're eating while planning. Thinking about work while making love.

I'd like to offer, as an alternative, full-screen living — a life where we allow one thing to take up the entirety of our attention.

## *Full-screen mode on your computer*

I prefer to write in full-screen, distraction-free text editors like Byword, OmmWriter, or Q10. They fill up your screen so there are no distractions as you write — it's just you and your text.

But you can do almost anything in full-screen mode: read articles using Instapaper (which removes ads and everything but the article); watch videos in full-screen mode; open a browser tab in its own window, and put that into full-screen mode, saving everything else for later.

You just have the one task in front of you, the one thing to read or write, and you aren't switching back and forth between bone and toy.

This means you can fully focus, can fully savor the article, can fully give your attention to your work. You do better when there's only one thing in your mouth, or in your attention.

## *Full-screen mode in life*

You can apply the same ideas to the rest of your life.

If you're going to spend time with your child, don't switch between the child tab and the work tabs in the browser of your mind. Put your child into full-screen mode, and let him take up all your attention, and let work and everything else you need to do later fade into the background.

You'll still get to the work, when you're done with what you're doing with your child, but for now, be fully in this one activity, with this one person. When you're done with that, you can bring your work into full-screen mode, and let the rest of your life go into the background for the moment.

If you eat, let the food fill up the screen of your attention, not your thinking about other things. If you're showering, let that fill your attention, instead of planning. When you're brushing your teeth, let the "conversation" (read: argument) you had earlier fade away and just brush your teeth.

When you work, do one task at a time. And don't just do one task at a time, but do that task with all your attention (or as much as possible), and don't be thinking about the other tasks.

## *The doing*

It's easier said than done, and it takes practice. As with anything, when you first start practicing, you won't be great at it, but you'll get better with practice. Start today.

A great practice is sitting meditation, where you do nothing but sit, and maybe just pay attention to your breath. That's difficult, as our minds tend to throw thought after thought at us, but noticing those thoughts can be a useful practice that is carried into all other activities in our lives.

Beyond sitting, try mindful cleaning. What you learn in sitting and cleaning will be applicable in every other full-screen activity you do each day.

Full-screen living isn't necessarily easier than one where you're constantly switching between the tabs of your mind. It takes constant practice, and in fact that practice is every waking moment.

## *Chapter 8*

# The anxiety of being overwhelmed, & the simplicity of doing

*“Before enlightenment; chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment; chop wood, carry water.”  
~Zen proverb*

In the chaos of the modern world, with the anxiety that comes with all we have to do, there is a beauty in simply doing.

We're buffeted wildly by whatever emails, conversations, news, events, demands, that are going on around us. Our minds become a constant deluge of thoughts dwelling in the past, worries of the future, distractions pulling us in every direction.

But all of that melts away when we focus on just doing.

It doesn't matter what the doing is: sitting, walking, writing, reading, eating, washing, talking, snuggling, playing. By focusing on the doing, we drop our worries and anxieties, jealousies and anger, grieving and distraction.

There is something profound in that simplicity. Something ultimately heart-rendingly, breath-takingly gorgeous.

You are in the middle of your day today, and you're caught up in the sandstorm of thoughts, feelings, anxieties, to-dos, meetings, readings, and communications of this day.



Pause. Breathe. Let all of that fade.

Now focus on doing one thing, right now. Just choose one thing, and clear away all other distractions. Seriously, clear it all away. Turn off your Internet.

Let all thoughts about anything other than the doing also fade away. They'll come up, but gently make note of them, and then let them go. And return to the doing.

If you're washing a dish, do it slowly, and feel every sensation. If you're eating a fruit, taste it, feel the textures, be mindful of your hunger or lack of it. If you're writing something, pour your heart into that writing, become the writing, inhabit the words.

Just do.

The rest of the world becomes meaningless distraction. It's just you, and your doing.

And you realize: this is all that matters. In this, there is everything.

*“When walking, walk. When eating, eat.” ~Zen proverb*

## *Chapter 9*

# Clear your email inbox

The beauty of an empty inbox is a thing to behold. It is calming, peaceful and wonderful. More importantly, learning how to process to empty is about not procrastinating on things by letting them sit in a pile in the inbox.

If your inbox is full, you might feel like you're drowning in email. Let's look at how to get your head above water first, and then how to get safely to dry land.

### *Get your head above water*

You need to give yourself some breathing room. A flooded inbox is overwhelming, and you don't know where to start. So here's where we're going to start:

1. **Create an “actions” folder or label in your email.** This is where you're going to store any emails that you need to take action on (other than just replying or filing or whatever).
2. **Pick the most important.** Go through your inbox and check off 10–15 that are the most urgent action emails, and file them in this new folder. If you don't get to the sections below right away, you can at least work from this folder for now.
3. **Make a list.** Write all of the actions from these emails on a to-do list. It's good to get the tasks out of your emails and on a task list. If you don't already have a task management system, just use a text file or piece of paper.
4. **Temporarily archive.** Now create a “temp” folder. File everything that's still in your inbox into this temp folder. Everything. You're going to get these out of the way and not worry about them at the moment. We'll get to these, but it gives you a little breathing room.

5. **Set a new policy.** Every new email that comes in will follow the rules in the next section. No more allowing your inbox to pile up.

## *Deal with incoming emails*

So what to do with new emails that come in? Set some rules, and commit right this minute to ruthlessly sticking to them.

First, process from the top down, taking these actions with every single email:

1. Delete or Archive (use this liberally)
2. Quick reply (four sentences or less) and then archive.
3. Put a task on your to-do list for action, and then file into your “action” folder.  
This last item includes emails that require longer replies.

Move on to the next email, and take one of these actions. Don’t spend longer than 20 seconds on any one email when you’re in processing mode. If you take one of these three actions, and work quickly, you should dispose of every email and be done in minutes.

Only when you’ve processed should you start worrying about the to-do items. You can choose to do those now, or later. Don’t start doing the to-do items when you’re processing.

Also, delete newsletters and any other non-essential emails. You’re never going to read all those newsletters, notices from services, catalogs from companies, and so on that regularly get delivered from your inbox. So go into your “temp” folder and delete all of them right now. All of them. And whenever new ones come in — emails that are not from real people directed just for you — you’re going to go to the bottom of the email and click on the “unsubscribe” link. Every single one of them should have an “unsubscribe” link — if not, mark as spam. It only takes 10 seconds to click on the unsubscribe link and then go to the new page and hit the

unsubscribe button. And if you do this for every single one, you'll soon get a lot less email.

Follow these four rules and you'll never have a full inbox again.

## *Stop the flood*

OK, things should feel a bit more manageable now. Now we want to set some long-term policies so that you get fewer emails from now on.

Here's what to do:

1. **Unsubscribe from everything.** This was talked about in the section above, but just in case you missed that, go back and read the newsletters item. You don't need newsletters flooding your inbox.
2. **Stop sending so many emails.** The more emails you send, the more you'll get. Use email as little as you possibly can. Call people if you can, or walk over and talk to them. If those aren't possible, see if you can figure it out for yourself. If you send an email that doesn't require a response, say so.
3. **Send shorter emails.** They're more likely to get read and acted on, and it'll take less of your time to write them. Try sticking to 4 sentences or fewer.
4. **Check email less often.** Set times each day, and only check email on those times. When you do, process your inbox to empty using the rules above.
5. **Filter out notifications.** If there are notifications you do want to see, create a folder or label for them, and create a filter (Gmail is great for this) so that the notifications go straight to that label/folder and skip the inbox.
6. **Set policies.** Put up policies on your website or send the policies out to the people you work with. These policies should be aimed at reducing the number of requests you get. For example, if requests are coming to you that should be going somewhere else, put that in your policies. If people should deal with things through a different channel than email, say it in the policies. Try to figure out your most common types of emails, and find solutions so you don't have to respond to all of them.

7. **Post FAQs.** Similarly, if you get a bunch of questions regularly, post the answers publicly so that you don't have to repeatedly answer them by email. It'll save you a lot of time.

## *Process old emails*

You're going to want to return to your "temp" folder, when you have the time, and start processing it. Some steps:

1. **Process it in chunks** if there are too many to do now. Just do it for 5 minutes and then come back later.
2. **When you process, follow the rules for processing your inbox above** (under the "New Emails" section). Start at the top, take quick action on each email, moving it out of the temp folder as fast as you can.
3. **Feel free to mass delete emails.** If you know you'll never reply or act on emails, just check a bunch of them off and delete or archive. You can get big chunks done at once this way. Give yourself the freedom to let these go — and just worry about what you need to do from this point on.

## *When to process emails*

Once you learn to become an email processing machine, you might be tempted to do it throughout the day, to keep your inbox empty. It can be addicting!

But then you're just reacting to whatever comes into your inbox. Instead, close the email program, and focus on your important tasks. Email processing is probably something you only need to do 2–3 times a day (or just once, if you don't get a lot of urgent emails). Some jobs require checking email more often (customer support, for example), but for many of us, our important tasks are outside of email.

Also let go of the need to get the email to empty and keep it there. The method above is about dealing with emails effectively, not about getting to a perfect state of emptiness. Obsessing over getting to empty means you'll never be happy, because as

soon as you achieve that, more emails will come in. Then you have to deal with those, and then more come in. Instead, open your email 2–3 times a day (if your job allows that), and get as close to empty as possible, then get out. If you like, leave two emails in the inbox, just so you don't ever get addicted to an empty inbox.

## *Chapter 10*

# Get organized

It's easy to say "Just work in the moment" with a single task, but what about all the others you have to do? They don't just magically disappear — you still have to do them sometime.

I've found it useful to have a system for keeping track of all my tasks, that I learn to trust because I know that everything I need to do is in the system. Once you build this trust, you can focus on the one task you want to do right now.

The exact tools you use aren't as important as having a place for everything, and developing the habits for putting things in their place.

Here are some options for such a system, inspired by one of my favorite productivity systems, Getting Things Done by David Allen.

## *The buckets*

I've found the following buckets to be essential:

1. **Task list.** I currently use Omnifocus, though it's fairly expensive, and a simple to-do program or text file could work as well. Basically, a list of all your tasks for today, and for later. I recommend organizing them by project. I'll share my Omnifocus workflow below.
2. **Reminders.** You need to regularly do a set of tasks, like "change oil in car" or "work out" or "journal" or "attend weekly managers' meeting". You could use calendar reminders, or the reminders app on your phone. Again, I put recurring tasks in Omnifocus.
3. **Calendar.** Other than recurring tasks, you'll need a calendar for appointments. I use Google Calendar, but often use Fantastical on the Mac and

iPhone as my main interface with the calendar. Whatever calendar you normally use is fine.

4. **Other lists.** There are miscellaneous items you want to keep track of, and you should have a place to put each. For example: grocery lists, errands, books to read, movies to watch, places to travel, goals and dreams, projects you might want to do someday. You could have a text file for these (call it “Someday”), or use an Evernote note or two, a Google Doc, a note in your notes program. I use Someday lists in Omnifocus.
5. **Files.** You need a place to keep documents, receipts, tickets, tax documents, etc. You can use a set of paper folders or folders on your computer, Evernote, Google Drive, iCloud, etc. I use a set of Dropbox folders (Taxes, Financial, Key Documents, Upcoming), and scan in all paper documents to be put in these folders.

When things come into your email inbox, you can put them quickly into one of these buckets, and then not think about them until you need to. Create a place for everything.

## *The habits*

These three habits are essential for building trust in your system:

1. **Put things in their buckets.** When you have a document that should be filed, immediately file it where it belongs. When you have a task to do from an incoming email, add the task to your task list. If you have a meeting that someone scheduled with you, put it in your calendar. Every item should have a place (and if it doesn’t, make one), and you should develop the habit of putting those things in their place. You’ll never worry about anything again.
2. **Daily review.** Every morning, take five minutes to check over your calendar, reminders, and project/task lists, and mark what you need to do today — your most important tasks as well as the smaller ones to do later. It doesn’t take long, and you’ll feel good about being on top of your tasks.



3. **Weekly review.** Every week, take a quick look over your projects and see if there's anything missing, anything you forgot to check off. Do a quick check of your someday files, your calendar, your reminders, and see if anything needs to be tweaked or added. You'll feel much safer knowing things are running smoothly after a weekly review.

It's easy to put these off, but you build trust by creating the habit of not putting them off.

## *My system*

I don't claim my tools and system should work for everyone, but just to give you some ideas, here's how I use Omnifocus:

1. **Inbox.** Omnifocus has a couple of keyboard shortcuts that work no matter what program you're in, as long as Omnifocus is running in the background. So I keep it running at all times, and if I'm processing email, I just use the shortcut and create quick tasks in Omnifocus. If I'm in the browser and find something I need to do or want to check out later, I create a quick task in Omnifocus. It all goes into the Inbox.
2. **Projects.** In the Projects tab, I set up projects for all the regular things I do, from my blog to my Sea Change Program to the Zen Habits book to family things. I even have a project called "Marriage," where Eva and I are working on ways to continually improve our relationship.
3. **Single tasks.** Some tasks don't fit well into projects, so I have a single-action list that just has one-off tasks like "Call grandma" or "look into space travel".
4. **Maintenance.** In a folder called "Maintenance," I have single-action lists called "Daily," "Weekly," "Monthly," "Quarterly," and "Yearly." I put any regular tasks into these lists, like "prepare tax documents," "change oil in car," "read with kids," or "workout."
5. **Someday lists.** I have a series of lists in a folder called "Someday" that include "Ideas for blog posts," "Read/watch/listen," "Great ideas," "Ideas for kids," "Travel," "Gift ideas," "Wishlist," "Learning," and "Miscellaneous." Any

ideas or things I want to think about someday go into these lists. I review them monthly.

6. **Today.** Every morning, I review my calendar and project lists, and flag the items I want to do today. I then use the Flagged tab for my daily action list. Maintenance tasks like “workout” and “read with kids” are set to automatically recur, so I don’t need to flag them each day. They just pop up here. I use the “defer” action for flagged tasks I don’t want to do now but that I want to show up in the Flagged tab when I’m ready to work on them — for example, my daily recurring tasks usually are set to defer until 5 a.m. each day, so when I wake up, they’re sitting there in my flagged folder. But my workout task is set to defer until 9:30 a.m., because I work out a little after that, so it pops into the Flagged tab at that time.
7. **Weekly review.** Every Sunday, I go into the Review tab and look over every project, to see that they’re up-to-date. Some projects that are less active are set to have reviews every two weeks, or monthly.

That’s my current system, though I should note that I change the system up every now and then, so in a year, I might have different tools. Whatever system I’m using usually has most of those kinds of lists and reviews, but set up a little differently. I share this current system with you guys because it’s been working well for me.

## *Chapter 11*

# Do it now

I have a friend, Susan O’Connell (Zen teacher and President of the San Francisco Zen Center), who will get out her paper calendar immediately if you suggest getting together sometime.

Instead of saying, “Let’s be sure to meet sometime soon,” she’ll want to make a date right this moment. When I asked why, she said she tries to only deal with something once.

It’s an old-fashioned piece of productivity advice, but it works.

Deal with something once. Do it now. Then it’s off your mind, and you can fully focus on the next matter.

Do most of us do this? We might read a bunch of emails, and say, “I’ll reply to those later. I’ll decide later.” We might see a bill or other piece of mail, and put it aside for later.

We put off small decisions and tasks for later, and they pile up, weighing on us at the back of our minds, pulling on us until we collapse under the weight of “later”.

Try dealing with it immediately.

If you open an email, make a decision on it immediately. Schedule the appointment in your calendar, reply, do a small task it requires, or if it takes too long, then you can put it on a to-do list — but avoid this if possible. David Allen suggests a two-minute rule: if the task can be done in less than two minutes, do it now. I suggest five minutes, even up to 10, as that means you have one less thing to worry about.

At any rate, archive the email once you've dealt with it, or delete it. You're done with that. Move to the next, and repeat.

This applies to everything else: mail, paperwork, phone calls, requests from others. Deal with them immediately, or schedule a date to deal with it later if necessary.

When you are finished using something, put it away immediately and avoid a mess later. This is also how I keep clutter at bay. When you're cooking, wash the items as you go to avoid a huge kitchen mess.

When your child asks for attention, give it to her now.

When your wife starts talking to you, put away the laptop, iPad or mobile device, and talk to her now.

What this means is that you deal with each thing in the moment, and then move to the next. Your mind isn't pulled in a million directions at once.

I'm not saying we should just be reactive, and be at the whim of any incoming request. It's better to focus on what's important. But a balance can be struck. When you deal with email or other types of communication, do it now. When you decide to work on something important, clear everything else, shut down communication, and just focus on that one important task. Don't bounce around.

Try it, and practice throughout your day, and let me know how it works for you.

## *Chapter 12*

# Do less

Many of us work in an endless stream of tasks, browser tasks, social media, emails, meetings, rushing from one thing to another, never pausing and never ending.

Then the day is over, and we are exhausted, and we often have very little to show for it. And we start the next day, ready for a mindless stream of tasks and distractions.

Let's question the normal way of doing things, take a step back and give our lives some consideration. Is it really worth it to do so much and have so little to show for it? Are we losing our lives to busy-ness and distraction?

What if we did less instead?

### *The benefits*

I could probably write an entire book on the benefits of doing less, but here's the short version:

1. **You accomplish more.** No, you don't get more done (you're doing less, after all), but if you do less and focus on the important stuff, you actually achieve better results, more meaningful accomplishments. This is how I'm able to work less but still write hundreds of posts a year (on various sites), create ebooks and courses, and more.
2. **You have less anxiety.** When you let go of the distractions and the non-essential, you free yourself from the fear that you need to do these things. You learn that your world doesn't fall apart when you let these things go.
3. **You enjoy life more.** Taking time to really focus on an important task, or enjoy the little things, rather than rushing through them, is much more enjoyable.

4. **You create time.** When you do less, all of a sudden you have free time! What can you do with all that time? How about spend some time with loved ones, read, write, make music, exercise, cook healthy meals, start your own business, meditate, do yoga?

These benefits are just the start, but you'll discover even more as you give this a try.

## *Savor your tasks*

You can savor a delicious meal, and you can savor life as well. You can also apply the idea of savoring to your to-do list.

When you do a task — let's say writing something — create space around that task. Really pay attention, really pour yourself into it, and enjoy it. Any task can be enjoyable with the savor mindset — yes, even cleaning and doing taxes.

When you do the task, don't rush through it, but be mindful, be present, and smile.

When you're done with the task, savor your accomplishment instead of just looking for what's next. Breathe between tasks.

## *Curate your tasks*

If you normally do 20–30 things a day (as an example), small and large tasks and meetings, that's great — but are these things important? Are they good enough to make the cut of what should be in your life?

Instead, think of yourself as a collector. Each day is limited, our lives are limited, and we can try to cram as many things as we possibly can into these containers, or we can collect just the experiences worthy of being in these limited days.

What would you include in your day if you were culling experiences and tasks down to the best ones? My day, as an example, often contains these things I love:

meditation, writing, coffee and reading, spending time with my wife and kids, exercise, eating healthy meals, helping people, going for a walk, more reading, drinking a glass or two of red wine. Not every day has those things, and not in that order, but those are some of the things I find worthy of my day.

## *Create a simpler day*

Can you do less today? How would you do it?

The answer is yes, you can do less today, even if you've already started with a rush of small tasks. Here's what I suggest:

1. **Take a breath.** Take a moment to pause in your busy day, and breathe. Pay attention to your breath for a minute, then pay attention to your body, how you're sitting, whether your jaw is clenched, what is tense.
2. **Now consider your day.** What have you done already today? What is on the horizon for the rest of the day? Is there anything you can let go of? Can you create spaces between your tasks? Can you cull your tasks, getting rid of the non-essential, just leaving the best?
3. **Learn to know the essential.** It takes time to figure out what tasks give you the most impact on your life, your career, your ability to help others and change the world. But start learning today — pick what you think is most essential, clear some space, and just work on those things. Savor them.
4. **Reduce distractions.** Consider going on a digital cleanse — take a day or a week off of social media, news, entertainment/gossip sites, the places you usually spend on distractions. What will you do when you feel like some distraction? Meditate, exercise, create.
5. **Breathe.** Enjoy the new space. Savor the beauty of doing less.

## *Chapter 13*

# Do what you love

“The supreme accomplishment is to blur the line between work and play.” - Arnold Toynbee

One of the greatest accomplishments of my life has been finding my love for writing on Zen Habits. Being able to do work I love, waking up every day with a purpose, connecting with people who find value in what I do ... it's more meaningful than I could have believed.

Unfortunately, many people rule out the possibility of doing work they love, because it doesn't seem realistic. For nearly two decades I focused on going to college, and working at a day job that I sometimes enjoyed but often dreaded, because that's what we expect should happen. Starting my own business, pursuing my dreams, doing something I loved? Crazy talk.

Crazy talk is what I'm going to give you now. It is possible — I did it, all while working a full-time job, doing free-lance writing on the side, and having a wife and six kids. I did it, even if I never dared to dream it for the first three decades of my life.

I don't have all the answers, but I'd like to share what I've learned about doing what you love. Because if you can find it, it will be the thing that will get you motivated to get out of bed in the morning, to cry out, “I'm alive!”

If you don't think it's possible, do a small easy test. Don't think you can start a blog? Sign up for a free WordPress.com account and do a short post. Don't tell anyone about it. Just write a post. It costs nothing, risks nothing, takes almost no time. But you will learn you can do that one little thing, and if you pass that test, you now know your theory of impossibility was wrong. You can do this with any skill — not just blogging.



Expand your tests. If you pass the first test, do another small one. Then another. Keep going and notice your confidence grow. Your skills grow along with the confidence. It's amazingly simple. Iterate and re-iterate as long as you are having fun.

If you don't know what you love, don't worry. There's no need to figure that out right away. Try something that someone else is doing, and see if you think it's fun. The real fun part, btw, comes when you start to get good at it, so perhaps stick with it for awhile and enjoy the learning, then enjoy being good at it. If that first try doesn't work, try something else. You don't have to commit to one thing for your entire life. You can do a dozen a year if you want, for a decade. You'll probably find something by then.

Here are some things to try:

1. **What are you good at?** Unless you're just starting out in life, you have some skills or talent, shown some kind of aptitude. Even if you are just starting out, you might have shown some talent when you were young, even as young as elementary school. Have you always been a good writer, speaker, drawer, organizer, builder, teacher, friend? Have you been good at ideas, connecting people, gardening, selling? Give this some thought. Take at least 30 minutes, going over this question — often we forget about things we've done well. Think back, as far as you can, to jobs, projects, hobbies. This could be your passion. Or you may have several things. Start a list of potential candidates.
2. **What excites you?** It may be something at work — a little part of your job that gets you excited. It could be something you do outside of work — a hobby, a side job, something you do as a volunteer or a parent or a spouse or a friend. It could be something you haven't done in awhile. Again, think about this for 30 minutes, or 15 at the least. If you don't, you're probably shortchanging yourself. Add any answers to your list.
3. **What do you read about?** What have you spent hours reading about online? What magazines do you look forward to reading? What blogs do you follow? What section of the bookstore do you usually peruse? There may be many topics here — add them to the list.

4. **What have you secretly dreamed of?** You might have some ridiculous dream job you've always wanted to do — to be a novelist, an artist, a designer, an architect, a doctor, an entrepreneur, a programmer. But some fear, some self-doubt, has held you back, has led you to dismiss this idea. Maybe there are several. Add them to the list — no matter how unrealistic.
5. **Learn, ask, take notes.** OK, you have a list. Pick one thing from the list that excites you most. This is your first candidate. Now read up on it, talk to people who've been successful in the field (through their blogs, if they have them, or email). Make a list of notes of things you need to learn, need to improve on, skills you want to master, people to talk to. Study up on it, but don't make yourself wait too long before diving into the next step.
6. **Experiment, try.** Here's where the learning really takes place. If you haven't been already, start to do the thing you've chosen. Maybe you already are, in which case you might be able to skip to the next step or choose a second candidate to try out. But if you haven't been, start now — just do it. It can be in the privacy of your own home, but as quickly as possible, make it public however you can. This motivates you to improve, it gets you feedback, and your reputation will improve as you do. Pay attention to how you feel doing it — is it something you look forward to, that gets you excited, that you love to share?
7. **Narrow things down.** I recommend that you pick 3–5 things from your list, if it's longer than that, and do steps 5 & 6 with them. This could take month, or perhaps you've already learned about and tried them all out. So now here's what you need to ask yourself: which gets you the most excited? Which of these can produce something that people will pay for or get excited about? Which can you see yourself doing for years (even if it's not a traditional career path)? Pick one, or two at the most, and focus on that. You're going to do the next three steps with it: banish your fears, find the time, and make it into a career if possible. If it doesn't work out, you can try the next thing on your list — there's no shame in giving something a shot and failing, because it'll teach you valuable lessons that will help you to be successful in the next attempt.
8. **Find inspiration.** Who else is doing what you love doing? Who is excited about it most? Follow them. Learn about them. See what path they took. Watch closely how they execute, what they do right. Learn from the best.

9. **Reach out to a mentor.** Of the people who inspire you the most, try to make contact with a few of them. If they never respond, try a few more. See if you can buy them lunch or coffee. Don't pitch them on anything. Just ask for their help, and say you'd love for them to mentor you in a way that won't take up much of their time. Don't demand a lot of time, but go to them when you're having trouble making big decisions.
10. **Choose one passion at random.** Some people have many interests and don't know where to start. Pick one or two randomly if they're all about equal, and just get started. Don't let choice paralyze you. Get started, because in the end it won't matter if you started with the wrong passion — you'll learn something valuable no matter what.
11. **Get good at it.** You get good at something with practice. Allow your friends and family to be your first audience, readers, customers. Then take on a few others at a low cost, or increase your audience slowly. But always have an audience or customers if possible — you'll get good much faster this way, with feedback and accountability. Read about it. Watch videos. Take a class. Join a group of others learning. Find people to partner with. Before long, you'll be good at it.
12. **Help others.** One of the best ways to get good at something is to help others learn. Making someone's life better with your new skill is also an amazing way to get satisfaction out of what you do, to love what you do. Help as many people as you can in any way possible — it will pay off.
13. **Find your voice.** Eventually, as you master your skill, you will learn that you are different than the thousands of others doing it. You will find your uniqueness. It's not necessarily there at first, because you might not have the technical skills to express yourself. But eventually, find that voice. Find the thing that sets you apart, that helps you to stand out from the crowd. Then emphasize that.
14. **How can you be valuable?** What can you do that is valuable to others? Sometimes it's doing something that they really need. Sometimes it's doing it better than others. Sometimes it's saving people time, or money. Other times it's just making their lives better, brighter, pleasanter in some way.

15. **Become an expert.** If you get good at something, and help others, and find a voice, and become valuable — you'll become an expert at what you do. Others will turn to you for advice. Help them. Read more.
16. **Don't be a jerk.** Too many people online are so worried about maximizing subscriber numbers or page views that they do things that are disrespectful to their readers. Asking me to click “Next Page” five times to read your article? Jerk move. Having a pop-up asking me to subscribe before I've even read the article I came to read? Jerk move. Screaming at me to “Like” your page on Facebook, when I could decide that on my own without being asked if the article was really good? Jerk move. Learn to feel what is respectful, and what's a jerk move.
17. **It's the doing and loving that matters.** Many people focus on growing, or hitting goals, or making money, but they forget what matters. What matters most is loving what you do. If you love it, and you're doing it, you've already succeeded. Don't worry so much about achieving certain levels of success — people push themselves so hard to reach those things that they forget to enjoy what they're doing, and in the process they lose the reason they're doing it in the first place.
18. **Explore how to make a living doing it.** This doesn't happen overnight. You need to do something, get good at it, be passionate about it. This could take months or years, but if you're having fun, that's what's most important. Try selling your own products. I've found that the best way to make a revenue, by far, is by selling your own stuff. I've tried ads and affiliate links, and have found that what works best for me is selling my own products and services. I've already proven to my audience that I'm valuable and honest and trustworthy, and so they are much more likely to want something that I've created than something I recommend made by others. So create something valuable that will help others, and sell it.
19. **Dream bigger.** Once you've overcome the initial fear and started to become good at something you love, dream bigger. The first stage is small steps, but don't stop there. You can change lives. You can change the world. Doing so will change you.

I'm not saying this will be easy. It'll require a lot of reflection and soul-searching, at first, then a lot of courage and learning and experimentation, and finally a lot of commitment.

But it's all worth it — every second, every ounce of courage and effort. Because in the end, you'll have something that will transform your life in so many ways, will give you that reason to jump out of bed, will make you happy no matter how much you make.

I hope you follow this guide and find success, because I wish on you nothing less than finding your true passion.

*'Everything you can imagine is real.'* ~Pablo Picasso

## *Chapter 14*

# Find your inspiration

*“You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.” - Jack London*

We all have days when we’re just not very inspired, when we need passion and creativity breathed into us.

I know I do.

For anyone who needs a little shove, whose creativity has dried up, who needs to be moved ... I humbly offer this simple guide.

While I never claim to have all the answers, nor that my way is the only way, I share here some things I’ve learned about inspiration, some tricks I’ve learned that work for me.

I’m often in need of inspiration, but in all cases I’ve found it. And it’s a wonderful thing.

## *What is inspiration?*

Many people think of it as an elusive quality that can’t be forced, and yet it can be found if you look for it.

Others think it’s a way to find ideas, but it’s more than ideas ... it’s being moved to put those ideas into action.

Inspiration is finding something else that is divinely inspired (people, nature, amazing ideas), having that inspiration breathed into you (“breath” is the root of “inspiration”), and then taking action on it. Creating, doing, inspiring others.

## *How to find inspiration*

Inspiration is just about everywhere you can look, if you're looking for it. That's the key: to keep your eyes open. Too often we miss beautiful sources of inspiration, because we're too busy thinking about other things.

Be observant. See everything around you as a possible source of inspiration.

Some possible sources of inspiration:

- blogs
- books
- magazines
- films
- people around you
- nature
- children
- art
- music
- history
- exercise
- religion
- great projects
- dreams
- social media
- photographs
- forums
- google
- success stories
- life, everywhere

Just keep your eyes open, at all times, staying present whenever possible, and allow yourself to breathe in that inspiration.

## *How to stay inspired*

Inspiration isn't just a one-time thing. You'll need it on a regular basis.

When you practice the above method — keeping your eyes open, staying present, and breathing in inspiration — you get better at it. It becomes a skill you can use at any time, and you'll use it often.

Some tips for keeping the inspiration coming:

1. **Work with inspired people** — one of the best ways to stay inspired is to work with creative, energetic, positive people.
2. **Read daily** — varied things, from blogs to magazines to books of all kinds.
3. **Get outside** — nature is one of the biggest inspirations, and you'll miss it if you're inside all day.
4. **Talk with new people** — they'll always expose you to new and interesting things, if you're open to it.
5. **Break out of your routine** — see things from a different perspective. Take a new route home. Go to a new restaurant. Visit someplace new in your area.
6. **Find time for silence** — it's more inspiring than you might think. Unfortunately, not enough of us do it.
7. **Exercise** — or at least get moving. It helps the blood to circulate, and gets ideas moving around. My most inspired thoughts come during runs.

## *Now take action*

Don't just feel inspired. Take this inspiration and use it, be moved, and do something. Channel that inspiration into creating something amazing.

Put that something out into the world, and in turn, you will inspire others.



## Chapter 15

# Create

*‘Men must live and create. Live to the point of tears.’ ~Albert Camus*

It’s amazing how many people I talk to who tell me they want to create a new blog, write a book, start a new business, change careers, make something new.

But they keep putting it off.

Does that sound familiar? You’ve been wanting to do something different, but you don’t have the time (or maybe the energy) right now? A million things on your to-do list, a schedule packed full, meetings that keep coming up. You’ll get to your Big Thing, but later. There’s all the time in the world to do it later, right?

That time will never come. Not if you don’t create that time yourself.

Seize the bull by the horns, grasp it tenaciously, never let it go. Time has a habit of trampling over us, so softly we don’t even notice but so powerfully we become crushed over the course of weeks and years.

I had two jobs, six kids and marathon training going on when I created Zen Habits. There was no time, but I put up a single blog post. The next day I did two posts, even though I had no time. That month I did about 30 posts (not all are still online), despite there being no time.

I had no time, so I created it. Time is often said to be our most limited resource, but it’s not true. We can create time. It takes the sheer force of will to do it, but it can be created.

Time doesn’t fall into your lap. It isn’t handed to you by a kindly old gentleman. You must create it, taking from the world the raw materials you need and shaping it

with your bare dirty blistered hands, pushing the clay into form from its shapeless muddy glob.

I had no time to create *Zen Habits*, and yet today it stands, alive and breathing with pattering heart. I created the time, taking some from television watching, some from meetings, some from saying no to the endless requests on my time by co-workers and well-meaning friends, some from other important projects that I put off. I put off important things to create time for *The Most Important Thing*. I said no to others I cared about to say yes to the thing I needed to make.

Say no to everything else. Put off what can be held at bay for the time being. And create time for what is necessary.

Make something. Bring new creative life into the world, change the lives of others, and in doing so, change yours.

You have the power to create time, and the will to create. Don't squander it, my friend.