Experiment

Without

Limits

PERSONAL EXPERIMENTS FOR PEAK
PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY

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Getting Started

Feeling stuck? Ready to start taking action and need direction?

Experiment Without Limits is your roadmap for achieving peak performance and accelerating personal development. It's packed with all of my top recommendations, including step-by-step instructions on how to implement them into your life.

I have studied and worked with some of the most prolific and high-achieving individuals in the world—including founders with multiple exits, best-selling authors, award-winning producers, and visionary investors—to deconstruct and distill the techniques which truly move the needle.

I have learned many lessons working with high performers. Time after time, I've seen clients stumble at similar junctures in their businesses and personal lives. If you are ready to become a top performer—for others to see you as a leader, an athlete, a changemaker—it is time for you to implement these strategies.

Besides being a successful entrepreneur myself, I am a professional poker player once ranked in the top 20 online players in the world, and competed in the toughest games at the highest stakes. I've taken the system I used to become a world-class poker player and poured it into this workbook.

How to Use Experiment Without Limits

Everything you will learn and implement in the following pages comes from what I personally use to train startup CEOs. These are the exact guidelines I apply to 10X my clients' performance.

This workbook is extensive. All chapters stand on their own, but they come together to form a complete strategy for transformation. You don't need to read the chapters in order—feel free to identify your current pain point and start there.

My advice? Make the investment of time necessary to shift your life trajectory. This isn't a magic pill—you will only get out what you put in.

This is the first step towards achieving your full potential. Let's put the plan into action!
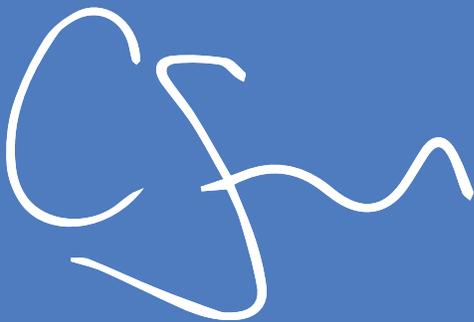
Chris Sparks
Executive Performance Training
The Forcing Function

Setting Goals

> "I learned that if you work hard and creatively, you can have just about anything you want, but not everything you want. Maturity is the ability to reject good alternatives in order to pursue even better ones.
>
> — Ray Dalio

Goals act as your North Star. They keep you moving in the right general direction and allow you to reorient whenever you stray from the path. Figuring out what you really want out of life is the first step to getting it.

GOAL GENERATION

The first step to goal setting is to generate a list of potential goals to choose from. Before you decide what to pursue, brainstorm all of the possibilities, giving yourself permission to think big.

Here is a series of prompts I have found useful for generating potential goals.

Life Story

Goal setting is your opportunity to write your own life story. This long-term focus shifts your search area from what brings you happiness to what will give your life meaning—the *pursuit* of a challenging and worthwhile goal.

30 min

PROMPT   **Write Your Life Story**

- What would you attempt if you knew you could not fail?
- What issue do you want to solve that people say is "too big" to tackle?
- In 25 years, you're giving a keynote at TED: what is the topic of your speech?
- What do you want your obituary to say? Write it out!
- What would you do if money (or another constraint) was unnecessary?
- If you were the last person on Earth, what would you do?

Values

To figure out what you truly want, you must prioritize your values. Examining how you want to spend your days helps to shape what types of goals are available to you.

> **PROMPT** **Define Your Values**
>
> 30 min
>
> - What are your most important values?
> - In what areas of your life do you refuse to compromise?
> - Write out the schedule of your ideal day.
> - How much money do you need to create the life you want?
> - What aspects of your life would need to change to accomplish your biggest goals?

Take the Outside View

Objectivity is critical to goal setting. You must cultivate the ability to view your life as if you are an outside observer.

> **PROMPT** **Take the Outside View**
>
> 10 min
>
> Close your eyes and imagine you have only just arrived in your own body. All of your past decisions are unknown to you. All you can do is appraise your current situation and make the most of your inherited skills and knowledge.
>
> What are the three actions you might take next?
>
> _____
>
> Pretend you are the protagonist in a novel you're reading.
> Fill in the blank: "why don't they just do _____ already?"

GOAL SELECTION

The ideal pursuit minimizes opportunity cost—the inability to pursue the goals not selected—and maximizes expected value.

Minimize Opportunity Cost

An opportunity cost is the lost value of an unselected goal when an alternative goal is selected. Resources allocated to the pursuit of one goal are then unavailable for pursuing other goals, forcing a trade-off decision. When selecting a goal, always take the corresponding opportunity cost into account.

PROMPT **Minimize Opportunity Cost**

5 min

Choose one of the potential goals generated in the previous prompts.

- What are the intermediate goals on the way to that goal?
- What would you need to do to ensure that you make daily progress towards this goal?
- What would you have to give up to pursue this goal? Is this sacrifice worth it? Why or why not?

Maximize Expected Value

An expected value is calculated by taking the sum of all possible outcomes, each multiplied by the probability of occurrence. When deciding between goals, always select the goal which you expect to have the best average outcome based on your values.

If you are having difficulty deciding which goal to pursue next, the Expected Value Calculator on the next page can be powerful. The experiment allows you to identify which value is actually most important to you and reveals the untested assumptions blocking your decision.

Experiment: Expected Value Calculator

Directions:

STEP 1: List all of your potential priorities under "Potential Priorities" This may take some timeboxed brainstorming.

STEP 2: Number each priority in order of where you predict it will rank for "total score".

STEP 3: Rate each priority on each of the 6 categories from 1 (worst) to 5 (best). Feel free to change/delete categories if you like.

STEP 4: Compare total scores. Do the results surprise you? How does the highest score line up with your intuition? Adjust category scores as necessary.

STEP 5: (optional) Decide which of the 6 categories is most important to you. Rerank scores for this category from 1 to 10 instead of from 1 to 5 and observe how total scores change.

STEP 6: How does this change your impression of which goal to pursue? Brainstorm ways you can test your assumptions (time commitment, difficulty level, impact) if the answer is still unclear.

Download an Editable Calculator with Examples

Potential Priorities:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Potential Priorities	Predicted Ranking	Time (Upfront)	Time (Ongoing)	Difficulty	Excitement	Impact (90 Day)	Impact (25 Year)	TOTAL SCORE*
Listed Above	*Do First*	*1 Most, 5 Least*	*1 Most, 5 Least*	*1 Most, 5 Least*	*1 Least, 5 Most*	*1 Least, 5 Most*	*1 Least, 5 Most*	
#1								
#2								
#3								

*Total score is calculated exponentially so 1=1, 2=4, 3=9, 4=16, 5=25 towards total score.

Category Guide:

Time (upfront): How long will this take to get this up and running and start receiving benefits? Remember speed of implementation.

Time (ongoing): How long will this take to grow and maintain? Can this be passively managed in the future? Remember opportunity cost.

Excitement : How much does the idea of this excite me? Will I enjoy the process or have to use willpower to push through?

Difficulty: Do I currently have (or have access to) the necessary skillset? How likely is sucess? How much variance in potential outcomes?

Impact (90 day): How much immediate impact will this have? What short-term opportunities does it create? Momentum builds on itself.

Impact (25 yr): How much impact could this have towards my life's mission? Will the skills and experience gained be worthwhile even if I fail?

GOAL FRAMING

A well-framed goal inspires action and maximizes the chances of success.

Go through the goals you have selected and rewrite each of them until they are SMART. Use the following checklist and examples as your guide.

CHECKLIST **SMART Goals**

☐ **Specific**
Specific goals give you a clear aim and direction with clear, binary (1/0) success criteria.

☐ **Measurable**
Measurable goals allow you to track progress, illuminating opportunities to improve.

☐ **Actionable**
Actionable goals are tied to the actions under your control rather than outcomes.

☐ **Rewarding**
Rewarding goals are sufficiently challenging and meaningful, giving you the momentum necessary to stay the course.

☐ **Time-based**
Time-based goals have a definitive endpoint or deadline which creates urgency.

Dumb Goal	SMART Goal
I'm going to write a book.	By writing two pages every day, I will complete a 180-page first draft by August 1.
I'm going to become stronger.	By lifting for three sets or thirty minutes in the gym at least three times per week until July 31, I expect to add ten pounds of muscle mass.
I'm going to find a significant other.	By going on ten dates over the next three months, I expect to meet someone I would be interested in dating.

Experiments

It is useful to think of your life as an ongoing experiment and your goals as hypotheses. You expect that taking these actions will lead you to the desired results but you cannot be sure until you actually run the experiment.

Commit to each goal for 30 days as an experiment, collecting data to test your initial hypothesis. After 30 days, you can decide whether to commit further. These small experiments add up to massive changes over time.

EXPERIMENT **Creating an Experiment**

15 min

STEP 1: What is a SMART goal that could improve your life?

By writing two pages every day, I will complete a 180-page first draft by August 1, three months from now.

STEP 2: What are the hypotheses that need to be tested?

How long it takes to write two pages on average

My ability to set aside enough time every day to write

How consistently I will write two pages (vs. 1 or 3)

STEP 3: Which hypothesis is critical to the experiment's success?
What is the result necessary to support completion on this goal?

How long it takes to write two pages on average

As I have 90 minutes daily set aside for writing, I need to be able to consistently complete the two pages in that time.

STEP 4: How will you quickly test this hypothesis?
How will you adjust if your test does not have the desired result?

For one week, I will write exactly two pages per day and time how long it takes me.

If it takes longer than 90 minutes, I will either find more time in my daily schedule to write or extend my August 1 deadline.

Designing Systems

> "Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them.
> — Alfred North Whitehead

Goals are insufficient for driving lasting behavioral change. In order to maintain long-term trajectory and momentum, you need to develop systems which support taking action.

THINKING IN SYSTEMS

A system is a group of interacting parts working together to accomplish a specific goal. Changes to one part of the system cause cascading changes to everything else in the system.

There are three key principles which will allow you to analyze and improve your the various systems in your life: bottlenecks, feedback loops, and leverage.
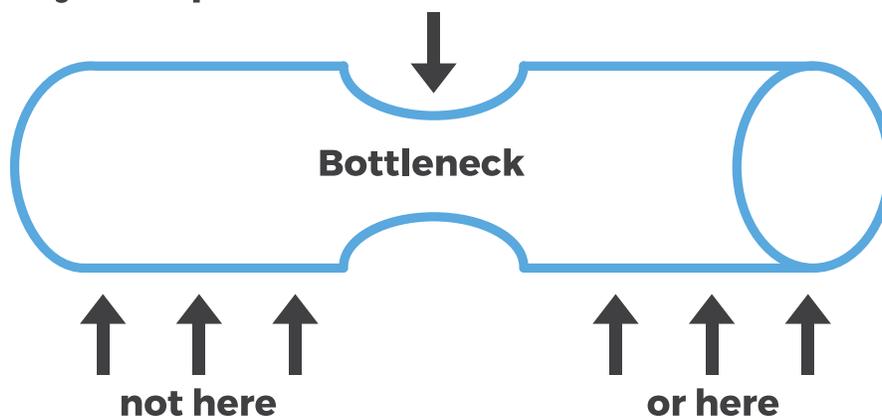
BOTTLENECKS

Every system has various constraints limiting its output. Just like every chain has a weakest link, every system has a most limiting constraint, also known as a bottleneck. This *point of greatest congestion* creates a ceiling for the performance of the entire system.

Your performance is always limited by your current bottleneck. Thus, self-improvement projects will often be wasted effort if you fail to address your bottleneck.

You do not need to work harder. You only need to work more effectively.

Only an improvement here will make a difference

Bottleneck

not here   **or here**

EXPERIMENT **Identifying the Bottleneck**

15 min

STEP 1:

Select one area of your life where you would like to accelerate progress.

STEP 2:

Set a timer for five minutes and write down any possible constraints which could be limiting you in this area.

STEP 3:

Choose one constraint from your list which you think is limiting you the most. This is your potential bottleneck.

STEP 4:

Set a timer for five minutes and write down any action items which could reduce or remove this bottleneck.

STEP 5:

Choose one action item which could immediately reduce your bottleneck. Be specific on how you will track progress.
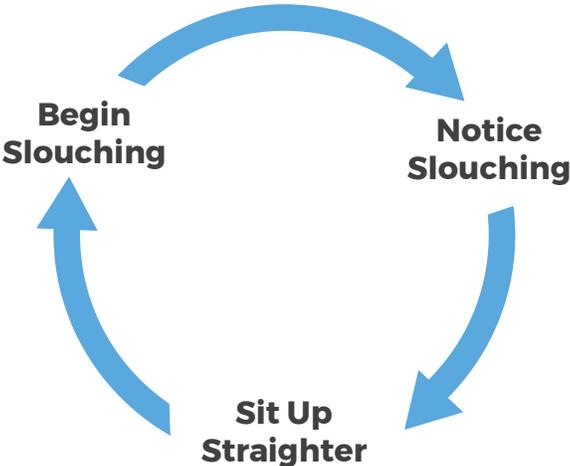
FEEDBACK LOOPS

Feedback loops are a circular system where the outputs of a measurement repeatedly "feed back" to change the measured inputs.

There are two types of feedback loops:

Balancing Feedback Loops regulate behavior by maintaining the status quo. Install balancing feedback loops to prevent yourself from getting off track with your habits.

One example of a habit with a balancing feedback loop is your posture. Tracking and reinforcing better posture will encourage sitting up straight.

Balancing Feedback Loop: Posture

Reinforcing Feedback Loops strengthen behavior by amplifying a current habit in the same direction. Install reinforcing feedback loops to take your habits to the next level.

One example of a habit with a reinforcing feedback loop is cooking. Cooking healthy food will increase the energy you have available, thus increasing the likelihood of cooking in the future.

Reinforcing Feedback Loop: Cooking

Cook Healthy Food

+

Have More Energy

+
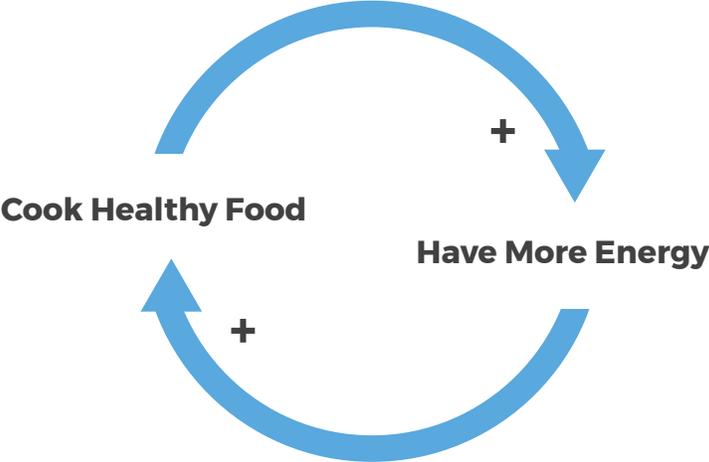
The Improvement Loop

You are always in one of three stages of your own personal improvement loop: Planning, Experimenting or Reflecting.

The speed of your progress is proportional to the tightness of your improvement loop. Look for opportunities to increase your frequency of measurement and experimentation.

Reflect
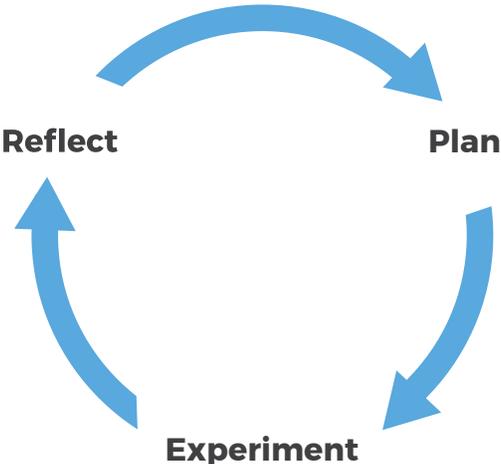
Plan

Experiment

Building a Feedback Loop

20 min

PLAN

Goal:

Select a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Rewarding, Time-based) for which you want a feedback loop.
How will you know when you have achieved your goal?

Habit:

What input action will lead you to your goal?

Measure:

How will you track your efforts to ensure they are leading to your desired results?

EXPERIMENT

Measure:

How will you make sure that you are regularly tracking progress?

Balancing Loop:

What can you put in place to improve your consistency?
What can you put in place to prevent you from getting off track?

Reinforcing Loop:

What could help you continually raise the bar for yourself?

REFLECT

Measure:

When will you have enough data to know how to proceed next?

Iterate:

How can you improve upon this plan for next time?

LEVERAGE

Leverage is the ability to return maximum results per unit of effort. Apply leverage by identifying opportunities to make small life changes which will have outsized effects.
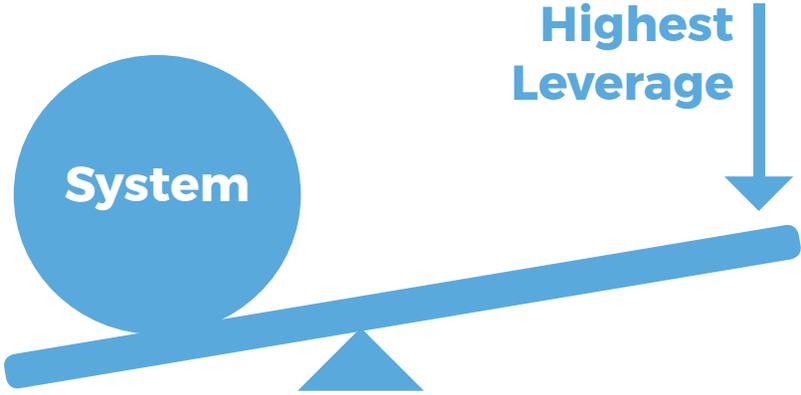
Leverage is famously illustrated by the Pareto Principle or 80/20 Rule. You can achieve 80% of the results with just 20% of the effort. More dramatically, you can also achieve 50% of the results with just 1% of the effort!
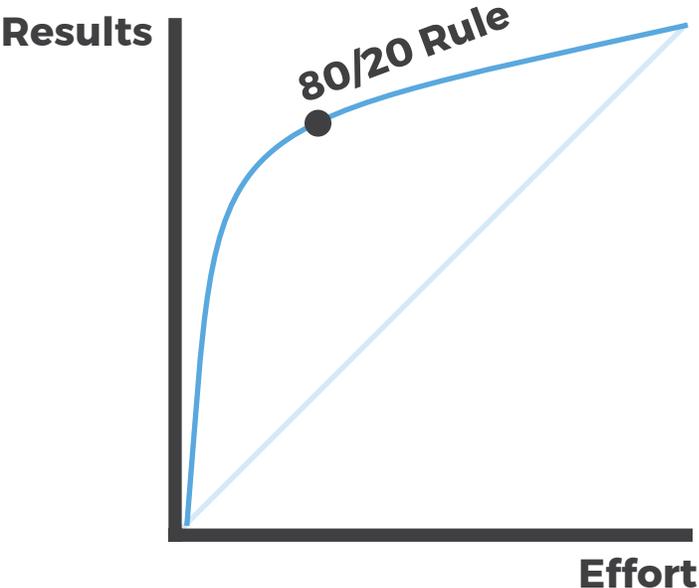
In *Thinking in Systems*, Donella Meadows details the five points of greatest leverage within a system:

1. **Change the goals and values of the system.**
   Realign the system with your intended aims.

2. **Build in self-organization.**
   Design your systems so that they will naturally improve over time.

3. **Improve information flow.**
   Take more objective, accurate, and frequent measurements as well as reflecting regularly to track your progress.

4. **Install feedback loops.**
   With feedback loops, use the information gained from measurement to improve your systems.

5. **Tighten feedback loops.**
   By reducing the delay between measurement and response, you can accelerate your learning and implementation speed.

PROMPT **Leverage**

10 min

- What are the most valuable things that you are doing, and how could you do them more?
- What are the 20% of things you are doing which are driving 80% of results?
- What are the least valuable things that you are doing, and how could you do them less?
- What are the 80% of things you are doing which are driving 20% of results?

Building Habits

> " We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.
> — Will Durant

The appearance of superhuman levels of self-discipline is simply a collection of strong habits, carefully cultivated over time. Building habits is a learnable skill that, if mastered, allows you to become the author of your life.

UPSTREAM EFFECTS

Every day a river flows, the water widens and deepens a channel in the ground. The river can only flow in a different direction if the channel is redirected.

Habits work in the same way. Every time a habit is repeated, your behavior becomes more ingrained, as every action makes that action more likely in the future.

Actions taken to change your habits precede the actual habit change. To redirect the river, you must go upstream from the intended destination. Thus, the actions you take to change your habits are called *upstream effects*.

Downstream Results

Upstream Effect

Old Habit

Desired Habit
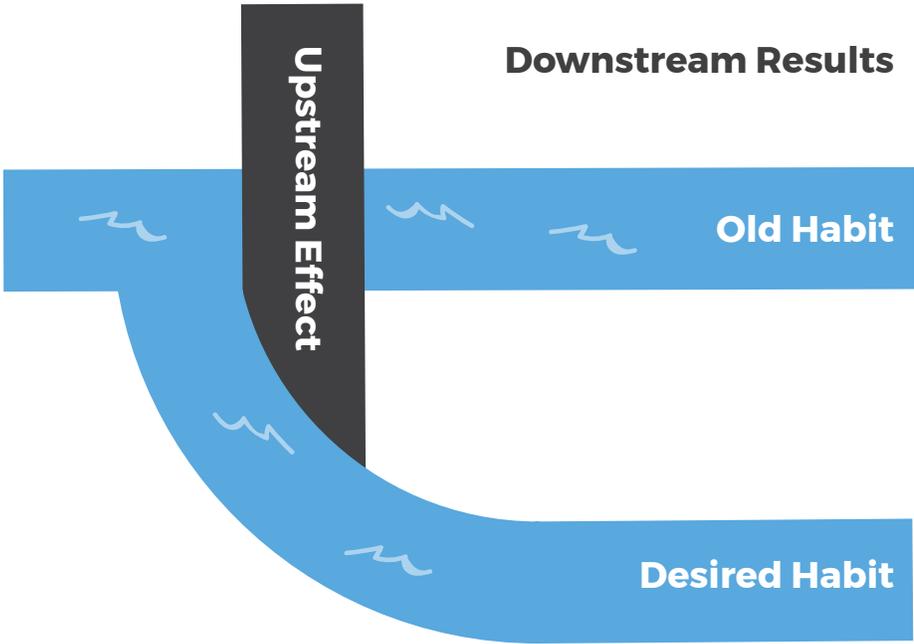
THE HABIT LOOP

The Habit Loop deconstructs a habit into its three component parts.

Triggers set the habit in motion.
Triggers are contextual details which your brain has previously associated with a habit.

> *An alarm clock alerts you that it is time to wake up.*

Behaviors are the actual actions performed as part of the habit.

> *You get out of bed to turn off the alarm.*

Rewards reinforce a habit.
Rewards strengthen the link between a trigger and the associated habit behavior.

> *You reflect on your excitement for the day ahead.*

Trigger   **Behavior**

Habit Loop

Reward

HABIT TRIGGERS

Triggers make the habit action happen. A trigger can be anything in your internal or external environment which you associate with the habit.

To create a new habit, start by writing it out in the form of an algorithm:

"IF [Trigger], THEN [Behavior]".

The five categories of triggers are *preceding events*, *time of day*, *location*, *emotional state*, and *other people*. If you are having trouble maintaining habit consistency, add an additional trigger from a different category. For example, you can link the habit to a reliable preceding action, add a time or location-based reminder, or find an accountability partner.

CHECKLIST **Improving Triggers**

The best triggers have the following characteristics:

☐ **Specific:** Clear instructions leaving no room for interpretation.
   After dinner ➜ After I finish eating dinner

☐ **Consistent:** Happens every single day with a reliable frequency.
   After getting ready for work ➜ After getting dressed

☐ **Automatic:** Effortless to notice when it occurs.
   At 9:30 AM ➜ When my 9:30 AM alarm goes off

☐ **Unavoidable:** Impossible to find a way around it.
   Walking past the gym ➜ Leaving my apartment

EXPERIMENT **Creating Triggers**

STEP 1: Think of a current habit that you want to make more consistent. What is the current trigger for this habit?

STEP 2: How can you improve this trigger to be more specific, more consistent, more automatic, or less avoidable? Spend one minute writing down ideas.

STEP 3: Could this trigger be combined with a trigger from a different category? Spend one minute writing down ideas.

Breaking Bad Habits

No Trigger = No Habit.

If you remove the triggers for a bad habit, you will eventually break the habit. Here it is best to invert your strategy, making triggers less specific, less consistent, less automatic, and more avoidable. Try reducing the frequency of the preceding event, replacing associations for that time of day, or removing your exposure to the triggering location, emotional state, or person.

EXPERIMENT **Breaking Bad Habits**

STEP 1: Think of a bad habit you would like to break. What are the current triggers?

STEP 2: How can you decrease the likelihood of these triggers occurring? Spend two minutes writing down ideas.

HABIT BEHAVIORS

When designing positive habits, save time by anticipating potential failure modes in advance. Follow these best practices to make it easier to stay consistent with your habits.

CHECKLIST **Behavior Design**

☐ **Eliminate unnecessary steps.**
Minimize the number of action steps necessary to complete your habit.
Have your running clothes already on when it is time to run.

☐ **Always auto opt-in.**
Make any decisions needed to begin a habit in advance.
Have your running distance and route chosen in advance.

☐ **Reduce activation energy.**
Make starting your habit so easy that you can't say no. Think two minutes or less.
Give yourself permission to just run around the block.

☐ **Eliminate excuses.**
Remove any source of friction which might cause you to skip your habit.
Own running clothes and shoes that you love.
Block off time for running on your calendar.

EXPERIMENT **Behavior Design**

STEP 1:

List out all of the steps necessary to complete your habit.
Can any of these steps be eliminated or made easier?

STEP 2:

How can you make your habit auto opt-in?

STEP 3:

How can you reduce the activation energy needed to start your habit?

STEP 4:

What excuses or sources of friction could cause you to skip your habit?
Write down ways to eliminate these excuses in advance.

HABIT REWARDS

When you hear reward, think reinforcement. Rewards reinforce the association between a trigger and a behavior through repetition. The more immediate the reward, the stronger the habit reinforcement.

Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Rewards

Extrinsic rewards are the easiest to install and give you the momentum necessary to stick with a habit in the formational stage. Shift your focus to reinforcing intrinsic rewards as a habit strengthens in order to make it sustainable for the long-term.

Extrinsic rewards are the external and tangible results of doing the habit.
"I get [incentives, compensation, reputation, recognition, progress]."

Types of Extrinsic Rewards	
Physiological	Have a snack, drink tea, take a short break, go for a walk
Psychological	Check into habit app, cross off a day on calendar
Social	Text accountability partner, talk to a friend, share to social media
Physical	Do a fist pump, victory dance, smile
Verbal	Praise yourself, say a phrase like "way to go!", sing a song
Audial	Play a favorite song or sound that makes you feel good

Intrinsic rewards are the intangible and internal feelings received from habit completion.
"I feel [accomplished, pleasure, enjoyment, mastery]."

To implement an intrinsic reward, simply add thirty seconds to the end of your habit to reflect on how you feel after completion.

Types of Intrinsic Rewards	
Physical Feeling	How does your body feel differently from before?
Mental Feeling	Are you more calm, focused, or inspired?
Satisfaction	How do you feel about yourself?
Pleasure	What was enjoyable today?
Subjective Experience	What felt different from the last time?

Structuring Rewards

There are many rewards which already exist in your day which can be used to reinforce a habit. Anything that you enjoy doing can be used as a reward. A few examples are eating and drinking, taking a shower or a walk, or listening to music.

This is the shortcut to habit building: strategically positioning your preexisting rewards immediately after your most fragile habits.

Accountability

Having accountability will be a powerful extrinsic motivation for sticking to your habit commitments.

In studies, goal achievement increased from 10% to 65% with a specific plan in place and a commitment to an accountability partner. That success rate went all the way up to 95% when a location-based appointment was made with that same partner.

To add accountability to your habits, try sharing your progress online, telling friends about your habit commitment, or making a bet.

Tracking

Peter Drucker said it best: "You only improve what you measure."

The secret is that you can improve any behavior simply by tracking it.

Consistent measurement creates the tight feedback loops necessary for accelerated progress. Identify which conditions correlated with habit completion and then always recreate those conditions in the future.

Habit Tracking Best Practices

Track Completions

Goal: Build momentum from creating a habit streak.

How: Mark down each day when habit is completed. You can use a habit app, a spreadsheet, a calendar, or a notebook.

Diagnose Setbacks

Goal: Limit the damage from habit lapses.

How: Begin a regular journaling or reflection practice.

PROMPT **Rewards**

10 min

With a habit in mind, let's plan out the rewards which will maintain consistency.

- What are two extrinsic rewards which you can utilize immediately after habit completion?
- What is one feeling that you will reflect upon as an intrinsic reward after your habit completion?
- What is one preexisting reward that you will restructure to be after your habit completion?
- What is one way you will hold yourself accountable to others?
- How will you be tracking completions and diagnosing setbacks?

KEYSTONE HABITS

Keystone habits are the scaffolding of your productivity practice. Installing a keystone habit starts a chain reaction, creating a cascade of positive behaviors. Each additional keystone habit increases the energy and confidence you have available for future habit building.

My personal keystone habits are planning, journaling, gratitude, exercise, meditation, and a "power hour" where I complete my most important task to start the workday.

Habits Habits

Keystone Habit

5 min

PROMPT **Identifying Keystone Habits**

- What habits will make the rest of my day go better?
- What habits will make other habits easier or more likely to happen?
- What habits will cause me to view myself in a more positive light?

CHECKLIST **Habit Best Practices**

When starting a new habit, maximize your chances by following these best practices:

- [ ] Focus on building just one new habit at a time.

- [ ] Set the initial bar for success so low you can't say no. Think two minutes or less.

- [ ] Have a specific and consistent location and time of day blocked off for your habit.

- [ ] Have a plan ready for when you are unable to complete your habit at the usual time or place.

- [ ] Commit to completing the habit every single day for an entire month.

Creating Routines

> "Chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken.
> — Warren Buffett

A routine is a container for a chain of similar habits. The completion of one habit acts as a trigger to begin the next habit in the chain. Each habit reinforces the others, creating a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

THE FOUR ROUTINES

These four routines can act as containers for all of your keystone habits.

Morning Routine

Why: Sets the tone and builds momentum to start the day

When: 60-90 minutes, right after waking

Habits: exercise, meditate, journal, gratitude

Power Up Routine

Why: Maximize time by planning and removing distractions

When: 30-60 minutes, upon arrival at desk

Habits: plan, visualize, prepare, start on top priority

Power Down Routine

Why: Review the day, allowing for a clear work/life separation

When: 30-60 minutes, end of the workday

Habits: capture open loops, reflect, track, organize

Evening Routine

Why: Sets the tone and builds momentum to start the day

When: 60-90 minutes, before bed

Habits: learn, self-care, unplug from devices, AM preparation

CREATING YOUR ROUTINE

Every hour spent designing a new routine will save a week or more installing that routine into your life. Stack the odds in your favor before you begin.

Start by solidifying your Morning Routine. After four weeks (M-F) of consistent execution, repeat this process with your Power Up Routine and so on.

EXPERIMENT **Creating Your Routine**

20 min

STEP 1:

Write out each step of your perfect routine.

Include all transitions between each step as well as anything you will need to complete them, such as a specific location, tool, or context.

STEP 2:

Estimate how long each step will take, making sure to allow for slack. Rewrite your routine with timestamps for each step.

You are ready to proceed when this routine reads like a recipe or standard operating procedure which someone else could follow on your behalf.

STEP 3:

Mentally simulate the routine, identifying any potential points of friction.

Estimate your confidence level (1-100%) on sticking with this routine for four weeks straight.

STEP 4:

Iterate on the order and timing of your routine until your confidence level reaches 90%.

See below for an example of a completed routine from the previous experiment.

Example Morning Routine	
8:00	Alarm goes off. Make bed and drink the glass of water on the nightstand. Go to the bathroom to take vitamins and shower.
8:15	Return to bedroom to get dressed. Pack bag for the day. Review the day's priorities in planner and schedule.
8:30	Go outside with yoga mat and stretch for 10 minutes. Expected length of time before a reward is received.
8:45	Go to meditation cushion with journal and write for the greater of one page or 15 minutes.
9:05	Meditate for 20 minutes in silence or using a guided app if available.
9:30	Head to the office and make sure desk is well-organized for the day. Read one chapter of non-fiction if time available.

Offline Training

It is challenging to improve your routines while you are running through them. Thus, it is important to set aside time to "train offline." Practicing offline training cuts down on your routine learning curve by creating rapid iteration cycles and muscle memory.

Practice offline training anytime you wish to optimize a current routine or start building a new one. This is not a mental simulation—walk through each step as you would normally.

EXPERIMENT   **Offline Training**

15 min

STEP 1:

Select an existing routine you would like to optimize.

I want to get out of bed and start my morning routine right away without hitting snooze.

STEP 2:

Recreate the trigger for the first step of your routine and then physically walk through the initial step for each habit in your routine.

Turn off the lights, get in bed, and set an alarm for 5 minutes away.

STEP 3:

Walk through these steps over and over until they are automatic.

When the alarm goes off, I get out of bed and then proceed through the next three steps of the morning routine repeatedly until I can complete them in my sleep.

Routine Best Practices

You are not a robot. Any routine will become tedious if you try to perform it the exact same way each day. Use these strategies to keep your routines fresh so that it is easier to stay consistent.

Life happens. Expect that your routines will fall off occasionally. That's okay. The key is when you fall down to immediately get right back up again.

> **CHECKLIST**   **Routine Best Practices**
>
> ☐ **Streamline**
> Look for ways to make your routine as simple and frictionless as possible.
> *I lay my gym clothes and journal out the night before to simplify completion of my morning routine.*
>
> ☐ **Novelty**
> Reduce the risk of burnout by giving yourself options and variety.
> *Instead of a set stretching routine, I will do any stretches I choose for 10 minutes daily.*
>
> ☐ **Don't Miss Two Days In a Row**
> When you miss a day, prioritize completion the next day to avoid creating a streak.
> *If I miss my routine, I will block off time in my calendar for it the next day.*

Minimum Viable Routines

Routines are contextual. In a new physical environment, you will often be without your usual tools, triggers, and schedule, making sticking to your usual routine more difficult.

A minimum viable routine takes less time to perform and requires no outside tools. For example, if you typically meditate for 20 minutes using an app but are without that time or phone access, you can sit silently for 5 minutes instead.

Have a minimum viable routine in place to eliminate all excuses for skipping your routines. You will maintain momentum and reinforce the identity of being someone who completes their routines every day without fail.

> **PROMPT** **Minimum Viable Routine**
>
> 10 min
>
> Consider how you could make the following adjustments to the routine you created earlier to create a minimal viable version.
>
> - What changes would you make to your routine so that it took 20% of the time, but still gave you 80% of the benefits?
> - If you only had 15 minutes for your routine, what parts would you need to skip or shorten?
> - If you were in a completely unfamiliar environment, how would you go about completing your routine?
> - If you did not have access to any of your usual tools, how would you go about completing your routine?

CHAPTER 5

Maximizing Time

> "It is not that we have so little time but that we lose so much. The life we receive is not short but we make it so; we are not ill-provided but use what we have wastefully.
>
> — Seneca

The tendency is to overweight the importance of working longer hours or improving the efficiency of those hours without ever asking the question: "am I working on the right things?" Time is what you make of it.

IDENTIFYING TOP PRIORITIES

At any given time, there can only be one top priority. Do not start until this top priority has been clearly defined.

Creating A Project Menu

To define your top priority, first create your Project Menu, a list of all the potential projects available to you. After capturing all the options of what you *could* do, you can make a much more informed choice of what you *should* do.

CHECKLIST **Creating a Project Menu**

A good project menu has three defining characteristics:

☐ **Centralized**
Capturing every project you have committed to, want to do, or might want to do frees up tremendous mental bandwidth.
Having one single place where you can regularly review your project options proves invaluable as importance and circumstances shift with time.

☐ **Project-based**
Convert all of your intended outcomes into projects.
Projects have discrete deliverables and deadlines.
A deliverable is discrete if a third-party could easily identify whether the project has been completed.

☐ **Priortized**
Projects are organized and listed in order of importance and urgency so that the highest priority projects are always at the top of the list.
Potential future projects are captured as "Someday/Maybes" at the bottom of the list.

Prioritizing Projects: Important vs. Urgent

Use the Eisenhower Matrix below to prioritize your Project Menu.

Whenever possible, do the important before the urgent. Urgent projects put out fires while important projects create opportunities or prevent future fires from even occurring.

	Urgent	**Not Urgent**
Important	**DO** *Do It Now*	**DECIDE** *Schedule A Time To Do It*
Not Important	**DELEGATE** *Who Can Do It For You?*	**DELETE** *Eliminate It*

Identifying Important Projects

☐ **Use your fear as a compass.**
A desire to take on a project that scares you is a strong indicator of importance.
Fear causes an overweighting of the risk of the unknown when the biggest risks are the risks not taken.

☐ **Prioritize opportunities with potential 10X outcomes.**
Avoid the trap of an incremental mindset, as there is far more competition at the bottom of the tree than at the top. The most important projects tend to have limited downside but limitless upside.

☐ **Maximize operational leverage.**
Your highest leverage projects are building systems and creating processes. Your lowest leverage projects are repeatable processes that could be automated or delegated. Hand off your $10/hr tasks to create time for projects with an expected value of over $1000/hr.

---

15 min

PROMPT **Identifying Important Projects**

- What potential project most scares you right now?
- What have you wanted to do for a long time that you have not yet attempted?
- How could you achieve your 1 year goals in the next 3 months?
- What result would take you or your business to the next level?
- Where are you working "in" your business rather than "on" it?
- How could you manufacture urgency to get you started on the Important/Not Urgent projects?

EXPERIMENT **Creating a Project Menu**

STEP 1: Do a sweep.

Check everywhere a potential project could be stored. Write down anything that you have agreed to do or might want to do.

Ex. goals, calendar, notes, to-do lists, files, emails, messages

STEP 2: Centralize.

Digitize your list so you can easily reference and reorganize it.

Ex. Evernote, Workflowy, Things, Todoist, Google Drive

STEP 3: Define deliverables.

Specify exactly what needs to happen in order to consider each project completed.

STEP 4: Create a Someday/Maybe list.

Move any item you do not plan to start soon to a Someday/Maybe section at the bottom.

STEP 5: Remove non-projects.

Cross off any item with no clear deliverable, one action step, or the possibility of being combined with an existing project.

STEP 6: Define deadlines.

For maximum results, when should each project be completed? Given these deadlines, when would you need to get started?

STEP 7: Prioritize your menu.

Categorize all projects into Important/Urgent, Important/Not Urgent or Not Important/Urgent.

- *Use the previous prompts to identify your most important projects.*
- *Projects are urgent if they need to begin within 30 days.*
- *Move Not Important/Not Urgent projects to the Someday/ Maybe list.*

TRACKING YOUR TIME

How you spend your time reflects your current priorities. Improving time management begins with an objective view of where your time is currently going.

Manage time like an investment portfolio. Whenever your time spent becomes out of alignment with your priorities, just rebalance your portfolio by shifting time back towards higher priorities.

EXPERIMENT **Where Is Your Time Going?**

1 Week

STEP 1: Track where your time goes for an entire week.
Break down your day into 30 minute blocks. At least three times a day, write what you were doing during each block as best as you can remember. Lunch, dinner, and before bed make good triggers.

STEP 2: Review where your time went.
Categorize all activities. Link activities to projects and/or create categories (i.e. social, entertainment, health) as necessary. Sum the time spent for each category.

STEP 3: Create hourly rates.
For each project or category, estimate how much that time was worth. Ask yourself: What was the expected value of that hour? How much would someone need to pay you to take that time away?

STEP 4: Compare actuals with your priorities.
Where does the amount of time spent surprise you?
What does the way you spend your time say about your priorities?
Where are your priorities and time spent out of alignment?
What are the high-hourly activities you are avoiding?
What are the low-hourly activities you should stop doing?

Time Tracking Example

Time	Activity	Category	Hourly Rate
10:00 AM	Interviewing EA	Hiring	$1000
11:30 AM	Groceries	Health	$20
3:30 PM	Facebook	Entertainment	$10
7:30 PM	Meeting Friend	Social	$100

THE POWER OF PLANNING

Every minute you spend planning saves ten or more. Planning creates a default path, as a plan becomes the most likely course of action. The stronger the plan, the better the chance of achieving a desired future.

CHECKLIST **Keys to Successful Planning**

☐ **Separate planning from execution.**
Decide what to do in advance of doing it. This will create a stronger default, putting you in a better position to prevent future distractions.

☐ **Create realistic time estimates.**
Plan your stopping points based upon the expected time needed to reach the next project deliverable. Anticipate contingencies in case progress is slower than expected.

☐ **Account for your constraints.**
Treat your available time as a budget to be allocated as effectively as possible. Acknowledging your inability to do everything supports prioritization of the most important things.

Day Planning

Maximize your chances of having a successful day by planning the night before. When you wake up, you should already know what to do and when to do it.

See the next page for a template you can use to plan out your day.

EXPERIMENT **Day Planning**

15 min

STEP 1: Determine constraints.
Check your calendar for pre-commitments you will have to work around.
Set aside time in your schedule for habits, meals, breaks, and exercise.
Break your remaining day into work cycles of 30 minutes each.

STEP 2: Identify opportunities.
How many work cycles does your schedule allow? How are they structured throughout the day?
Do you have any openings of 90 minutes or more for deep work?
Choose a "daily theme" to guide your day.

STEP 3: Decide daily priorities.
Review your top priorities for the week.
Given your constraints, what deliverables could you reasonably reach?
Allocate work cycles required for each top priority as available in order. Block off these work cycles on your daily schedule.

STEP 4: Strengthen your plan.
Use Murphyjitsu (ch. 8) to identify any potential points of failure.
Take any steps possible to increase your chances of success.
Iterate on your plan until you are at least 70% confident you can follow it as written.

Day Planning Template

Today's Theme: _____

Habit Tracking

☐ 1_____ ☐ 2_____ ☐ 3_____
☐ 4_____ ☐ 5_____ ☐ 6_____

Wake Time Planned:_____ Actual:_____

Sleep Hours:_____ Quality (1-10):_____

Productivity Score (1-10):_____

Avail Cycles Deep Work:_____ Total:_____

Today's Top Priorities

#1 _____
#2 _____
#3 _____

Expected Deliverables + Cycles

#1 _____ Cycles: _____
#2 _____ Cycles: _____
#3 _____ Cycles: _____

Today's Plan (scheduled work and activities)

8:00 AM _____
8:30 AM _____
9:00 AM _____
9:30 AM _____
10:00 AM _____
10:30 AM _____
11:00 AM _____
11:30 AM _____
12:00 PM _____
12:30 PM _____
1:00 PM _____
1:30 PM _____
2:00 PM _____
2:30 PM _____
3:00 PM _____
3:30 PM _____
4:00 PM _____
4:30 PM _____
5:00 PM _____
5:30 PM _____
After 6:00 PM _____

Today's Actuals (tracking where time went)

8:00 AM _____
8:30 AM _____
9:00 AM _____
9:30 AM _____
10:00 AM _____
10:30 AM _____
11:00 AM _____
11:30 AM _____
12:00 PM _____
12:30 PM _____
1:00 PM _____
1:30 PM _____
2:00 PM _____
2:30 PM _____
3:00 PM _____
3:30 PM _____
4:00 PM _____
4:30 PM _____
5:00 PM _____
5:30 PM _____
After 6:00 PM _____

Day in Review:

What went well? _____
What didn't? _____
What did I learn? _____

Weekly Planning

The weekly review is the cornerstone of any productivity practice.

A one week view allows for both high-level strategic thinking and low-level tactical action for maximizing time. Incorporate learnings from the previous week into a new plan designed to propel forward your top priorities.

EXPERIMENT **Weekly Review**

15 min

STEP 1: Review what happened last week.
Convert the answers to these questions into action items to improve your performance for next week:
What went well? What went wrong? What did I learn?

STEP 2: Update project menu.
Identify any potential or incomplete projects which might be priorities for the week ahead.
Review your goals to see if any long-term priorities are being neglected.
Capture all action items and open loops. Are any of these related to current projects?

STEP 3: Reprioritize project menu and make it actionable.
Rank your projects in order of priority. Importance comes before urgency.
Identify the next deliverable for each project and break down the action steps needed to reach it.
Estimate the number of 30 minute work cycles required for each step.

STEP 4: **Create a time budget.**

How many work cycles do you expect to complete next week? Use past performance as a guide.

Allocate your cycles available to your top priorities, working down the list in order.

STEP 5: **Schedule your week.**

Review your week's schedule and decide which day to work on each of your top priorities. Optimize to complete each action item in one sitting and batch similar action items together wherever possible.

Maximizing Attention

> "Attention is the ability we have to discriminate and to focus only on that which we want to perceive. We can perceive millions of things simultaneously, but using our attention, we can hold whatever we want to perceive in the foreground of our mind.
>
> — Don Miguel Ruiz

Improve your attention by creating the contexts which support it. Simply identify the conditions where you are best able to pay attention and then continually and deliberately recreate those conditions.

BEST PRACTICES OF ATTENTION

There are two ways to maximize attention: pay attention to fewer things and reduce how often you switch between them.

Serial > Parallel

Multitasking is a myth. What you think is multitasking is only rapidly switching back and forth between tasks. Any 50/50 attentional split is actually 40/40, with the other 20% lost due to costs of reorientation. You will always move faster by completing one task before starting on the next.

Serial

Task 1 → Task 2

Parallel

Task 1
Task 2
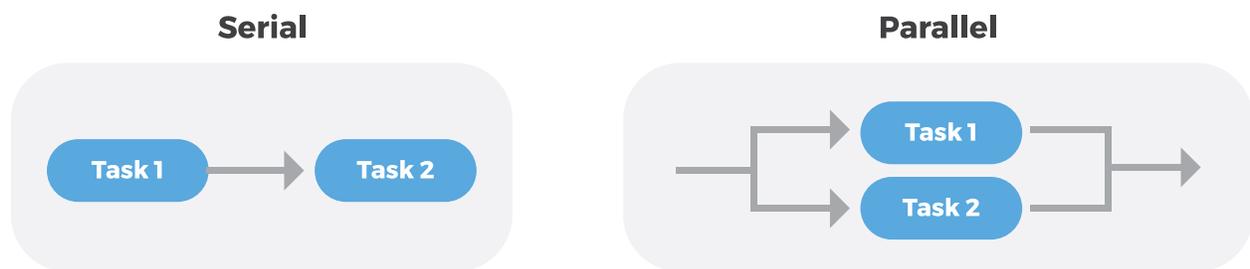
Attention = Mental RAM

Like a computer, your attention is split amongst all your current mental processes, or open loops. Each time a loop is closed, that attention can be redistributed. Thus, it is important to restrict what what is top of mind to only what is required for the task at hand.

Training Attention

The ability to sustain and deepen your attention can be improved through training. The more you practice holding a single object in mind, the easier it will become, and the longer you will be able to do so.

If you take your attention seriously, start cultivating your meditation practice. Meditation is like doing mental push-ups. Every time your attention wanders, practice gently bringing it back to your original intention.

CHECKLIST **Best Practices for Attention**

☐ **Plan Your Checkpoints**
End every work cycle with a tangible deliverable and a clear next action. This avoids the need to retrace your steps or tie up loose ends for next time.

☐ **Always Be Capturing**
The brain is an inefficient storage device. Anything to be remembered for later should be captured externally and be easily retrievable at the moment it is needed.

☐ **Timeboxing For Deep Work**
Tasks expand to the time you allocate to them. Increase your efficiency simply by setting a timer and committing to hold attention on a single task for that length of time.

PROMPT **Increasing Attention**   10 min

- When do you find yourself trying to multitask? How can you reduce that temptation?
- How could you begin or deepen your meditation practice?
- What specific deliverables do you need to complete this week?
- What are you remembering that should be captured externally instead? Where would be a better place to store that information?
- What regular activities could have their efficiency improved through timeboxing?

REDUCING SOCIAL DISTRACTIONS

Reduce how frequently others interrupt you by creating boundaries for availability and setting clear expectations for preferred channel and response times.

CHECKLIST **Reducing Social Distractions**

☐ **Deep Work Mornings**
Block off your mornings on your calendar for deep work so that others can only schedule meetings in the afternoons.

☐ **Create an Urgent Line**
Have one urgent-only channel and set response time expectations to allow batch checking of non-urgent channels (ex. email, Slack) at set times.

☐ **Do Not Disturb Signal**
Make it obvious to coworkers when you are unavailable by wearing headphones and setting yourself as away on messaging.

PROMPT **Reducing Social Distractions**

10 min

- When are meetings especially disruptive? Can you block off this time instead?
- What will your urgent channel be? How will you set expectations?
- How often and when will you check your non-urgent channels? How can you stick to this?
- How will you help make it obvious to others when you are unavailable to talk?

REDUCING PHYSICAL DISTRACTIONS

Increase your ability for focused attention by recreating the conditions which support it. Ensure your workspace is approachable and create a clear context separation between the activities which require different states of mind.

CHECKLIST **Reducing Physical Distractions**

☐ **Remove Visual Clutter**
Everything at your workspace should have associations with that are conducive to productivity. Keep your space clean and well-organized to support attention.

☐ **Maintain Separate Contexts**
Utilize different physical and digital spaces for different types of tasks. Using multiple computers, browsers, or workspaces can greatly support intentionality.

☐ **Create Distinct Transitions**
Prevent attention leakage by creating strong signals of change. Try changing music, clothes, or body position when switching from activity to the next.

PROMPT **Reducing Physical Distractions** 10 min

- What are three things you could do to make your current workspace more supportive of your goals?
- What are the three most common types of tasks which you do on a daily basis? List one way you can create a better separation or a more distinct transition for each type of task.

REDUCING DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS

When working on computers and carrying smartphones, a laundry list of distractions are always only a click away. Creating constraints which prevent access to these distractions will remove the drag on your attention.

CHECKLIST **Reducing Digital Distractions**

Block Addictive and Distracting Websites
Be intentional about your web usage and install web blockers.
Install RescueTime, Freedom, and Crackbook to track your web usage and add friction to accessing distracting websites.

Turn Off Notifications
Computers should only speak when spoken to.
Leave your phone on Do Not Disturb during work hours and turn off any notification on your phone or computer which is not absolutely necessary.

Put Away Your Phone
Having a phone in view draws on the willpower necessary to avoid checking it.
Leave your phone in another room or a drawer while working.

Checklist continues on next page

☐ **Curate Your Home Screen**

Identify time-wasting apps and add friction to accessing them.

Remove all low-value, social media, and messaging apps from your home screen by either deleting them or hiding them in folders.

☐ **Switch Phone to Grayscale**

Reinforce the perception of your phone as a tool rather than an entertainment device.

Keep your phone in B&W to reduce and upgrade usage.

PROMPT **Reducing Digital Distractions**

10 min

- Name five websites or apps which distract you from your goals.
- For each, name one constraint you could put in place to make that website or app harder to access.
- What unnecessary notifications can you turn off on your phone or computer?
- What can you do to reduce the amount of time that you spend on your phone?

CHAPTER 7

Maximizing Energy

> "And what is a man without energy? Nothing—nothing at all.
> — Mark Twain

Energy is your physical capacity for getting things done. A lack of energy will manifest as feelings of tiredness, irritability, and low motivation, as if you are swimming upstream. Maximize energy levels by systematically installing supportive, healthy habits.

ENERGY LEVERAGE POINTS

Energy Leverage Points

☐ **Increase energy baseline**
95% of your energy levels are determined by your lifestyle choices: eating well, sleeping well, and getting enough exercise.

☐ **Reduce energy leaks**
Eliminate any activities which consistently drain your energy.

☐ **Reduce activation energy**
Make anything you want to do as easy as possible to get started.

DAY STRUCTURING

You will make the most of the energy you already have available by following these techniques to start your days strong, identifying your peak energy periods, and taking effective breaks.

Start With Momentum

If you win the first hour, you win the day. Energy levels exist in a feedback loop with your current level of activity. A body at rest tends to stay at rest, while motion stimulates further motion. Start your day strong to begin an upward spiral of momentum which can carry over to the rest of your day.

CHECKLIST **Building Momentum**

☐ **Get outside in the first hour of waking up.**
Natural light is a mood boost and slows down your body's melatonin production.

☐ **Get your body moving right away.**
Motion creates emotion and exercise instantly generates energy.

☐ **Start work with a Power Hour.**
Start with one hour on your most important task of the day.

MATCH ACTIVITIES TO ENERGY

Energy levels have natural peaks and valleys throughout your day.

It is very common to have an energy peak in the late morning with a smaller, secondary peak in the early evening and an "afternoon dip" in between.

For maximum effectiveness, structure your day strategically so that your most valuable activities match up with your peak energy levels.

An Average Energy Cycle

Time	8am	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Energy																
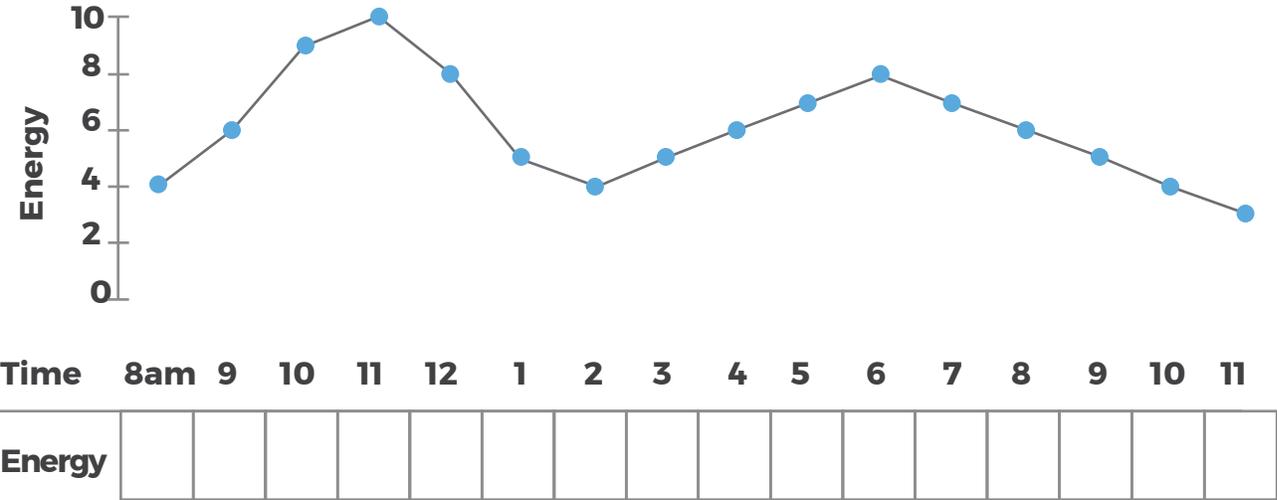
EXPERIMENT **Identifying Energy Cycles**

1 day

For one entire day, set an hourly timer. Whenever the timer goes off, note down your current energy level (1-10).
Print out this page and use the boxes above.

- Did a pattern emerge? How long after waking up did you have your energy peak? Did you have a secondary peak?
- Plot your energy levels on the chart. How does your cycle compare to the typical cycle?

TAKING BREAKS

Sustaining energy throughout the day means taking breaks. Completely disengaging from your work serves an important purpose. Breaks give your brain time to rest and integrate new information so you can recharge.

CHECKLIST **Taking Effective Breaks**

☐ **Preselect your checkpoint.**
Take a break only when you have reached a deliverable.

☐ **Disengage from work.**
Close all open loops and just let your mind wander.

☐ **Change your location.**
Step away from your desk, get outside if possible.

☐ **Unplug.**
Avoid all technology, especially messaging and social media.

PROMPT **Structuring Your Day**

10 min

- How can you start the day with more momentum?
- What activities currently require the most activation energy?
  Name one way to make it easier to get started on each.
- At what times during the day do you have the highest energy levels?
  Name three ways you could adjust your daily schedule to better match up with your energy cycle.
- How could you be taking more effective breaks?
  Name three break activities you can do to fully recharge.

SLEEP

To maintain peak performance, you will need to spend a full one-third of your life asleep. Without a way to reduce sleep, how do you optimize it?

Getting better sleep entails a series of experiments to upgrade your bedroom environment, your sleep hygiene, and your bedtime routine. Each individual change can improve sleep by 1-5%. These changes can really add up over the course of a lifetime.

`CHECKLIST` **Optimal Sleep**

☐ **Use a sleep tracker.**
Automatic tracking gives you feedback on which changes to your environment or routine affect sleep. Wearables such as the Oura Ring are most accurate.

☐ **Keep your bedroom sacred.**
Maintain a strong context by using your bedroom only for sleeping and sex. Keep your phone and computer outside of the bedroom.

☐ **Create a sleep cocoon.**
Darken your room completely using blackout curtains and wear an eye mask. Use a fan or white noise machine.

☐ **No devices before bed.**
Stay away from all devices for two hours before bedtime. If not possible, wear blue light blocking glasses.

☐ **Lower your bedroom temperature.**
The ideal temperature usually falls between 60-65°F.

Checklist continues on next page

☐ **Pay attention to supplements.**
I have success with kava, ashwagandha, or CBD to wind-down one hour before bedtime and magnesium to accelerate sleep onset.

☐ **Be careful eating or drinking before bed.**
Eating a large meal makes falling asleep more difficult. Alcohol prevents restorative deep sleep. Avoid caffeine six hours before bedtime.

☐ **Check for allergies.**
Reducing exposure to allergens such as dust, mold, pets, or pollen can greatly improve sleep.

☐ **Clear your mind of open loops.**
Being future-oriented at bedtime leads to insomnia and stressful dreams. Falling asleep is accelerated by capturing thoughts in a journal and reading fiction before bed.

☐ **Relax your body and slow down your breath.**
Starting at your toes, relax each part of your body in turn to release hidden tension. Slow your breathing pattern with 4-second inhales, 7-second holds, and 8-second exhales.

PROMPT **Optimizing Sleep**

5 min

- Name three ways you can improve your sleep environment to make it more supportive of high quality sleep.
- What current habits are getting in the way of a consistent sleep schedule? How would you like them to change?
- Name three activities you could add to a bedtime routine to help you wind down for sleep.

EXERCISE

You don't need to be a serious athlete to reap the benefits of exercise. The more you exercise, the more energy you will have.

Maintaining a healthy body leads to a healthy mind. Simply put, motion creates emotion. Regular exercise is shown to improve memory, creativity, sleep, health, sex drive, and happiness.

CHECKLIST **Exercise**

☐ **Break a sweat every day.**
This means you will hit a target of 30 minutes of daily exercise.

☐ **Stretch in the morning.**
Morning yoga transforms your entire day by eliminating energy leaks from poor posture and tight muscles.

☐ **Make the exercise a bonus.**
Approach exercise obliquely. With organized sports, martial arts, dancing, climbing, and acrobatics you get a great workout without the feeling of hard work.

☐ **Functional training beats strength.**
The purpose of weight training is to prepare your body for the demands of real life. Maximize gym time with compound exercises which require coordination between major muscle groups.

Checklist continues on next page

☐ **Incorporate a long afternoon walk.**
The best ideas do not come to you at your desk. Afternoon walks recharge your batteries and help overcome the post-lunch slump.

☐ **Choose walking or biking.**
Whenever there is a close decision, take the manual option. You will enjoy the journey more and often you will even save time.

PROMPT **Optimizing Exercise**

5 min

- What are three of your favorite forms of exercise?

    For each, what is one thing you could do now to make sure that you do them more often?

- What are three ways you could inject more movement into your day?

NUTRITION

The gut is your "second brain," containing 100 million brain cells, 70% of immune cells, its own nervous system, and the body's largest store of serotonin. Improving your nutrition will massively improve your mood, health, and general well-being.

CHECKLIST **Optimal Nutrition**

Raise the floor on your eating habits by implementing these simple rules.

☐ **Eat slowly and mindfully.**
Enjoy your food more and you will be less likely to overeat. Pay attention to how you feel afterward. If you feel bad, don't eat it again.

☐ **Make healthy food the easiest food available.**
Batch cook to have healthy meals prepared in advance. Preplan grocery shopping or delivery of food staples to remove barriers to cooking.

☐ **Plan ahead before eating out or ordering in.**
Have rules for which restaurants you can order delivery from. Predetermine what you will order from the menu before you arrive at the restaurant.

☐ **Experiment with a compressed eating window.**
Fasting burns fat, regenerates cells, reduces problematic late-night eating, and can bring additional mental clarity.

PROMPT **Optimal Nutrition** 5 min

- Name three ways you can change your environment to make it more supportive of healthy eating choices.
- What is one habit you can install or change to make it easier to reach your nutrition goals?

CAFFEINE

Caffeine can be an effective source of activation energy. One cup and you are more focused, alert, and effective. However, few people realize how habit-forming caffeine can be. Caffeine has a 6-hour half life, meaning it takes 48 hours to leave your system completely.

Consider the implications. Felt benefits from caffeine are mostly alleviating withdrawal symptoms. Like any stimulant, you must be intentional to experience net benefits.

Half-Life Of Caffeine In The Average Human Adult Over 48 Hours
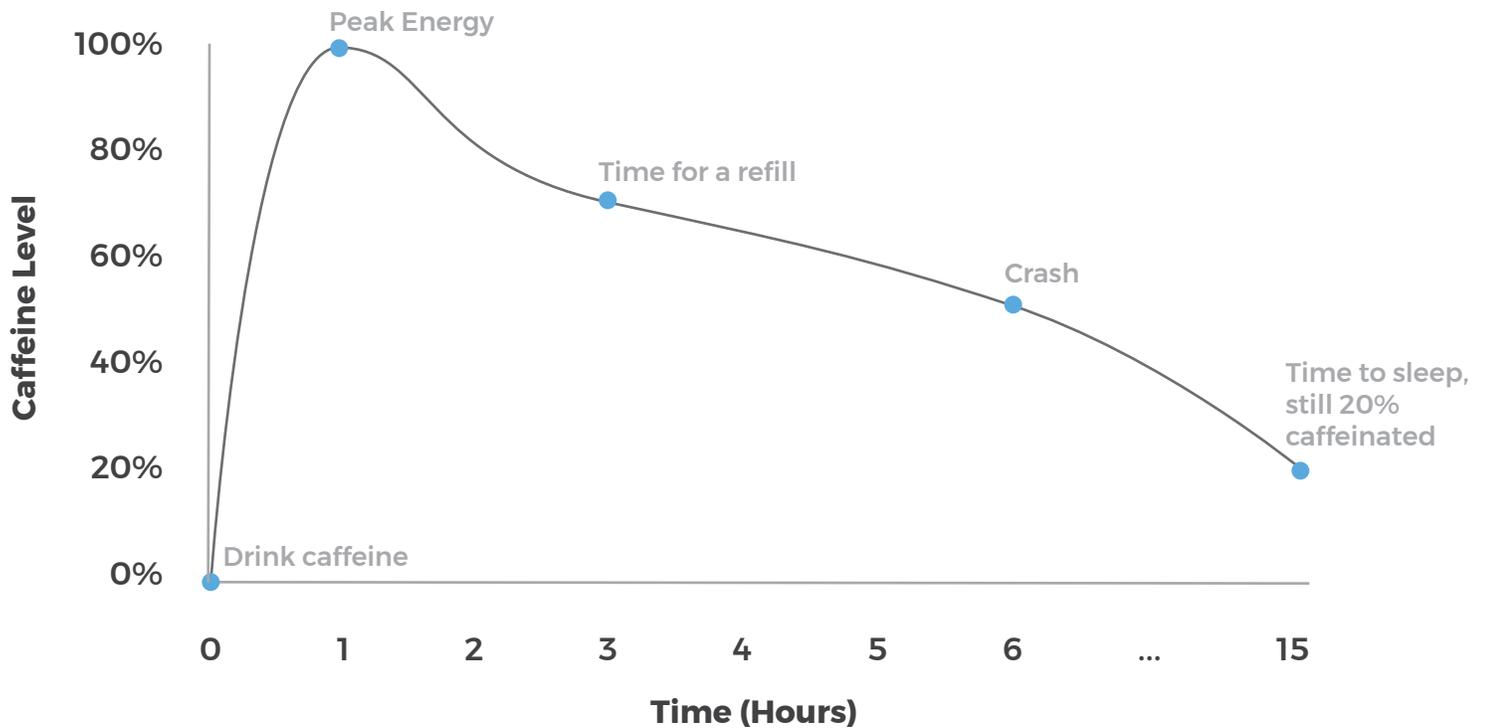
CHECKLIST **Optimizing Caffeine**

☐ **Choose effective sources.**
Coffee can mess with your stomach and energy drinks have harmful ingredients.
Green tea contains L-Theanine which counterbalances the anxiety of caffeine.

☐ **Control timing and dosage.**
Reduce the number of variables you need to account for.
I take a 100mg caffeine pill at the same time every morning, which allows for a higher level of precision than liquid consumption.

☐ **Take caffeine only as needed and with purpose.**
Have a strong intention prepared to maximize the energy boost before you crash.

☐ **Cycle off occasionally.**
Caffeine loses its effectiveness over time as tolerance builds.
Cycle off for one week when on vacation to reset your system.

PROMPT **Optimizing Caffeine**

5 min

· Is there a more effective source of caffeine you could be taking?
· If you could only take caffeine for three activities, what would they be?
· Do you have any upcoming opportunities to cycle off?

Overcoming Procrastination

> " Procrastination is attitude's natural assassin. Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an unfulfilled goal.
> — William James

Why do you procrastinate? You need to get things done but manage to find excuses and delay the inevitable until the last moment. It can be hard to work in the now when future returns are hard to see. Overcome procrastination by reconciling the valid objections of your current self doing the work with the benefits your future self will receive.

PROCRASTINATION EQUATION

The procrastination equation from Piers Steel accounts for every major finding on procrastination and draws upon our best theories of motivation.

Motivation is boosted by increasing the size of the reward or the odds of receiving it. Motivation is curbed by delaying the reward or increasing alternative options.

$$\text{Motivation} = \frac{\text{Expectancy} \times \text{Value}}{\text{Impulsiveness} \times \text{Delay}}$$

Expectancy	Perceived odds of succeeding on a task *and* receiving a reward as a result.
Value	Enjoyment of doing the task and/or the subjective value of the reward to be received.
Impulsiveness	Ability to focus in the face of distractions.
Delay	Expected length of time before a reward is received.

PROCRASTINATION ALGORITHM

Imagine you have a major project to submit to a client which is due in one week.

On past projects like this one, you found yourself avoiding the work until the last minute. Why did you procrastinate? Was it a difficult client? A vague project? Did it pay less than your usual rate?

Treat all of your reasons for procrastinating as completely valid. If you are able to determine the root cause of your procrastination, you can take immediate action to address this cause and increase your motivation.

EXPERIMENT **The Procrastination Algorithm**

15 min

STEP 1: Notice when you are procrastinating.
Having personal warning lights in place as an objective signal is very helpful here.
Ask yourself: "What am I avoiding?" Be specific.

STEP 2: Which part of the equation is the bottleneck?
Do you need to increase expectancy or value?
Do you need to decrease impulsiveness or delay?

STEP 3: Implement one of the action items from above.
What effect did this have on your feelings towards the task at hand?

STEP 4: Keep repeating Steps 1-3.
When you are motivated enough, get started on the task!

PREVENTING PROCRASTINATION

Good news: you can prevent procrastination. You just covered the first step by revealing the hidden effects of expectancy, value, impulsiveness and delay on your motivation. The next step is managing your time well and planning ahead to predict potential missteps.

Time Estimation

Accurate time estimates are key to avoiding procrastination. When a project takes longer than expected, you can get demoralized or sidetracked as deadlines get extended. When projects are completed slowly, molehills turn into mountains, delaying and creating unnecessary anxiety.

Time estimation is a skill which improves with practice. Always track your actual time to project completion. Doing a postmortem after each project to reflect on lessons learned will help you improve future estimates.

CHECKLIST **Creating Project Time Estimates**

☐ **Take the outside view.**
How long do similar projects usually take? Research and talk to others to identify base rates.

☐ **Take the inside view.**
What projects have you done which required similar skills? How long did they take compared to your original estimates?

☐ **Run a simulation.**
Any unique constraints or distractions which could cause delays? Have you fared well in similar situations in the past?

☐ **Add more slack than you think you need.**
Humans tend to be overly optimistic with time estimations. The less experience you have, the more slack you need. For a new project, multiply your initial estimate by 3.

Murphyjitsu

Murphy's Law states that anything that can go wrong, will go wrong. Murphyjitsu takes this law and transforms it to your advantage by predicting and then mitigating future cases of procrastination. The results are shockingly effective.

Check out the examples below for inspiration on mixing Murphyjitsu into your personal experiments.

Murphyjitsu: Example Interventions

Increasing Expectancy
- Brainstorm next actions to identify low hanging fruit.
- Review past successes and track progress to reinforce optimism.
- Research how others have approached this problem before.
- Ask someone who has been there before for advice.
- Boost energy with music, exercise, or a nap.

Increasing Value
- Raise the stakes with accountability or a competition.
- Do whatever you can to make the task more enjoyable.
- Review your life goals to reinforce the reasons for your action.
- Imagine success and contrast that with where you are now.

Decreasing Impulsiveness
- Create a pre-routine which reinforces discipline.
- Schedule difficult work during high energy times.
- Set a timer and commit to focus for that length of time.
- Create a deadline or a hard stop to get yourself moving.
- Move to a new location with less distractions.
- Put away your phone and block nonessential internet use.
- Keep a distraction log of things to return to later.

Decreasing Delay
- Break down a large project into bite-sized tasks with rewards.
- Plan an enjoyable break for after the next deliverable.
- Commit to showing a draft to a friend for review.

PROMPT **Murphyjitsu**

Use this prompt when planning to uncover potential causes of procrastination on a future task.

Answer each question on a scale from 1-10. If your answer is < 7, reference the examples on the previous page for inspiration.

Expectancy

From 1-10, how likely are you to succeed?

If < 7, why? What would increase your chances?

From 1-10, how likely are your efforts to be rewarded?

If < 7, why? What would increase your confidence?

Value

From 1-10, how important does this feel?

If < 7, why? What would increase the stakes?

From 1-10, how enjoyable will this be?

If < 7, what parts are not enjoyable? What could increase your enjoyment?

Impulsiveness

From 1-10, how distractible do you think you will be?

If < 7, what will tempt you? How could you increase friction?

From 1-10, how urgent does this feel?

If < 7, why? Can you shorten the deadline?

Delay

From 1-10, how soon do you expect a reward?

If < 7, why so long? Can you shorten the reward cycle?

CHAPTER 9 Mental Game

> " An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
> — Benjamin Franklin

Performance is never a straight line. You will inevitably experience periods of low performance. The silver lining is that, with a contingency plan in place, you can prevent down cycles from occurring as often and get back on track much faster when they do.

TROUBLESHOOTING

There are three ways to raise the floor for your performance:

1. **Prevention**: How can you prevent down cycles from happening?
2. **Recognition**: How can you recognize the signs that you are in a down cycle?
3. **Intervention**: How can you quickly get yourself back on track?

PREVENTION: FIREBREAKS

The most reliable technology for fighting fires hasn't changed in thousands of years—just dig a hole around the fire. When a "firebreak" is reached, there are no more trees for fuel in the fire's path and it burns out.

Procrastination   Separation   Fresh Start
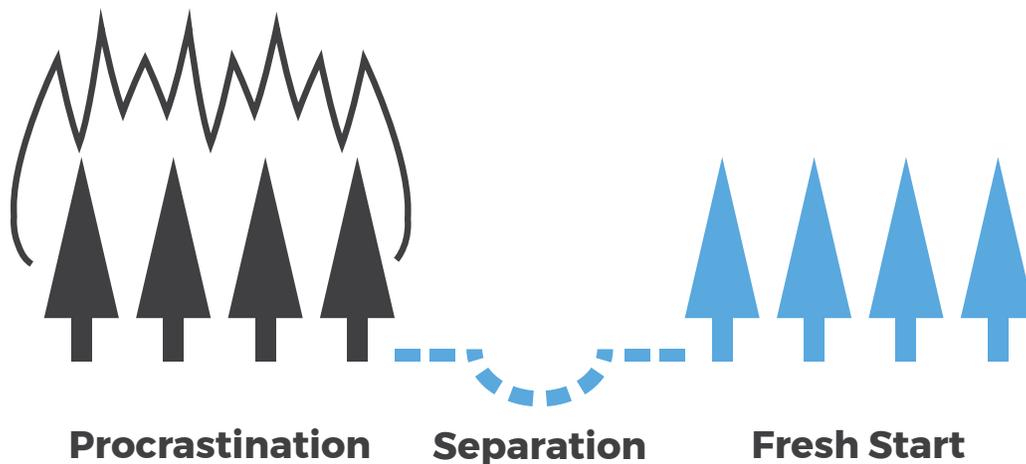
A firebreak is a preplanned checkpoint designed to get you back on track. Firebreaks allow you to put what has happened behind you so that you can start fresh with a clean slate.

CHECKLIST **Firebreak Habits**

☐ **Practice Gratitude**
Drawing attention to your wins and blessings shifts your posture from judgement to appreciation and your gaze from internal to external. Positive thoughts lead to positive actions.

☐ **Journaling**
Writing releases internal tension like opening a pressure valve. Journaling pokes false self-narratives full of holes, rewriting them in a way which inspires you towards action.

☐ **Weekly Reviews**
Weekly reviews close and seal the container around the previous week. By starting fresh and gaining clarity on next actions, you start the next week with positive momentum.

PROMPT **Firebreak Habits**

15 min

Gratitude:
- What are you grateful for?
- What are you excited about?

Journaling:
- What is going well right now?
- What isn't going so well right now?
- What have you learned recently?

Weekly Review:
- What would have made last week even better?
- What can you do to make sure that this week is great?

RECOGNITION: WARNING LIGHTS

When things are not going well, it is easy to view the world through a distorted lens. Warning lights act as a dashboard, giving you clear, obvious, and unambiguous signals on your current state of mind.

Identify your own warning lights by paying attention to the thought patterns and behaviors which correlate with your undesired states.

EXPERIMENT **Identifying Warning Lights**

15 min

STEP 1:

Think back to a time when you felt unproductive.
Review any writing (notes, journal entries, social media posts) which you have from this time period.

STEP 2:

Spend five minutes brainstorming any emotional differences you noticed.

Did you feel fear or guilt about anything?

How did you feel towards yourself?

How did you feel about the past? About the future?

Any recurring thought patterns or excuses?

STEP 3:

Spend five minutes brainstorming any behavioral differences you noticed.

Any important habits that were not being completed?

Any old undesired habits creeping back up again?

Anything you "should" have been working on, but weren't?

Anything you were doing that you normally don't do?

STEP 4:

Based on your answers, what are three personal warning lights which could indicate that you are currently in an unproductive place? If you notice one of these happening, what action will you take next?

INTERVENTION

Performance is both driven and thwarted by your feedback loops. When things are going poorly, a "negative spiral" feedback loop can be created, making a bad situation even worse.

Any negative spiral can be interrupted with a single action in the right direction. The right intervention can reorient your state of mind and generate positive momentum.

CHECKLIST **Turning Around Down Cycles**

☐ **Medical Checklist**: Are you hungry, thirsty or tired? Eat something healthy, drink water, or take a nap.

☐ **Keystone Habits**: Have you journaled, meditated, and exercised today? If not, do these habits now.

☐ **Listen to Music**: Listening to your favorite music is a guaranteed way to lift your spirits.

☐ **Go Offline**: Put away the screens and go for a long walk outside.

☐ **Brainstorm Action Items**: Spend five minutes brainstorming ways to get started on a task you have been avoiding.

☐ **Create Space for Self-Care**: Schedule your favorite self-care activity. I recommend a massage, a bath, or visiting a sauna.

☐ **Confide in a Friend**: Call a friend or family member to ask for their advice and to hold you accountable.

☐ **Altruism as Cure**: Do one generous thing for someone else with no expectation of return. It is uncanny how well this works.

Accelerating Learning

> "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.
> — Bruce Lee

You live with an infinite universe of information at your fingertips. This can be a blessing or a curse. It is possible to die happy, having learned only a small fraction of what there is to know, if you learn deliberately and intentionally.

DECIDING WHAT TO LEARN

With so many potential dimensions for improvement, how do you sift through the noise? All goals are accomplished by acquiring the knowledge and skills of a person capable of achieving that goal.

Skill selection is a matter of identifying maximum leverage. Determine which skill, if developed, would put you the closest to achieving your goals.

EXPERIMENT **Identifying Your Highest Leverage Skill**

15 min

STEP 1:

Spend two minutes brainstorming any goals which come to mind.
- What do you want to accomplish, create, do, contribute to, and understand?

STEP 2:

Identify the five goals from Step 1 which are most exciting to you. For each of these goals, specify your intended outcome so that it will be obvious when this goal has been successfully achieved.

STEP 3:

List out every skill which you would need to develop or improve to achieve each of these outcomes. Use these questions to decide where to start.
- What three skills came up the most often?
- Which of these three are you in the best position to learn right now?

BEST PRACTICES FOR ACCELERATING LEARNING

These best practices can help you unlock extraordinary learning abilities.

Keeping the skills you just identified in mind will help you accelerate progress in these areas.

Developing Mastery

Performance is maximized by mastering one concept before moving on to another. Avoid attempting to develop several skills at the same time. Be focused and selective with your learning. Serial defeats parallel.

CHECKLIST   **Developing Mastery**

☐ **Learn via outbound, not inbound.**
Determine what skills are most important and only then research what the best resources are.

☐ **Strengthen foundations first.**
Mastery of foundational concepts enables a deep understanding of advanced topics, allowing for their subsequent mastery.

☐ **Synthesize with contextual perspective.**
Build bridges between disparate areas of knowledge by gaining perspective on the historical and cultural context.

☐ **Diversify sources and forms of media.**
Maximize the quantity and variety of your mental representations to acquire a more nuanced understanding.

PROMPT **Developing Mastery**

10 min

Using one of the highest leverage skills you identified earlier, answer the following questions.

- How will you determine what the best resources are?
- What are the foundational concepts in this area?
- What are the more advanced concepts which should be avoided until later?
- What is the historical or cultural context that will help you create connections to aid your retention?
- What are the different perspectives and forms of media available to help attack this subject from multiple angles?

Optimizing Retention

Even with the best sources of knowledge, you still need the ability to retrieve that knowledge when needed. Retention requires an active experimentation mode, remixing and finding new applications for knowledge as you learn it.

CHECKLIST **Optimizing for Retention**

☐ **Learn by teaching.**
If you cannot teach it, you do not yet understand it. Sharing knowledge with others is the best way to discover the gaps in your own knowledge.

☐ **Reality-test new ideas.**
A knowledge map must correspond to the territory to be useful. Tighten feedback loops by converting new knowledge into experimental action.

Checklist continues on next page

Continued: Optimizing for Retention Checklist

☐ **Match current training to future needs.**
Training style and context should track with the future needs for that skill. Whatever is immediately useful and actionable is most likely to be retained.

☐ **Allow space for diffuse thinking.**
Solutions to a difficult problem often come when you step away. This diffuse mode of thinking allows the brain to see the bigger picture and consolidate learnings.

PROMPT **Optimizing for Retention** _10 min_

Using one of the highest leverage skills you identified earlier, answer the following questions.

- What are your opportunities to deepen your knowledge by teaching it to others?
- How can you convert your knowledge into action to tighten your feedback loop?
- What is the context in which you will need this new skill? How can your current training methods more closely match this context?
- How will you ensure that you leave space for diffuse thinking?

Improving Signal to Noise Ratio

It takes effort to sift through information. Maximize your return on this effort by selecting sources with a high signal to noise ratio. Avoid sources which are misleading, outdated, vague, or fluff.

Low-signal learning costs you in three ways:

1. **Resource opportunity cost of time, energy, and attention.**
   Mismanaged time, energy, and attention drain you.

2. **Overconfidence and poor decision-making.**
   The illusion of knowledge leads to false beliefs and bad choices.

3. **Wasted space.**
   Limited cognitive resources are wasted retaining useless knowledge.

CHECKLIST **Improving Signal to Noise Ratio**

☐ **Use the Lindy Effect as a guide.**
The expected half-life of knowledge is the length of time it has already been around. A book that has been relevant for 50 years is likely to still be relevant in 50 years.
I use a simple filter for reading: "Will this be relevant one year from now?" If not, then it's not worth reading today.

☐ **Separate content discovery and consumption.**
Increase average quality by saving content rather than consuming it immediately. Creating this space allows prioritization for better consumption choices.
Read-It-Later apps such as Instapaper are indispensable for storing interesting articles and blog posts for later review.

Checklist continues on next page

☐ **Avoid all feeds.**

Algorithms are tuned to show you what you are most likely to engage with, which limits alternate viewpoints. Prioritize human curation, especially if a recommendation has been personalized for you.

I add a new book to my reading list only when it has been recommended personally to me by a trusted friend with a history of quality.

PROMPT **Improving Signal to Noise**

10 min

Using one of the highest leverage skills you identified earlier, answer the following questions.

- What sources of knowledge on this subject have stood the test of time?
- What sources of knowledge will not be relevant to you one year from now?
- Name three ways you could create separation between your content discovery and consumption.
- Which friends should you ask for personalized learning recommendations on this subject?

Making Learning Downhill

Learning is a habit. Make your learning habit easier to complete!

Picture yourself on a bicycle which is coasting downhill. The proper mindset and preparation can make your learning feel just as effortless.

CHECKLIST **Downhill Learning**

☐ **Prioritize process over product.**
Focus on improving your process and the results take care of themselves. Thinking too much about short-term quality causes emotional self-sabotage.

☐ **Sculpt your environment.**
Curate your reality to maximize learning surface area. Present your future self with as many effortless opportunities to practice your skill as possible.

☐ **Good coaches are indispensable.**
Coaches identify the critical areas for improvement based upon a deep understanding of how expert performers excel. They provide personalized strategies to improve and feedback to accelerate progress.

Checklist continues on next page

☐ **Get external investment.**
When accountable only to yourself, you are unlikely to progress. Teaming up creates accountability, decreases activation energy, and opens up new dimensions of training.

☐ **Optimize for interestingness.**
The intersection of amazing, high-impact, and enjoyable comprises far more learning than you will ever have time for. The more you learn, the more you will hone your intuition of quality. If it's not interesting, move on.

PROMPT **Downhill Learning**

20 min

Using one of the highest leverage skills you identified earlier, answer the following questions.

- Where are you letting results get in the way of your progress?
- How could you further integrate this skill into your daily life?
- Name three ways you could change your environment to make learning downhill.
- Who would be a good person to team up with?
- Do you know a good coach who could accelerate your progress in this area? Who?
- Is there anything you are learning out of obligation? Does it make sense to stop?

DELIBERATE PRACTICE

All skills are developed through deliberate practice. Follow these four steps whenever you are training a new skill:

1. **Identify the sub-skills.**
   Convert goals into projects by breaking then down into necessary sub-skills.
   With a goal of performing stand up comedy, I watched professional comedians perform to identify the three primary sub-skills: storytelling, writing jokes, and public speaking.

2. **Find your bottlenecks.**
   Break down the sub-skills even further. Examine each to identify the bottleneck holding back your progression the most.
   I read one book on each sub-skill to identify my primary and secondary bottlenecks.

3. **Solicit feedback.**
   Create tight feedback loops by tracking progress and regularly reflecting on how the process can be improved.
   I signed up for a comedy class, practiced storytelling with friends, and hired a speaking coach to ensure that I would practice effectively and to cut down on my learning curve.

4. **Train until mastery.**
   Train in short, intense bursts, overcoming each bottleneck in turn.
   I rewrote and rehearsed jokes over and over. With each repetition, I tried to improve a single aspect of my routine until I felt I had mastered it.

Example: Learning Stand Up Comedy

Subskills	Bottlenecks	Feedback Source
Storytelling	*Key Moments* Story Capture Point of View	Practice with Friends
Writing Jokes	*Punchlines* Joke Formats Transitions	Taking A Comedy Class
Public Speaking	*Vocal Tonality* Stage Presence Filler Words	Find Speaking Coach

EXPERIMENT **Creating a Skill Learning Plan**

60 min

In this experiment, you will put everything together to create a plan which greatly accelerates your learning process.

STEP 1: Conversion

Specify the desired outcome and create a deadline where you will be tested.
Identify all necessary sub-skills in order of priority required to perform well on this date.
Determine a reasonable level to reach in each sub-skill before moving to the next one.

STEP 2: Bottlenecks

For each sub-skill, identify the top performers. Figure out what they do differently and the early training methods they used to accelerate progress.
Identify your bottleneck (weakest area) within each sub-skill to focus your training.

STEP 3: Feedback

Determine how you will track your progress and set aside space for regular reflection.
Find a coach or group of peers with whom you can practice and exchange feedback.

STEP 4: Mastery

Create a timeline for each stage of practice leading up to the deadline, deciding when you will need to transition to the next sub-skill.
Adjust this plan as necessary during your regular reflection.

What's Next?

Take a moment to reflect upon on your experience working through *Experiment Without Limits*. What has changed? What have you learned?

Contrast where you were when you started this workbook to where you are now. It is important to recognize just how far you have already come—and to acknowledge that you are only getting started.

What if you maintained this momentum? Imagine how much further you could go.

Knowing is Only Half the Battle

You have worked through the roadmap and can see the path to realizing your full potential. Having a direction is only one step in the process, though. Top performers work with subject-matter experts to cultivate and strengthen the habits and systems necessary for success.

At The Forcing Function, we work one-on-one with a select number of entrepreneurs and executives to accelerate their business growth and personal goals. Our clients make larger impacts and build lives with greater freedom and purpose. We expand upon the techniques laid out here to create a structure which support execution, tailored to each individual.

If this sounds like something you need—and are ready to work for—we should talk.

Are you ready to join the ranks of elite performers?

Get started today by taking our Performance Assessment to identify your biggest opportunities for growth.

> Take the Performance Assessment

What Clients Experience

"Chris is a machine. Working with him as a startup founder is like having a cheat code. Mastering productivity means mastering yourself. For the first time in my life, I feel like I can finish anything."

— Zack Kanter
Founder, Stedi

"The coaching is everything I could have asked for and then some. If you are looking to maximize your efficiency towards increasing your income and achieving your long-term goals, Chris is your guy."
—Garrett Adelstein
High Stakes Poker Player

"Chris is a practical expert at creating high leverage habits that engineer success. I recommend working with him if you want to cut the crap and make sure you consistently progress towards your biggest goals."
—Sam Hysell
Growth, Vayner Talent