



Lesson 6

Using Downtime Intelligently

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Many high performers are seduced by the idea that working harder will improve their productivity.

- ▶ While effort and productivity are correlated at the beginning of the week, working beyond a certain number of hours actually damages our performance.
- ▶ After 50 hours per week, the relationship between hours worked and productivity breaks down.

Over time, working around the clock leads to the onset of burnout.

- ▶ Burnout is what happens when the demands of our work consistently exceed the amount of energy we have available.
- ▶ When stress is prolonged over an extended period, there's a point at which it's no longer simple for you to bounce back.

Burnout leaks into every element of our lives.

- ▶ It first appears as a lapse in self-control.
- ▶ We become less motivated, more cynical, and find it harder to generate creative ideas.
- ▶ We also become reliant on high-intensity emotions – emotions like anxiety and excitement that get our adrenaline going.
- ▶ These emotions can feel energizing in the moment, but over time, take a lot out of us.
- ▶ High performers (like the people taking this course) are especially likely to experience burnout because they're the ones constantly pushing themselves to be the best and achieve more.

The only way to achieve high performance over the long term is to take recovery as seriously as you take your work.

- ▶ Sustainable engagement requires strategic disengagement.

Suggestions for minimizing distractions at home:

**Craft an Arrive Home routine that
helps you transition mentally from
being at work to being at home.**

- ▶ Do something that creates mental distance between you and your work.
- ▶ Get moving: Emotional tension requires physical release.
- ▶ Be specific about what you're not going to do.
 - Decide in advance what you don't want to do when you arrive home.
 - Consider deleting time-wasting apps from your phone.
- ▶ Make working harder to do by hiding your phone, scheduling Do Not Disturb to block phone calls, or by using a separate device that doesn't have email on it.

**The presence of a smartphone
alters the quality of your experience
– even if you're not using it.**

- ▶ Studies show you have shallower conversations.
- ▶ You also become more selfish and less willing to help others after using a smartphone.

When answering emails from home, batch your email checking.

- ▶ Avoid refreshing your email throughout the night.
- ▶ Each time you ‘refresh’, you undo the relaxation effect of being at home.

To prevent all-night email sessions:

- ▶ Consider teaming up with a coworker so you can take turns monitoring emails during the week.
- ▶ Avoid sending non-urgent emails in the evening so that you don’t get sucked into a back and forth exchange.
- ▶ Instead, send emails on a time-delay so that they arrive the next morning.

Not working is not the same thing as recharging.

- ▶ The absence of work does not necessarily imply the presence of restoration.
- ▶ There is a fundamental difference between not checking your email and replenishing your energy.
- ▶ To restock your mental energy, you need to fill your non-work time with activities that animate you, and help get you energized.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Guidelines for using downtime intelligently:

- ▶ Avoid doing “nothing”
- ▶ Being active is more energizing than being passive
- ▶ Growth experiences are energizing
- ▶ Spending time with friends and family is energizing

Activities that are detrimental to recovery:

- ▶ Shopping
- ▶ Surfing the web
- ▶ Binge-watching TV

Guidelines for optimizing your weekend:

Plan your weekends earlier in the week – not on Friday night

- ▶ Avoid scheduling every minute: give yourself 2-3 anchor activities around which you can structure your day

Include time for pursuing a passion

- ▶ Be specific about what you’re hoping to achieve

Be sure to involve others

- ▶ Look for opportunities to do your growth focused activities with a significant other
- ▶ Consider creating family rituals

Avoid allowing chores to take over your weekend

Designate a particular set of hours to chores and get them out of the way by batching.

Consider automating chores by outsourcing.

Activities you can hire people to do for as little as \$10/hour:

- ▶ House cleaning
- ▶ Dish washing
- ▶ Grocery shopping
- ▶ Laundry/Laundry folding
- ▶ Cooking
- ▶ Repairs around the house
- ▶ Yardwork
- ▶ Dog walking
- ▶ Store returns

Consider signing up for delivery services like:

- ▶ Blue Apron
- ▶ Plated
- ▶ Hello Fresh
- ▶ Amazon Subscribe and Save

When grocery shopping:

- ▶ Visit the store during non-peak hours
- ▶ Sort your list by aisle
- ▶ Choose the checkout line with the fewest people, not the fewest groceries

The value of vacations:

- ▶ People who take all their vacation time are 7% more likely to earn a raise or promotion than those who leave 11+ days unused.
- ▶ Foreign travel boosts creativity.
- ▶ Provides an opportunity to reflect on the direction of your career.
- ▶ Reduces the risk of experiencing a heart attack.

Optimizing your vacation

Before going:

- ▶ Plan well in advance (anticipation is the best part of the vacation)
- ▶ Frontload decision-making so that you're not stuck deciding on your itinerary when you get there
- ▶ Choose activities that allow you to be active
- ▶ Block out the day before you leave and the day when you get back, so that you're not rushed.
- ▶ Create a path to detachment by recruiting a gatekeeper and having them decide whether you need to be reached.
- ▶ Create a vacation email account and forward all your itinerary emails to that account.
- ▶ Share the account information with your gatekeeper, family, and close friends.

During the vacation:

- ▶ When it comes to creating memories, how we start and end an experience is especially important. Be sure to start and end your vacation with a special activity.
- ▶ Do something novel on your trip
- ▶ A larger variety of activities can make your trip feel longer in retrospect
- ▶ Take lots of photos, but if taking photos prevents you from doing an activity -- like playing tennis or riding a jet ski -- try saving photo taking for the end of the experience.
- ▶ If you need to work, batch and time limit your email sessions at the beginning and/or end of the day, so you can fully disconnect during the middle of the day.

After the vacation:

- ▶ Avoid working late on your first day back
- ▶ Make sure to preserve memories of your trip
- ▶ Plan more vacations
 - Anticipation is the best part
 - The duration of your trip is far less important than people assume.
 - Two 3-day weeks can provide a greater happiness boost than a single weeklong break.