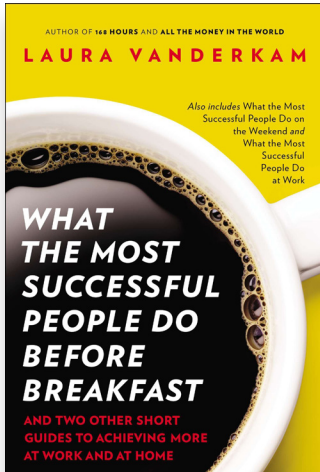


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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Laura is the author of several time management and productivity books. Her work has appeared in publication including the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Fast Company, and Fortune.

# What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast

## THE SUMMARY

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### What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast

Having spent the past few years examining how people use their time, I know that spending two or more hours each day getting ready to face what lies ahead is nothing unusual. Magazines teem with stories on how to tame morning chaos. According to the National Sleep Foundation's 2011 Sleep in America poll, the average 30 to 40-year-old claims he or she gets out of bed at 5:59 on a typical weekday morning, with 46 to 64-year-olds rousing themselves at 5:57. Yet many people don't start work until 8:00 or 9:00 am. By "start work" I mean "show up at the workplace." When people are frazzled from wrangling small children, battling traffic, or even standing in line for twenty minutes at Starbucks, it's easy to seize that first quiet stint at the office as unconsciously chosen me time. We read through personal e-mails and peruse Facebook and headlines totally unrelated to our jobs until a meeting or phone call forces us to stop.

In the end you can spend three to four hours a day on mindless tasks or barking at a petulant child to "get in the car now or we are driving off without you" instead of on your core competencies. These are your highest-value activities which include nurturing your career, nurturing your family beyond basic personal care, and nurturing yourself. By that last category, I mean activities such as exercise, a hobby, meditation, prayer, and the like. The madness of mornings is a key reason most of us

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believe we have no time. We have time, but it's consumed by sound and fury that culminates in few accomplishments beyond getting out the door.

Mornings don't have to be like this. They can be productive times. Joyous times. Times for habits that help one grow into a better person. Indeed, learning to use mornings well is, in our distracted world, what separates achievement from madness. Before the rest of the world is eating breakfast, the most successful people have already scored daily victories that are advancing them toward the lives they want.

The best morning rituals are activities that don't have to happen and certainly don't have to happen at a specific hour. These are activities that require internal motivation. The payoff isn't as immediate as the easy pleasure of watching television or answering an e-mail that doesn't require a speedy response, but there are still payoffs. The best morning rituals are activities that, when practiced regularly, result in long-term benefits.

The most successful people use their mornings for these things:

1. Nurturing their careers—strategizing and focused work
2. Nurturing their relationships—giving their families and friends their best
3. Nurturing themselves—exercise and spiritual and creative practices

From studying people's morning habits, I've learned that getting the most out of this time involves a five-step process.

## *Track Your Time.*

Part of spending your time better is knowing exactly how you're spending it now. Write down what you're doing as often as you can and in as much detail as you think will be helpful. While you may be thinking specifically about your mornings, try tracking a whole week (168 hours). The reason to do this is that the solution to morning dilemmas often lies at other times of the day. You may be too tired in the mornings because you're staying up late, but if you look at how you're spending your nights, you'll notice that you're not doing anything urgent or particularly enjoyable.

As for the mornings themselves, you can be spending them in a very organized fashion and still not be spending them in a way that aligns with your values. Track them carefully and question your assumptions. What absolutely has to happen, and what does not?

## *Picture the Perfect Morning.*

After you know how you're spending your time, ask yourself what a great morning would look like for you. For me, it would start with a run followed by a hearty family breakfast with good coffee, then, after getting people out the door, focused work on a long-term project like a book, plus writing on my personal blog.

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## *Think Through the Logistics.*

How could this vision mesh with the life you have? How long will your ritual take? Don't assume you have to add it on top of the hours you already spend getting ready or that you'll have to get in to work earlier. The good thing about filling the morning hours with important activities is that you'll crowd out things that are more time intensive than they need to be. Give yourself fifteen minutes for a shower and you'll take fifteen minutes; give yourself five and you'll be out in five, unless, of course, your ideal morning ritual is a contemplative shower. In that case stay in there as long as you can. Map out a morning schedule. What would have to happen to make this schedule work? What time would you have to get up and (most important) what time do you need to go to bed in order to get enough sleep? Can you get to bed by that time?

Come up with a plan and assemble what you need, but whatever you do, don't label this vision as impossible. It's easy to believe our own excuses, particularly if they're good ones. For instance, maybe you're telling yourself that you can't use your mornings to exercise because you're a single parent of small children or a single parent during the week. For a moment, forget financial constraints. Pretend you have all the money in the world and list as many options as you can think of, which you'll soon see involve varying costs and degrees of difficulty.

## *Build the Habit.*

This is the most important step. Turning a desire into a ritual requires a lot of initial willpower, and not just for the first few days. The first few days you have enough motivation to move mountains at 5:30 a.m., but then, around day thirteen, you're wavering, and your bed will start to seem pretty enticing. What should you do?

One answer is to start slowly. Go to bed fifteen minutes earlier and wake up fifteen minutes earlier for a few days until this new schedule seems doable. Monitor your energy. Building a new habit takes effort, so you want to take care of yourself while you're trying. Eat right and eat enough, take breaks during your workday, and surround yourself with supportive people who want to see you succeed.

Choose one new habit at a time to introduce. If you want to run, pray, and write in a journal each morning, choose one of these and put all your energy into making that activity a habit before you try something else. Chart your progress. Habits take several weeks to establish, so keep track of how you're doing for at least thirty days.

Feel free to use bribery at first. Eventually daily exercise will produce its own motivation as you start to look better and have more energy. But until then, external motivations, like promising yourself tickets to a concert or a massage, can keep you moving forward. Keep in mind that your morning rituals shouldn't be of the self-flagellation variety. Choose things you actually enjoy.

## *Tune Up as Necessary.*

Life changes and rituals can change, too. The amazing thing about mornings is they always feel like a new chance to do things right. A win scored then creates a cascade of success. Once your brain

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records a victory it's more likely to take the next step and the next step. Believing that your actions matter is how the human mind learns hope. The most successful people know that the hopeful hours before most people eat breakfast are far too precious to be blown on semi-conscious activities.

How would you like to use your mornings? As with any other important question, this one repays careful thinking spending time figuring out what is truly meaningful to you. Once you decide, small rituals can accomplish great things. "A habit," Anthony Trollope once said, "has the force of the water drop that hollows the stone. A small daily task, if it be really daily, will beat the labors of a spasmodic Hercules." When you make over your mornings, you can make over your life. That is what the most successful people know.

## What the Most Successful People Do on the Weekend

Successful people know that weekends deserve even more care than you bestow on your working days. Every week, you are granted another chance to spend your time becoming happier, more creative, and whole. How do you achieve this rejuvenation? How do you arrange your weekend hours to create a full life?

Your weekends should be different from your workdays. Ted Devine, CEO of Insureon and former CEO of Aon Re, who coaches youth hockey on his weekends, draws an analogy from that sport. "You have to go as hard as you can for a minute and a half on the ice, then get off the ice and rest your legs—and if you don't do that, you won't go out the next shift and play nearly as well," he says. I think (given that Devine is coaching hockey on his weekends, and not sitting on a bench) the best sports analogy is that of "active rest" or cross-training.

Cross-training was better for my running than sitting on the couch or more running. Likewise, other kinds of work such as exercise, a creative hobby, hands-on parenting, or volunteering will do more to preserve your zest for Monday's challenges than complete vegetation or working through the weekend.

While playing the piano, meeting friends for a soccer game, and chopping wood could be spontaneous activities, busy people have to make an appointment to go off the grid as surely as to go on it. If you have a three-year-old, for instance, and you wish to chop wood, you need to make sure someone else is dealing with the child so he doesn't decide to "help" you. That requires thinking through your plan for the day and communicating it with someone else who might watch the child, or even just sticking him in front of the TV so he doesn't stick himself anywhere near the ax. If you're meeting friends to play soccer, you all need to know where and when to meet even if it's a tradition.

Failing to think through what you wish to do on the weekend may make you succumb to the "I'm tired" excuse that keeps you locked in the house and not doing anything meaningful. So we come to the insight on weekends that I find people resist, which is that a good weekend needs a plan. Not a

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minute-by-minute plan, not a spreadsheet full of details, but just a few fun anchor events sketched in ahead of time. Indeed, some research is finding that skipping the planning stage means cutting yourself off from the major mechanism via which weekends can deliver joy.

I'm a planner, so this seems intuitive to me. Yet whenever I suggest planning weekends at least a day or two in advance, I get grumbles. First, a great many people simply dislike the idea of planning their leisure time. This stems from a misunderstanding of what I'm talking about. As one person commented on my blog, "Not everybody wants to fill in every hour every day of the year." I don't want to fill every hour, either. Life would be dreary if you kept your work schedule on weekends, too, but there is a wide gap between planning every minute and planning nothing. This is a false choice. I find that three to five anchor events, spread over the sixty hours between that Friday beer and Monday alarm clock, should give you a nice balance. Three things taking three hours apiece is nine hours of your thirty-six waking ones. That leaves a lot of time for sitting and nursing a scotch.

Second, people have a visceral reaction to the word "plan" that makes them think of things they don't want to do. I'm suggesting planning things that you want to do. Taking your car to get repaired isn't an anchor event unless you collect antique cars and have a group of friends who meet every Saturday morning to tinker with them. You seldom hear from a Phillies fan, "Man, I have to go to the game this weekend—I wish I were doing nothing instead." That is the sort of thing that's an anchor event. Humans don't do well with suffering long term. As one reader told me, "Weekends are precious and ought to be cultivated with an eye toward enjoyment." When you plan enjoyable things ahead of time, you magnify the pleasure.

Here are a few tips to remember as you're making your plan:

*Dig deep.* Just because you haven't done something in years doesn't mean you shouldn't. Maybe there are activities you haven't done since childhood that could become a regular part of your weekends.

*Use your mornings.* Weekend mornings tend to be wasted time, but they're great for personal pursuits. If you're training for a marathon, it's less disruptive for your family if you get up early to do your four-hour run than if you try to do it in the middle of the day. To get up early, you'll probably have to avoid staying up late the night before, but this is a good idea in general.

*Create traditions.* Happy families often have some special weekend activity that everyone loves but no one has to plan each time. Maybe it's pancakes on Saturday mornings or a family walk to worship services, but whatever it is, make a ritual of it. These habits are what become memories—and comforting rituals boost happiness.

*Schedule downtime.* Jess Lahey, a New Hampshire-based teacher and writer, has official weekend naptime in her house that takes place each afternoon between 1:00 and 3:00. Her kids—who are preteens, not toddlers who actually need to nap—know it's coming, and they save up screen time for

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it. They play games together, watch a movie, or read. Everyone turns their phones off, and Lahey and her husband close the door to the upstairs, read for a bit, “then dive in for what always proves to be kick-ass sleep. That deep sleep that leaves you a little disoriented when you wake up,” she says. “Once I’ve figured out where I am and what day it is, I leap out of bed recharged and head out to weed the garden or get down to the business of making dinner.”

*Make time to explore.* A run, walk, or bike ride can turn into an adventure with plenty of opportunities for that spontaneity people seem to think planning quashes. Use weekends to stretch your routine a bit.

*Plan something fun for Sunday nights.* This idea may be the most important tip in this book. Even if you love your job, it’s easy to feel a bit of trepidation on Sunday about the stress waiting for you on Monday morning. If you don’t like your job, Sunday trepidation can become a full-on case of the Sunday night blues as time slides, inexorably, into the next day. You wonder what you’re doing with your life. You wonder if any of it is worthwhile.

If you’re asking such existential questions, it may be time to shake things up. But in the meantime, or even if you just feel weary when you think of your commute, you can combat the Sunday night blues by scheduling something fun for Sunday evening. This extends the weekend and keeps you focused on the fun to come, rather than on Monday morning.

Even if you plan three to five anchor events for your weekends, you’ll still see that this leaves plenty of open time. You can relax, of course, or be spontaneous. You can play with your kids or lie in the grass, but what about those have-to-dos? What about chores, errands, and playing catch-up on busywork for your paid job? Successful people know that the best weekends feature activities you love and a minimal amount of anything else.

You still have one more thing to do to secure your weekend’s awesome status. Carve out at least a few minutes to plan the week ahead. Schedule not just what you have to do, but what you want to do. The reason to do this on Sunday is that if you wake up on Monday morning without a plan, you can easily lose the day as you figure it out. You burn up willpower deciding, rather than diving in before your focus is lost. I find that making a priority list for the coming week helps me end the weekend and start the new week with a sense of purpose. I’m not just flailing, or if I am, the flailing at least has some forward motion.

What the most successful people know about the weekends is that life cannot happen only in the future. It cannot wait for some day when we are less tired or less busy. If you work long hours, then weekends are key to feeling like you have a life that is broader than your professional identity. The marathoner knows that rest days and cross-training days spur physical breakthroughs. Likewise, the mind needs to lay different pathways, needs to stretch itself to coax a nervous child to blow bubbles in the swimming pool so it can more cleverly negotiate a business deal. As you summon the willpower to pedal up that last hill, you develop the discipline to calmly lead a classroom or comfort a

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patient in the last minutes of a long shift. By treating the weekend part of one's 168 hours as different and precious, you can recharge the batteries and hit Monday ready to go.

## What the Most Successful People Do at Work

We all face the truth that our lives are built in hours. What you will accomplish will be a function of how you spend those hours. Many of us could use help. As with money, we have a tendency to fritter away the time in front of us as if it were infinite. We find ourselves counting minutes and wishing ourselves elsewhere. These hours pass with little promise of leading to anything that matters. They are spent and the transaction is done, like paying a late fee on a cell phone bill or buying a sweater that you never wind up wearing.

As with money, people who build wealth take some chunk of what is coming in and invest it in ways that generate returns. Successful people know that hours, like capital, can be consciously allocated with the goal of creating riches in the form of a changed world over a life time of work. Indeed, successful people understand that work hours must be more carefully stewarded than capital because time is absolutely limited. You can earn more money, but the mightiest among us is granted no more than 168 hours per week, and it is physically impossible to work for all of them. If you develop certain disciplines and invest your time instead of squandering it, you can do more with the time you have.

How do you build your career so that hard work feels lovely? How can you spend your hours to make a prodigious amount of your best work possible? How can you invest your time so that your work then speaks for you, multiplying what you can do on your own? How can you experience the joy of doing what you feel matters?

These are difficult questions. They may also be depressing questions if you frequently find yourself stuck in meetings that run long past the point of diminishing returns. The good news is there are lots of ways to start tending your time more carefully. Even if you think you lack complete control of your time, and even if you feel battered by the gales of creative destruction swirling through the economy, you can look at your calendar and see the possibilities inherent in minutes rather than seeing them as sands sifting through an hourglass. The secret to astonishing productivity lies in a handful of daily disciplines that have the power to make work hours count more.

## Discipline 1: Mind Your Hours

I first came to the topic of time not because I was interested in time management but because I was fascinated by the academic study of time use. Hunting through data from the American Time Use Survey, conducted annually by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other time diary projects, I came to the inescapable conclusion that how we think we spend our time has little to do with reality. We wildly overestimate time devoted to housework. We underestimate time devoted to sleep. We write whole treatises glorifying a golden age that never was; American women, for instance, spend more time with their children now than their grandmothers did in the 1950's and '60s.

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These curious blind spots continue into the realm of work. People who get paid by the hour know how many hours they work. People who inhabit the world of exempt jobs have a much more tenuous grasp on this concept but, as a general rule, the higher the number of work hours reported, the more likely the person is to be overestimating.

That would be funny, except that numbers have consequences. If you think, you're working eighty hours per week, you'll make different choices in your attempts to optimize them than if you know you usually work fifty-five. That's why people who want to use their hours better figure out how they're spending their hours now. Writing down how you spend your time keeps you accountable for the hours that pass, whether or not you're conscious of them.

There are lots of apps that can help you keep a time log, or you can download a decidedly low-tech spreadsheet from my website. I use the even-lower-tech solution of writing down my hours in a spiral notebook. If you've never kept track of your time before, I encourage you to try logging a whole week and think of yourself as a lawyer billing time to different projects. How much time do you spend checking e-mail? Thinking? Planning? Traveling? In meetings? Doing the substance of whatever work you were hired to do?

Tally up the totals and study them. Do those totals seem reasonable? What do you over or under invest in? Perhaps the most important insight to come out of this experiment is an understanding of exactly how long activities take. You don't have to log your minutes forever, but even doing it for a few days gives you a mindfulness about time. That mindfulness can lead to more productive choices by itself.

You may be frustrated to discover that how you're spending your time isn't how you wish to be spending your time, but the stark truth is that time is a nonrenewable resource. When it's gone, it's gone. There is no point lamenting how many of your hours have been lost in the past. There is much to be gained, though, by committing to doing things differently in the 2,000—3,000 work hours you are granted as a blank slate each year.

## **Discipline 2: Plan**

Once you know how many work hours you have available to you, the next step for transforming your career is figuring out what you'd like to do with them. When I poll audiences about what they'd like to spend more time on, planning and thinking land near the top of the list. People lament that they'd love to have strategic-thinking time, but they're just too busy! This always strikes me as a bit backward. You hope whoever is building your house isn't so busy hammering and sawing that he can't look at the blueprint. Likewise, successful people who have the same 168 hours per week as the rest of us simply build planning into their lives.

I tend to do my own planning on three levels. Each December, I think of questions I'd ask in the "performance review" I hope to give myself at the end of the next calendar year. What would I like to



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accomplish in my next two thousand working hours? To be sure, the future is unknowable, and goals can be changed. Nonetheless, setting annual goals focuses my brain on actions that would help achieve those goals. With my annual goals in mind, I then make a priority list every Sunday night of what I plan to accomplish in the next week. That priority list will include both immediate assignments and steps toward my annual goals. I tightly schedule Monday and loosely schedule the rest of the week. Then on Monday night I schedule Tuesday more tightly, based on what's left on the priority list and what's come up on Monday. Tuesday night I schedule Wednesday, and so forth. I've usually gotten most things done by Friday, which can be a mop-up day or a time for more planning.

People work in different ways, so there is no one version of planning that will work for everyone. The important thing is not so much the format. It's getting in the habit of scheduling a planning period. Once you get in the rhythm of planning, and of thinking through things before you do them, you'll find it's quite addictive. You might start working at strange times just to be sure you get your planning fix.

## **Discipline 3: Make Success Possible**

Once you start scheduling regular planning sessions, you'll gather all sorts of kindling for lighting a fire under your career. You'll think of a hundred new people you want to meet. You'll think of a hundred new ideas for growing your business. As counterintuitive as it sounds, resist the temptation to put all these wonderful ideas on the to-do list for Monday. Pace yourself. Successful people tend to view their primary to do lists a bit differently than others do. They aren't just lists. They're more like contracts. Whatever is on the list will get done, often as a matter of personal pride. This is true even if your deadlines turn out to be squishy.

Since life comes up and emergencies happen, making success possible hinges on two things: being choosy about each day's priority list and developing an accountability system that works. Successful people understand that willpower is great, but it is also a virtue many of us possess in limited supply. Your boss will keep you accountable to some goals, but if you've got broader goals, or if you don't have a boss, you'll need a secondary system. Figure out what app, website, person, financial wager, or group will make failure as uncomfortable as possible, and use that to make your goals happen.

## **Discipline 4: Know What is Work**

From time to time I am contacted by companies that make time-tracking software, which is generally designed for employers who wish to discourage employees from goofing off. Often these pitches feature intriguing statistics such as "Businesses lose nearly \$1.1 billion a week in time spent on fantasy football teams." Monitor your employees' time to see how many minutes feature screens full of ESPN instead of Outlook and—boom! —productivity will go through the roof! Right?

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A more insidious problem that drains far more cash than the \$1.1 billion allegedly lost each week to fantasy football lies in the things that look like work but aren't actually work. They may, theoretically, be part of your job, but they're not work if they're not advancing you or your organization toward your goals.

Take e-mail. E-mail certainly looks like work. But if checking e-mail ten times per hour means that writing a presentation takes two hours instead of one, it's hard to say that was a better use of time than writing for thirty minutes, checking e-mail for fifteen, writing for another thirty minutes, then watching cat videos for forty-five minutes straight. If some of those e-mails didn't need to be read at all, then you would have done just as well to cruise over to your fantasy football website while you were at it.

Consider also that bane of white-collar existence, meetings, and their remote-work sibling, conference calls. I'm often astonished by the sheer volume of meetings that show up on people's time logs. Collaboration is wonderful, but it has a downside because the volume of meetings soon turns into a vicious cycle.

People do need to meet, just like they need to send and read e-mail, and in many cases, meetings are critical to good management. What successful people do is constantly calculate the opportunity cost. Challenge yourself once a year or more to study how you're spending your time and see if you can make some game-changing moves. Clear the calendar of meetings scheduled in perpetuity, so those meetings have to earn their way back into your life. Look at meetings you think you have to be in and ask, "How could I not be there? Maybe it's uncomfortable, but it presents an opportunity for someone else on my team to step up." Your team members are smart people, and they can probably handle it.

You know that calling six old clients and spending twenty minutes on the phone with each one is quite likely to result in at least one request for a proposal. A two-hour meeting is thus the equivalent of giving up a good lead on new work. Is it worth that? Or could the meeting take only an hour, giving you the other hour to reach out? Sometimes it helps to put this question in terms of cold, hard cash. A recurring meeting that involves ten people getting together for two hours per week costs the same as having another part-timer on staff. Are you getting as much value out of that two-hour meeting as another employee would add? Or are the first fifteen minutes critical, and the rest just a voluntary tax on your organization's time?

This question of opportunity cost is particularly important if you're running a small business. Entrepreneurs often have a terrible time delegating the tasks they know they're good at. The problem with having just 2,000—3,000 work hours per year is that a choice to write the first draft of that report yourself, because you have a zesty way with verbs, is a choice not to figure out which of your revenue streams is growing fastest and deserves more attention. Those who leap from microbusiness to million-dollar business tend to make this calculation.

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Of course, in your quest to make sure you don't mistake things that look like work for actual work, there's a corollary, which is that you shouldn't fail to see as "work" things that really are. Productivity involves working with your temporal body, as opposed to against it. All kinds of things that don't look like work, when viewed from the right angle, are in fact great uses of time. For most of us, that means activities like taking breaks. I'll go for a walk or a run or out to do an errand during my low-energy time in the afternoon. I know that if I stay at my computer, I'm likely to find myself drifting over to e-mail every thirty seconds rather than cranking things out. Curiously, these breaks often enable me to process ideas that haven't quite fit together during my active work time.

Some research finds that such breaks have a fairly strong financial return. In 2006, Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy studied productivity at several Wachovia bank branches in New Jersey. They put 106 employees through a four-month wellness program that involved instruction on energy management, with guidelines for eating regularly, defusing negative emotions, and getting up from their desks from time to time. Compared with a control group, the energy management group achieved a 13-percentage point greater increase in revenue from loans and a 20-percentage point greater increase in revenue from deposits on a year over-year basis. (As Schwartz and McCarthy pointed out in their 2007 Harvard Business Review write-up of the study, Wachovia used those metrics to evaluate employees.) To be sure, it's hard to know exactly what motivates a person. A wellness program may simply make someone believe that her boss cares about her as a person and that's the key motivating factor, not the program itself. That said, plenty of people who've tried scheduling regular breaks have found that the time "lost" is more than made up for with renewed focus.

## Discipline 5: Practice

Anything that involves skill can be practiced and, if you'd like to become better and more efficient at what you do, probably should be practiced. The best kind of practice is "deliberate practice" identified by Anders Ericsson, Ralf Krampe, and Clemens Tesch-Romer in their famous 1993 Psychology Review paper on the schedules of elite musicians. It ideally involves immediate feedback on one's performance and a high volume of repetition to shore up specific skills.

Consider public speaking. The best speakers are not necessarily gregarious individuals. They're simply well-practiced sorts who've honed their material to the point where they know what people will react to and they've learned to manage that reaction. Negotiating can be practiced. Cold-calling can be practiced. Meetings can be practiced, particularly those in which you might encounter hostile questioning. Anything that happens live or that you can't do over again, is ripe for practicing.

If you're not sure which skills you can practice, try polling your coworkers on which skills they think matter in your line of work. Start with the most frequently mentioned one first. What is the standard of excellence for that skill? How can you practice to get better? You may not be able to devote half your workdays to improving your skills and your team's skills, but given how massively most people

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under invest in this discipline turning practice into a daily activity will make people better at their work. That is a fundamental competitive advantage.

## Discipline 6: Pay In

It is no longer sufficient to be employed, one must remain employable. That means monitoring that excellent concept of career capital. Career capital is a convenient way to think about the sum total of one's experience, knowledge, network, and personality characteristics. When your career capital level is high, you can cash in your chips at any point for a new situation, to take your career to a new level, or even to take a break without destroying your ability to earn a living. Successful people develop the discipline of paying in to this account every day.

These deposits take many forms. If practicing is about getting better at the skills you currently have, paying in is about figuring out what skills and knowledge you will need in the future. When you come across technical concepts you are unfamiliar with or new styles of drawing, do you write them down and make time to research them? At conferences, do you attend sessions on topics you've mastered or do you stretch to take in something new? For that matter, are you going to professional development events? Can you take a class on a topic that your boss keeps mentioning? Can you find a mentor who will help you figure out what skills and concepts you should be learning for success five years, ten years, or twenty years down the road?

The deposits can also take the form of creating a visible portfolio. The good thing about writing or illustrating books is that they are then out there in the market, speaking for you and your ideas even when you're not around. That's why experts in all sorts of fields (think medicine, politics, or business) write books or articles for industry publications, though, of course, writing isn't the only way to create a portfolio. Any sort of tangible evidence of what you've done will do, and this bias toward visible outcomes is not a bad mind-set to have. Think through your projects with the goal of having a measurable or tangible result. It is one thing to have a sense that your employee engagement program at the department store you manage is making people happier. It is quite another to document that turnover is 30 percent lower than at comparable stores. Could you pin something on a bulletin board (or Pinterest) and say "I did that"? If so, that's another big deposit in your career capital account.

Finally, the best way to pay in is to build up a network of people who are loyal to you. One of the harshest parts of losing a job is realizing how many people were loyal to your organization or your position, not to you as a person. But if you develop the discipline of paying in right, this need not be the case. The key is to realize that people are a good use of time.

What have you done today to increase your exposure and broaden your scope? Anyone can reach out to someone who's immediately professionally useful. Real career capital comes from having lunch, and sharing your network, with someone who's just been fired from a job she loved. These

# What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast

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are the moments that matter. If you have a tendency to shirk this daily discipline because life is busy, it might help to keep an actual deposit list like you would for a checking account. In a notebook somewhere, or in a private file, jot down any interaction that turned from mundane to meaningful, any evidence of your abilities sent out into the universe, any bit of new experience or knowledge gained. You never know when you might need your career capital but, as with health insurance, you'll definitely be better off having it than not.

## Discipline 7: Pursue Pleasure

This is the key insight that successful people have about how they spend their working hours. It is an insight often missed in stories on great places to work that belabor the countervailing perks of free M&M's and an on-site gym. It is also missed in the curmudgeonly bloviation of those who claim, "You're not supposed to like it! That's why they call it work!" Successful people know there isn't any virtue gained by spending your 40—60 working hours each week doing something that doesn't buoy your spirits, but that spirits are buoyed by very specific things.

Productivity, we are discovering, is a function of joy. Joy comes not from free M&M's, but from making progress toward goals that matter to you. For their 2012 book, *The Progress Principle*, Teresa Amabile of the Harvard Business School and Steven Kramer, a developmental psychologist, analyzed nearly twelve thousand diary entries kept by teams at seven organizations. They found that when "inner work life" (the perceptions, emotions, and motivations people express as they go about their workdays) is good, "people are more likely to pay attention to the work itself, become deeply engaged in their team's project, and hold fast to the goal of doing a great job. When inner work life is bad, people are more likely to get distracted from their work, disengage from their team's projects, and give up on trying to achieve the goals set before them."

What creates a great inner work life? Analyzing the diaries, which included ratings of the subject's mood and motivation, Amabile and Kramer found that the best days were characterized by progress, with 76 percent of the diary entries from the top-scoring days featuring small wins, breakthroughs, forward movement on projects, and goal completion. Such progress was far more likely to be evident on the best days than what one might think of as important factors, such as encouragement from a boss. The worst days were highly likely to contain setbacks to that progress, more so than obvious toxins like an insult from a coworker. As Amabile and Kramer write, "making headway on meaningful work brightens inner work life and boosts long-term performance. Real progress triggers positive emotions like satisfaction, gladness, even joy."

Ideally, your work should naturally lend itself to this sort of progress. You make time for deep work rather than coasting in the easily interrupted shallows. You can see the accomplishment of one step after another. You feel the inherent bliss in the moment when you know that success on something difficult is possible. It is the moment when the proof makes sense, when a pupil grasps the beauty of the novel you're teaching, or when an interview that pulls a thesis together makes you want to jump up and down.

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If you haven't felt this way in a while, then maybe it's time to take a few of your work hours and think back to when you last took such pleasure in your work. Think about what you can do to re-create those conditions. There are likely ways to turn the job you have into the job you want, at least for a higher proportion of the day, particularly if you like your organization's values and people. Small tweaks add up over time. Successful people constantly look at their days to evaluate what brings them pleasure and what does not, and they figure out how they can spend more hours pursuing pleasure and fewer hours doing what they don't care about. While work hours sometimes seem lengthy, they aren't endless. The daily discipline of seeking joy makes astonishing productivity possible, because then work no longer feels like work. It feels really, really lovely.