

# **Manage Your Day to Day by 99U | Book Summary by Paul Minors**

# INTRODUCTION

## Who is this summary for?

*Manage Your Day to Day* is perfect for anyone looking for some guidance in getting back some control over their daily lives. If you find yourself questioning things like 'should you answer that email or answer your calling?' 'Do you need to respond to other people first or set your own agenda?' then this is the book for you. When it comes to creative work, every decision, every day, matters. Learn how to build a rock solid routine, find focus and sharpen your creative mind.

## About the author

Manage Your Day to Day was put together by 99U, an institution focused on telling the stories of creative individuals and leaders that are shaping industries and changing careers. With contributions from over 20 creative individuals you just know this book is full of great advice. Contributions from; Dan Ariely, Leo Babauta, Scott Belsky, Lori Deschene, Aaron Dignan, Erin Rooney Doland, Seth Godin, Todd Henry, Christian Jarrett, Scott McDowell, Mark McGuinness, Cal Newport, Steven Pressfield, Gretchen Rubin, Stefan Sagmeister, Elizabeth G. Saunders, Tony Schwartz, Tiffany Shlain, Linda Stone, and James Victore.

## In this summary

This summary will focus each of the 4 key sections of the book; building a routine, finding focus, taming tools and sharpening your creative mind. In each section, we will briefly discuss the different tips from each of the twenty contributors.

# **BUILDING ROUTINE**

## **Mark McGuinness - Laying a groundwork for your routine**

McGuinness brings us the first advice in the realm of creating effective routines. His advice is to start the day how you mean to go on, to begin with, what he calls 'great work' before you dive into anything else. This is the time to focus on work that requires deep thought and creativity. McGuinness suggests leaving work such as email and phone calls till later in the day, these require less intensive thought and focus.

McGuinness' top tips to establish an effective routine:

1. Consider your energy rhythm, if you're someone who is focused and driven first thing in the day, then use this time to do the critical work. If not the morning, figure out what timing suits you best.
2. Identify triggers that will encourage you and your brain to switch to 'work-mode' - some people listen to a certain song or start the day by clearing up their desk.
3. Use a post-it note for to-do lists, this will eliminate the possibility of overwhelming yourself with too many tasks,
4. Any time you commit to something write it down, have it somewhere visible to yourself. Consider a diary, your desktop or post-its.
5. Identify a start time and end time for your working day, work between these hours and no longer.

## **Gretchen Rubin - The power of frequency**

Rubin suggests that you establish a consistent routine throughout your day. Rubin encourages you to establish regular intervals throughout the day, every day, that you are committed to working on your project or important tasks. This consistency will help you build momentum. By working on a project every single day you ensure that everything is fresh in your mind, it helps you make progress at a good speed and helps sustain a good level of productivity.

Rubin explains that you can't simply wait to be in the right mood to work on a certain project, commit time to it, show up and get it done!

## **Seth Godin - Routine and habit**

Godin stresses the importance of creating habits within your work and routine. If you do things regularly enough they will become habitual and automatic, this takes away some of the hard work and you'll know it's time to get work done. Godin also recommends the notion of having a trigger or something similar to signify the start of your work. E.g. putting on your lab coat or always doing your emails at the same coffee shop.

Godin explains that sometimes our regular routines do not correlate well with our long-term goals. The main reason for this is fear. Fear often triggers an unusual response within us and you might fight yourself self-sabotaging. Try to align your routine with your goals, don't let fear get in your way.

## **Tony Schwartz: Renewal**

Schwartz recommends you create a routine based on working for ninety-minutes followed by a mental break. This break will allow you to refresh and renew your energy before you dive back into work. Schwartz also emphasises the importance of ensuring you get enough sleep at night.

*"Don't be afraid of taking regular 5/10 minute breaks during the day."*

Schwartz explains that when your energy is low, you'll find yourself only working on small, easy tasks, This might make you feel productive when all your really achieving is the miniature non-important tasks. You should prioritise the most important and often the most difficult tasks, especially at the beginning of your day.

## **Leo Babauta - Make Room for Solitude**

Babauta recommends you find some time to yourself every single day. Use this time to analyse your habits and thoughts, are you being unproductive? Aim to calm your mind during this time and you'll find that your creative juices will begin to flow. You'll find it easier to differentiate the important from the non-important.

Babauta suggests you get this done first thing in the day when nobody else is around to disrupt you. He also recommends you that you try and include meditation

into your regular routine as a way to better control your mind and eliminate distractions.

## FINDING FOCUS

### **Cal Newport - Creative thinking takes time**

Newport recommends you find time in your day to focus purely on creative thinking. You need to commit to the time by blocking it out on your calendar, consider this just as important as any client meeting. Take some time away from all distractions, sometimes this means moving to a new environment for this activity. Use the time to be creative, focus on a certain task and see what you can come up with.

### **Christian Jarrett - Eliminate multitasking**

We are all guilty of multitasking, trying to get more than one thing done at once, and more often than not, at least one of those tasks will suffer as a result.

*"Studies show that the only time you can effectively multitask is when you're doing automatic tasks like walking. For activities that require conscious attention, there's only task-switching."*

In order to focus on a task, you need to eliminate the distractions such as noise, your phone notifications or email. Eliminate even the possibility of distractions by ensuring that your email browser is close if it's not required.

Jarrett, like many other authors, recommends that you start your day by focusing on the hardest and most important projects. Because our willpower is at it's strongest then, it's only going to decline as it gets later in the day meaning the distractions will become more tempting.

### **Dan Ariely: Understand your compulsions**

Ariely explains that we don't necessarily do it intentionally be we can make bad decisions and fall into bad habits easily. He explains that habits such as checking and replying to emails as soon as you reach the office is something most people do, they convince themselves that they are being productive and achieving things when really it's often just mindless work. Although it may be tempting, Ariely suggests trying to ignore your email when you first arrive, get started on something more gutsy, that requires deep thought, and you can get to your email later. It's still going to be there.

Ariely explains that one of the reasons we feel that email is productive and worthy of our time is because you can visually see the results, you can see the replies and the emails being marked as read so you feel like you've achieved a lot. However, if you're spending your time problem solving, it may take hours before you come up with a solution, it may not feel like you got a lot done in a long period of time.

In order to work on these compulsions, set yourself little progress markers so you feel like you're constantly making progress. Make even the smaller achievements visible, it might be in the form of a journal where you can note down each milestone.

## **Erin Rooney Doland - How to create in a chaotic world**

We live in a highly distracted world, there are literally distractions everywhere. And things like social media can be incredibly tempting. Rooney Doland suggests you use these distractions in a positive light to get through the work. If you commit to working for a certain period of time on deep, focused work, reward yourself with a few minutes on social media, use it as a mental break.

Rooney Doland explains that you are able to actually strengthen your willpower which will help you ignore all of the distractions around you. Again, she agrees with previous authors and suggests getting your harder work done earlier in the day as your focus weakens as the day goes on.

*"Give your brain a break. Alternate challenging creative work with more "mindless" tasks to give your brain time to rest and refuel."*

## **Scott Belsky - Tune into yourself**

How familiar is the concept of walking out of a meeting, or a lecture and jumping straight onto social media or checking your messages? It's something we all do almost automatically. Belsky suggests you stop doing this in those transitional times, just because you have a spare 5 minutes between meetings doesn't mean that your time is best spent on social media. Belsky recommends you allow yourself the opportunity to be present in the moment, reflect on the meeting or lecture or chat to someone about something meaningful. Instead of defaulting to your phone, you might find there's a lot more to life.

# TAMING YOUR TOOLS

## **Aaron Dignan - Make email matter**

Dignan points out that 28% of all office-workers time is spent on their email, reading, responding and filing. Regardless of your industry, it's highly likely that your job requires a large amount of email communication, but it's clear that we are spending too much time on emails.

Dignan suggests considering what your long-term goals are, write these down somewhere visible. Whenever you receive an email, consider whether it's necessary and whether it will help you work towards your goals. Sometimes email doesn't require a response, often they are just time-wasters. Be conscious of this and don't get tied down with the nonsense.

## **Lori Deschene - Social media mindfulness**

Social media has become a habitual activity that we all engage in mindlessly. Whether it's scrolling through Facebook or half-watching a YouTube video. Deschene encourages you to be more mindful when you use your social media, identify your intention and focus on the connection between yourself and others, are the relationships authentic? If not, then why are you spending your time there.

*"Part of being mindful with social media is using it consciously vs compulsively. Ask yourself, who are you trying to engage with and add value to? Or am I logging on because I'm feeling lonely or bored? Distinguish between compulsive and conscious behaviours."*

## **Tiffany Shlain: Do we need to be connected constantly?**

Living in an advanced technological age means that we are practically connected 24/7. It's no longer the case that when you leave the office at the end of the day you leave behind the stream of emails and phone calls, you are constantly available. Shlain emphasises the importance of taking a break and unplugging regularly. As much as once a week. Turn all of your devices off and embrace the peace and quiet.



*"Don't take technology into the bedroom. Sending emails right before bed or as soon as you wake up isn't healthy. It doesn't set you up well for sleep or for your day."*

## **Linda Stone - Conscious computing**

*"Information overload - more like information over consumption. In most areas of our lives, we've learned how to filter and select. But in the digital sense, we're still very inexperienced. It's time to open up to the idea of conscious computing."*

Stone explains that there's a physiological effect to sitting in front of a screen all day. Evidence shows that people hold their breath for portions of time and engage in much shallower breathing than optimal causing a lack of oxygen. This can affect stress levels and other areas of our health. Not only can it affect our health, but it also means that you'll find focusing harder and decision-making more difficult. Stone recommends having regular intervals where you step away from the screen and engage in some deep breathing. Another great solution is stand up desks, by standing your body is freer and is encouraged to take fuller, deeper breaths.

## **James Victore - Self-respect**

Following on from Shlain's point about being constantly connected, Victore discusses how there's a common assumption that when you're at home or even on vacation, you'll still be accessible via email and phone for work. Victore explains that this is problematic and creates a blurred line between urgent work and important work. These days, everything appears urgent.

*"It's often easier to do the trivial things that are urgent vs. the important and more difficult things. This results in us spending more time on other people's goals than our own."*

Victore suggests that you take a look at your relationship with your phone and your laptop and identify when you are crossing the lines. It's important to value your own time and your personal life.

*"You have a choice in where to direct your attention. Choose wisely. The world will wait. And if it's important, they'll call back."*

## SHARPENING YOUR CREATIVE MIND

### Todd Henry - Creation for yourself

There are a lot of creative people in the world who primarily focus all of their energy on creating for their clients. Obviously, this is necessary if you want to be paid but as a creative, it's important to remember why you do what you do. Most likely, you love creating whether it be art, or design or photography. Henry encourages you to commit to a period of time each week to work on your own personal creations. This will not only allow you to have a creative outlet, totally free to do what you like but it will also provide the opportunity for you to develop your skills and work on any weaknesses. Long term this will be beneficial for your sanity and your work.

### Scott McDowell - Train your mind

If you work in a creative field your more than likely familiar with creative blocks. When you're required to be working and being creative but the creativity just isn't flowing.

*"The most successful creative minds consistently lay the ground work for ideas to germinate and evolve. They are always refine their personal approach to hijacking the brains neural pathways, developing a tool kit of tricks to spark creativity."*

McDowell suggests that when you're faced with this situation, take a step back from the project. Go for a walk outside, give yourself an opportunity for new ideas to flourish. If you are constantly focused on the task at hand there is no time for new ideas to develop.

McDowell also explains that although sometimes frustrating, limitations can be extremely beneficial for both parties. It means that you understand the project a little better and what parameters you can work within, giving you complete freedom can sometimes be too much of an overwhelm.

### Elizabeth Grace Saunders - Don't be a perfectionist

It's easy to fall into the trap of wanting everything to be perfect, and when everything doesn't go to plan you can be left feeling like a total failure. Aiming for perfection can only lead to overwhelm, stress and in some cases, you'll simply stop trying new things or pursuing new projects.

*"Ironically, perfectionism can inhibit your ability to reach your full potential."*

The only way to overcome this is to accept that there is never a perfect time for anything, the ideal moment will not simply show itself. And nothing is ever perfect, all you can do is do your best and know that you tried your hardest.

*"By taking the less-than-perfect approach you're able to do more and far better work than taking a perfectionist approach that may mean you do nothing at all."*

## **Mark McGuinness - Unstuck**

McGuinness explains that we are all human and we all face a creative block from time to time. Even the best artists, song-writers and authors will face a time where they lack the creativity and drive they are used to.

McGuinness recommends trying to identify the problem. A few common problems are:

1. Inspiration drought - the way to tackle this is to take a little break, give yourself some space and you'll probably find what you're looking for.
  - 1.1. Emotional barriers - it's time to stop worrying about what other people think of your work, just follow your heart.
  - 1.2. Mixed motivations - don't worry about the motivations, just focus on the work.
  - 1.3. Personal problems - if you're struggling in your personal life, try to see work as a little time away from your problems.
  - 1.4. Poverty - even if you don't have a lot, see what you can do with what you do have.

# CONCLUSION

## Key Takeaways

- The most common underlying message in this book was to get your hardest, most difficult work done first thing in the morning to ensure your focus and willpower are at their strongest.
- Take little breaks throughout the day, it's impossible to work non-stop so allow yourself some time to renew and refresh. Particularly with creative work. If you feel a creative block, remove yourself and see if the creative juices get flowing again.
- Commit to time to yourself, whether that be for meditations as Babauta suggests, or to focus on your own personal creative projects like Henry suggests. Set aside a block of time and do something just for you.

## Further Reading

If you're looking for some tips on how to convert these tips into habits, check out *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg. This book not only focuses on work-related habits but also personal habits, therefore it is ideal for anyone who's interested in making a change in their life whether it be professional or personal. Duhigg discusses habits of individuals and the habits of organisations and society, so whether you are an individual, a business owner or a leader of a community group this book will be useful for you. Duhigg examines exactly what a habit is before delving into how we can mould shape and change these habits.

And if you're looking on more tips on managing your days effectively, definitely check out *What the Most Successful People do Before Breakfast*. Productivity researcher Laura Vanderkam has combined her three mini e-books into one comprehensive guide. Through Laura's research and interviews, her book reveals how to plan your mornings, weekends and work time to be achieve greater productivity and happiness.

Other books from the contributing authors of *Manage Your Day to Day* are: *Seth Godin, The Dip*, *Cal Newport, Deep Work* & *Leo Babauta, The Power of Less*.

*Guidelines* is my eBook that summarises the main lessons from 33 of the best-selling self-help books in one place. It is the ultimate book summary; Available as a 80-page ebook and 115-minute audio book. Guidelines lists 31 rules (or guidelines) that you should follow to improve your productivity, become a better leader, do better in business, improve your health, succeed in life and become a happier person.

## **Action Steps**

- Download the complete book on [Amazon](#)
- I recommend you take another look through the list of tips in this book, write down three that you want to put into action and commit to them. Commit to following these 3 tips for 3 weeks, and at the end of the 3 weeks see how you're tracking. Reflect on the time you've spent doing them and whether you've improved your daily routines.