

GIVE ME A BREAK

The art of making time work for you

Hugh D. Culver

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*It's not the minutes that make a life,
but the life in the minutes.*

Contents

PART I – IT’S ABOUT TIME:

Getting honest about what defines success.....	1
You Are Exhausted.....	3
The Ultimate Currency.....	12
Where Does the Time Go?.....	22
A Model for Change.....	27
Mirror, Mirror on the Wall	33
Getting Your Boulders Rolling	46
Goals Work (for you).....	60

PART II – SYSTEMS:

Rewiring your programs to create more success	79
Systems for Success.....	81
1 Creating Your Action Plan	84
2 You Come First	95
3 Putting Meetings on a Diet	104
4 Exorcise Your Email.....	116
5 Clearing the Clutter.....	145
Before You Move On	165

PART III – HABITS:

Daily actions to ensure your success..... 169

Habits of Heroes..... 171

1 Jump-Start Your Day..... 175

2 Honor the Mundane..... 186

3 Go With The Flow 191

4 Make It The Day Before Vacation..... 200

5 Put Procrastination on Pause..... 208

6 Make Time for Me-Time 214

7 Start a Stop-Doing List..... 223

8 Celebrate Successes..... 230

PART IV – THIS IS THE TIME:

Commitmenting to owning your success 235

It Doesn't Stop Here..... 237

It Is Time 242

Resources 245

About the Author 247

Part I



IT'S ABOUT TIME

Getting honest about what
defines success

Honesty is such a lonely word.

—BILLY JOEL, musician

You Are Exhausted

Watson, you see but you do not observe.

—SHERLOCK HOLMES, detective

You are exhausted. Despite best efforts to cross tasks off your To-Do list endless interruptions, a deluge of email and drawn out meetings have a grip on your day. By midday you feel like the contortionist trying to escape from a straight jacket; your efforts look impressive, but get you nowhere. The paper is piling up, your list just got longer and it seems the hallway outside your office has become social-central.

Sound familiar? Welcome to the club.

People just like you come to my workshops every year looking for solutions for their ongoing treadmill of conflicting deadlines, unfinished projects, disappointments and frustrations.

And usually I start every session with the same three questions:

- 1) “Do you usually have more work to do in a day than you have time for?” All of the hands in the audience quickly shoot up.

- 2) “Do you frequently finish your day saying to yourself, ‘The day is over and I have no idea where it went?’” Everyone groans in affirmation.
- 3) “In the past three months have you tried any new way, however small, to reorganize your day, prioritize work differently, change your patterns or manage your time better?” Now only a few hands go up.

And there is the irony: most people know they have a time-management problem, yet few take the time to do anything about it.

If we don’t change our patterns, our same ineffective approaches to workload and distractions will keep repeating themselves. The work may change, but there is little improvement in the approach. It’s like the old joke: What is the definition of insanity? Answer: doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a new result.

Here’s a better question: What is the definition of *sanity*? Answer: doing things differently until you get the result you are looking for.

At some point you may reach the point of work overload where you think, “Enough is enough! I don’t want to work this hard anymore, and I need to do something about it.” Do you need to manage your time better? Of course, but first ask yourself this: will just crossing more items off my list satisfy me, or do I want to *experience* my time differently?

Anthony is, by all accounts, a winner. Good paying job, lots of responsibility, healthy family and he likes his work – maybe a bit too much. “I rarely turn work off, I can’t,” he admitted to me in a phone conversation. “If I don’t stay on top of everything I will pay later.” Just like millions of hard working people everywhere, Anthony’s dedication to his vocation will have a cost and eventually something will give. It’s not unreasonable to predict that either: his health will suffer, his marriage will falter or his work will be impacted.

Following the strategies I’m presenting in this book, Anthony

now practices specific disciplines to unlock himself from work *before* he arrives home. Perhaps for the first time in years, he is committing himself to his time *away* from work with the same dedication and vigor that he commits to his work-time. Instead of working to have more time, this is how you would ‘make time work for you’.

My guess is that *you* also want more sanity and more balance between work, with all of its allure and complications, and your personal life, with all of its richness. All of this is possible, but it’s not going to happen by learning a few email tricks or how to shuffle paper faster.

The approach I’ve taken in this book is based on my own experience of unfolding the layers of ineffectiveness that have plagued my working career for three decades. I have looked at the patterns, habits, systems (you’ll hear a lot about systems) and beliefs that have conspired to frustrate my efforts to create success and have the kind of life I desire.

Of course I have to provide you with some tools and better ways to plan and manage the distractions and work volume, but I hope you will agree that this book isn’t just about tips and techniques.

I want you to rethink your approach to time *itself* and from there rebuild your approach to work, leisure and life. This journey is full of potential and (unfortunately for most) is fully optional. But it is possible; I know because I’ve done it.

I am well aware that self-help authors usually make bold claims right about now about how their lives have turned around due to their newfound insights. They boast of their wonderful lifestyles, their numerous homes, snazzy cars and frequent trips to luxurious islands where they inevitably are sipping from drinks with umbrellas . . .

*Once you make
the decision, the
universe conspires
to make it happen.*

—R.W. EMERSON,
philosopher and leader
of the Transcendentalist
movement

. . . I'm not going to do that.

When I started writing this book it quickly became a cathartic experience of self-reflection. With every chapter I found myself asking, "Am *I* really doing this?" It was painful to be promoting a formula for success while in my own estimation *still falling short*. Despite this, I continued to put these ideas on paper because I realize that perfection isn't my goal.

I don't work in a factory where work processes and tasks are repeated over and over; I live in a world that is constantly changing and challenging me to respond in the best possible way. And my guess is you live in that same world.

So, dear reader, I'm not predicting perfection, more wealth or time sipping from drinks with umbrellas. But I am predicting that this book can provide something even better: growth.

If you use even one of the strategies in this book, you will grow in your ability to enjoy more success have more free time and get more of what you are looking for. That's what I *can* promise.

The solutions provided in this book are simple, and yet they work. I know this because more than 3,000 people who have attended my live training sessions have experienced successful changes immediately. And because I use them myself (okay, I know this sounds "self-help author" here) and they are still turning my life around for the better.

GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

*Being busy is a form of laziness –
lazy thinking and indiscriminate action.*

–TIM FERRISS, author, serial entrepreneur
and ultra vagabond

Rest assured, the methods are simple to implement, and you won't have to purchase an expensive time-management system or new software. What you need to do, if you are committed to creating real change, is to:

- 1) Read this book,
- 2) Do the short exercises at the end of some of the chapters,
- 3) Choose the most relevant solutions for you, and
- 4) Practice them for thirty days.

By the end of thirty days, your new habits will be formed. These habits will put you onto a path of change that will give you more time, more freedom and more success.

If you are like me you might get distracted somewhere in the third chapter with another book, or a new project of some other life distraction. Don't; I'm going to suggest that you approach this book differently. I don't want you to read this book word for word – it's not necessary (nor is it a great use of time).¹

Instead I want you to read this book more like a manual. Start with an overview (that's what this next section is about) and get an understanding of the *flow* of the book so you know what to expect.

1. Some readers I am sure are quick readers and they read every word. But if 90% of people that buy business books never finish them then I suggest there is both a reading and a motivation problem. See my side bar on how to double your reading speed.

Next I encourage you to learn to read faster (see page five). Whenever I provide an exercise, do it. These are going to greatly help you to focus on what is important *for you* and to help you to create real, lasting change. Your objective should be to find and pull out the concepts and skills that you need, not to plan for an exam.

OVERVIEW

Part I “It’s about time” – is about getting real about where time goes and how you are doing for time efficiency. (Don’t read these chapters alone – it’s scary!). Pay particular attention to “Mirror, Mirror on the wall” if you want to get to the heart of why you do what you do (you’ll thank me later).

Part II “Systems” – will give you the foundations for creating more time-success in all aspects of your work. is all about your systems: planning, interruptions, meetings, email and clutter. Be prepared: no stickie note, phone message or wasted minute will be ignored. Everything is under scrutiny (you *might* thank me later).

Part III: “Habits of Heroes” – is your toolbox for great habits (some of which you maybe have never thought of as habits). I want this to be a fun tour through options that are easy to apply, but could have impressive long-term impact.

Part IV “This is the time” – focusses on constant improvement and keeping the flame lit.

Throughout the book there are one-page worksheets. If you are anything like me, you will be tempted to skip these. Don’t. It’s important that you do some of the work of creating improvements as you read the book. I’ve kept it simple – take time for a little reflection, jot a few notes, make a few decisions. Your time commitment for each of these short exercises should be ten minutes or less.

There are also some references to more resources online. You can access all of these at www.HughCulver.com/BreakBook. Use these, and share them with friends. They are there for you.



Note: from time to time I have inserted this symbol in this book. Pay special attention to these thoughts, or tips. These are gems that could really make a big difference for creating results.

Once And For All, How To Read

I took a speed-reading course and read ‘War and Peace’ in twenty minutes. It involves Russia.

–WOODY ALLEN, actor and playwright

How do you read a book? Are you a ‘skimmer’ flying through the pages gleaning only what is valuable for you? Are you a ‘starter’ – slowly reading each word for the first five chapters and then losing interest of getting distracted with a new book? Simply based on statistics I know it’s unlikely you are a ‘finisher’ – few people are.

So I thought it would be helpful to give you some tips on how to get the most from this book. This is a simple approach and certainly there are far more complicated approaches, but if you are a slow reader you probably won’t get through those, so, here’s a short version.

The average person reads at about 200 – 250 words per minute. With a few small improvements and a bit of practice

you should be able to at least double your reading speed and still have a comprehension rate of at least 75%. Here are some quick tips for reading faster and getting better retention and value out of books:

- **Plan to read.** You will have greater speed and retention if you read in a quiet place, at a time of day when you are fully awake and when you have committed time to read.
- **Read the Table of Contents.** Take a couple of minutes and scan the list to get some idea of the flow of the book. The Table of Contents should also give you some idea of what in the book will have value for you, and what can be skimmed.
- **For each chapter read the first paragraph,** then the sub-heads and finally the last paragraph. Decide if the chapter has any value for you. If not, move on to the next one.
- **Stop re-reading.** Use a device – a piece of paper, a ruler or your finger – to move down the page, keeping your eye moving along with the device. Keep moving at a steady pace, slightly faster than comfortable.
- **Skip words.** To get sufficient comprehension you don't need to read every word as you were taught as a child. Start by reading the third or fourth word in from both ends of the line of text. This will prepare you to take snapshots of lines, rather than reading every word.
- **Create a goal.** You can quickly calculate your reading speed by averaging the number of words on a line and multiplying

that number by the number of lines on the page. From there it is easy to measure your speed for reading the page. Set a goal to double your reading speed. You will save time and probably not miss anything. See www.HughCulver.com/BreakBook for more tips on speed-reading.

Ready to try your new skills? Here we go . . .



The Ultimate Currency

Running into the sun but I'm running behind.

—JACKSON BROWNE, 'Running on empty',
songwriter, artist

Long before recorded history we have been keeping track of time. The earliest examples were crude lunar calendars that predated the reforms of Julius Caesar's more exact Gregorian calendar by some 34,000 years. We've come a long way with recording time, while its importance in our everyday thinking and life has continued to increase. We use time as a measure of our day, as a record of our history, as a tool to compete against others and as a way to find our location.

Think of time as the ultimate, universal, non-renewable currency. Virtually anywhere in the world you can live a rich life by using it well or you can squander it like a weekend gambler on a sortie to Los Vegas. High performers who enjoy wonderful lives of wealth and personal freedom have the same amount of time as the millions who are convinced that there is never enough time. Either way, once you use it, it is gone.

Whether we operate a stall in Marrakesh, teach primary school in Santiago or arrive at our Seattle office by 9 a.m., time is democratic: we all get the same amount to start with. It's no different than the first cast of the die in a game of Monopoly. In life every player gets the same amount of currency every time we wake up and pass 'GO': 24 hours; 1,440 minutes; 86,400 seconds.

What we do with time is always up to us, and that all starts with perception.

As I grew older, my perception on time changed. When I was young, time seemed to go too slowly and I was restless for it to pass. In my twenties I felt like I had all the time in the world and, for the most part, I enjoyed the luxury of designing my days as I wished. In my thirties I learned to resent how other people could demand some of my time, and in my forties I felt I had no time: work, schooling, family and relationships filled every waking hour. I was perfecting "busy." And now, past the half-century mark, I truly regret time's passing – the lost opportunities and all the should-have's that I can't recapture. Same me, just a different perception.

Are You Satisfied?

There may be no 'i' in team but there's two in 'idiot'.

There must be some reason why you have this book in your hand. Maybe you are already successful and are looking for an extra insight that will create even more success. Maybe you haven't achieved the success you want but you want to learn how to better reach your goals. Or maybe you are frustrated with the way time slips through your fingers and you want to change your habits, but don't know how.

At a recent seminar for university professors that I was leading, a woman in the audience expressed exasperation about her workload and the impact on her family. She admitted she wasn't happy with some of her time-habits.

“Every night I bring home my ‘Guilt Bag’”, she admitted. Then she explained that her Guilt Bag was her case with laptop, notes and files that need her attention. When I asked her what she does with the bag once she arrives home she answered “I lean it up against the wall and rarely touch it.” “And all night”, she continued, “it stares at me reminding me of my workload and I feel more tired, anxious

and guilty.” That’s what I call negative programming and it’s all self-induced. It’s also preventable.



I have been studying and teaching time management for more than twelve years. I have probably read every current

book on the subject, taken courses, written articles, interviewed masters and spent endless hours working on my own performance. Here is the simple truth that I have discovered: *time management is not the goal.*

In the end, nobody will care how we organize our minutes. The only thing that will be measured is the value we create in the minutes we have.

I am not about to make moral judgments, but I am about to ask questions that promote action that serves you. Here are three great questions I want you to ask yourself before you read any further:

- 1) Do you start your day excited about what you are going to work on and what you are going to accomplish?
- 2) Do you usually finish your day smiling with the feeling that comes from a day well spent?
- 3) Do you feel like, for the most part, you are in control of how you spend your time?

If you are reading this book with the ambition of becoming more time effective, you will definitely get great skills and techniques for “saving” time and getting more done in a day.²

But while becoming more effective at work is a laudable goal, it’s not entirely why I wrote this book. I am interested in *how* you use your time, not how much you can pack into your time. *Give me a Break* is not about better time management and taking a physical break; it is about how to best take a mental break from work and the anxiety that comes from it in order to develop new patterns of making time work for you.

Perhaps this is the best question to consider as you dive into this book and discover ways to be reclaim more time in your day: What will you do with your new-found time?

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

—ANONYMOUS

Hyrum Smith, author of *The 10 Successful Laws of Time and Life Management* and modern pioneer of the day planner concept, discovered that most people believe in two self-limiting beliefs:

- 1) that someday we will have more time, and
- 2) that somehow we can save time.

Does this ring true for you? I certainly know that I lived with these same delusions for thirty years as I took my sloppy time-management habits with me, from business to business, from committee to committee, and into my personal life.

2. In our post-seminar surveys, we find that 95% of participants are saving at least one hour a day. This is time they can redirect to more important results in work and life.

I was constantly dreaming up new projects and starting them before finishing the old ones. I could easily justify procrastination as a by-product of my ambitious nature, and multi-tasking was my badge of productivity. As I tried to accomplish three things at once I did none of them well and mostly ignored everyone around me.

Although I was rarely late for business meetings, I had a poor track record for picking up my daughters from school or piano lessons (twice I was actually on time, but at the wrong location). It seemed that I never had enough time and my appointments, meetings and phone calls plagued my schedule and filled my To-Do lists.

My work and personal life was so out of balance that seven-day workweeks and sleeping at the office was not uncommon, nor were last-minute business trips to South America or cancelled dates with friends. I was frustrated. I knew I needed to change my patterns, but I didn't have a clue how to be successful and actually go home at a reasonable hour.

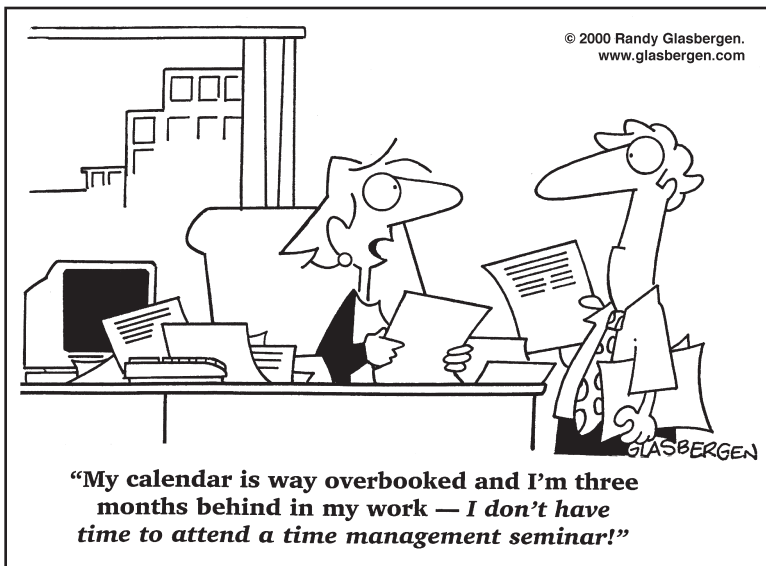
My ultimate excuse was that someday I would have more time for the pleasures of life. Just as Smith predicted, I believed that working faster than everyone else would save me time, but that mysterious bank of saved time never seemed to appear. I was oblivious to the evidence staring me in the face – that as I changed jobs, locations and careers, the pattern simply travelled with me. Each time I had a new set of circumstances to blame (never me of course!) it was always the exciting new project, the challenging new opportunity or the wealth that I was going to enjoy.

Luckily, my condition wasn't permanent. Using the concepts and tools in this book, I eventually managed to create more success in my work, more balance with my family, and more satisfaction in my life.

So, how are you doing? Do you know where your time is being

used well and where it isn't? Do you know which systems in your office are serving you and which are not? Do you really know the areas that you need to work on?

The first step in any development program or self-enlightenment program is always about awareness. You need to get very clear about the strengths that you want to keep and grow, and the areas of opportunity that are passing you by.



For years I was delusional about my situation. I was convinced that I was working as hard as humanly possible.

Maybe I was, but I was a long way from working smart. It wasn't until I got clear about the cost my weaknesses were exacting on my business success, relationships and health that I became serious about making change happen.

Self-assessment is the place to begin your path to 'Taking a Break.' The short quiz that follows mirrors the curriculum in this

book and asks you to rate how well you are utilizing certain essential systems and habits.

I want you to take the quiz now and, again, in thirty days.

In my seminars I call the first thirty days after the learning experience the “thirty-day challenge.” This is the time it takes to create a new habit. It is also the time when you will either apply some of what you learned and benefit from it, or lose it.

The challenge is to see how much value you can get from those first thirty days.

Also, we need to repeat a new habit *with intent*. In other words you have to really want the new habit to stick. Obviously you won’t stick with a change in your diet, like from dairy to a diet of tofu and soy milk if either one of these makes you nauseous. Similarly, adopting any strategies from this book won’t stick if you don’t have the intent to make them stick (or if they make you nauseous).

Take the quiz now. It should only take about three minutes to complete.

If you are like me, you might be tempted to jump ahead to the next section. Don’t do it. This quiz is an important starting point – it will help align the curriculum in this book with your specific needs. Go ahead and take the quiz now!

Time Management Self-Assessment Quiz

Rate yourself against the following statements based on a typical day by circling one of the numbers (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always)

PRIORITIES

I start my day by reviewing what I will accomplish that day (high priority).

1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

I avoid distractions and focus on what is most important, most of the time.

My goal is to accomplish priority tasks first, every day.

I plan my activities and priorities for the next day before leaving work.

GOALS

I have goals for the month or week.

I routinely set goals for all major projects or committee work.

My goals are visible and I constantly review them (at least weekly).

I constantly use my weekly goals to keep me on track and effective.

1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

SYSTEMS

I have a time-management system that I use and keep updated.

My workspace is free of files, paper, stickie notes, etc.

I manage my email and other message volume well.

I try to match my work to my energy (e.g. hardest work in the morning).

1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

HABITS

I am able to remove distractions and focus on the single task at hand.

When I find myself wasting time, I get back on track.

I manage my energy well and take regular health breaks every day.

When I leave work, I leave it behind.

1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT

I learn from others to improve my systems and habits.

I frequently review my habits and improve old habits that waste time.

In the last month, I have made an improvement to my time management.

I make time for education, relationships and self-improvement.

1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5

OVERALL SCORE (total each column and then get the sum of those 5 totals.)

--	--	--	--	--

To get a free copy of this quiz online, go to www.HughCulver.com/BreakBook

As you review your scores for each of the five sections, here are some questions to consider:

HIGH SCORES (you rated yourself between 85 and 100): Look at the high scores you gave yourself. Why did you rate yourself high in those areas? What is the process or habit that supports that score? Often you can perform at a high level in some aspect of time management and not be aware that what you are doing is unique. Record at least one process or habit you are doing well that resulted in your high score.

.....
.....

MID RANGE SCORES (you rated yourself between 70 and 85): Look for areas that you excel and have good performance. How can you reinforce these and support them always happening? Look at areas that you rated a '1', '2' or '3' – what is that habit that underlies this performance? Record at least one process or habit you are doing well that resulted in a low score.

.....
.....

LOW SCORES (you rated yourself below 70): What are you doing that is inhibiting your performance? Think about your office setup, your habits, your approach to creating and keeping goals. By becoming more aware of your patterns, you will be able to create the change you need. List three of the most obvious areas in need of improvement (here are some examples):

- I know I procrastinate about the hardest goals.
- I don't start my day with a plan and by mid-morning I feel out of control.

- I have all the papers on my desk in neat piles, but they constantly distract me. I know I need to do something about it, but I don't want to forget anything.
- People drop by my desk all day. I don't want to be rude, but it makes it difficult to focus and get any work done.

I need to change/improve

.....

I need to change/improve

.....

I need to change/improve

.....

Keep these areas of development in mind. The more focused you are on what you want to change, the more likely you are to find the solution in this book.