
Newport, Cal – Deep Work: Rules For Focused Success in a Distracted World

Grand Central Publishing, 2016, [Surrounding Knowledge] Grade ★★★★★

Buying and reading this book is an excessive exercise in confirmation bias on my part. This is very much what I believe and if I would only rate the book with regards to its importance it has five-star qualities.

The hypothesis of Carl Newport, an assistant professor in computer science at Georgetown University, is that we live in a knowledge economy where on the one hand it is vital to be flexible and able to move into new areas of competence to stay relevant, while on the other hand we spend so much time processing shallow information that we are beginning to lack the grit to do the work to accomplish this. Fewer develop or retain the ability to do deep work, i.e. *“professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.”* Since the ability to do deep work is both increasingly valuable and increasingly scarce it is a critical competitive advantage for those who possess it. And it's an advantage of growing utility.

With the ability to do deep work comes the ability to master new hard things and the ability to produce at an elite level in a winner takes all network economy. To top it off, those who experience “flow”, master new hard things and turn out to be happier!

High-Quality Work Produced = (Time Spent) * (Intensity of Focus)

An increasing amount of time is devoted to processing e-mails, chat groups, social media and the like and many cannot stand even seconds of media-free boredom that would give them a chance to reflect. Even when we are working with something in-between all our meetings we cannot resist the temptation to check out the e-mails or some website, destroying our already

poor concentration in the open landscape workplace.

The digitalization is eating away our ability to concentrate and contemplate. We lack the ability to postpone any reward as we, when returning home from work, binge watch TV-series like bulimics in a candy store. At work and at home we constantly take the actions that offer the least resistance. The end result is an impaired ability to dedicate the type of prolonged focus needed to learn new valuable deep knowledge and an inability to distinguish the important from the irrelevant. Internet is turning our brains into mush while our culture with few exceptions celebrates every new addictive technology from the US West coast multinationals as a step towards the Promised Land.

After the opening chapters, two thirds of the book outline tools that will aid the reader in his quest of doing deep work. Newport covers areas like design of the work environment, planning ones work and workday, establishing routines and rituals to help our willpower to stay on the right path, focusing our time used on what is important rather than on what's urgent, restricting the use of Internet, e-mail and other shallow work to certain hours, quitting social media, learning to say no to requests and the importance of idle downtime to give the brain rest. I especially like the #2 rule: embrace boredom. It's so much more important than most realize.

This is an easy to read book from a likable writer. My only reservation is not concerning the content, it's that nothing is very original or new. The interested reader will have read the same thoughts from the original researchers like Anders Ericsson. However, if you haven't you are in for a treat. Those who internalize the advice in this book will truly prosper.

Mats Larsson, April 7, 2016