

LESS, BUT MORE

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*Dedicated to all those who don't
have the time.*

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Introduction

I wrote this entire book on my phone when I had a few minutes during my day.

That's right—just my Nexus 5 and the Google Docs App.

Please don't think I'm asking you to replicate my behaviour. That's not the point. It's a demonstration that you can take advantage of any small amount of time to accomplish big tasks.

Time is a precious commodity that cannot be earned and we spend so much of it wishing we can do something else. Worse, when we're not living up to our potential, we can feel guilty about what we've been doing with it.

My hope is this short book can shift your thoughts to what can be done with the time available to you.

If Only...

We can get this idea in our head that if we just had more time... less commitments... some kind of getaway... we could achieve our aspirations. The conditions we currently face aren't ideal, but if we just had that little extra — things would be different.

Sound about right?

That's your ego talking.

If you can't make use of the time you have right now, it won't happen when time does open up. How many times have you suddenly had a free morning/afternoon/evening/day and did nothing with it?

Learn to use what you have right now and you'll be able to take full advantage of longer stretches of time when they become available. You may think you need an inordinate amount of time each day to get something done, but the truth is you can accomplish your life's goals in only fifteen minutes a day.

What Can You Do in 15 Minutes?

Great question, huh?

There's always someone asking a similar one on Quora:

- What can I learn in 30 minutes that will change my life?
- What can I do in 1 minute that will change how I see the world?
- What simple habit can I do every day that will have the biggest impact on my life?

I can't pretend to have a definitive answer because I haven't lived out my entire life. What I can tell you is my story is no different than many others who feel they've wasted so much of their time.

I would look for shortcuts, realize they don't work for the long term (or at all) and go back to wasting more time. Repeat process and look back on the last ten years, getting upset with myself.

If we can alter the way we approach change, the effects can be massive. I used to think I was always busy... then I got married... and started having kids. Then I realized I had only been making excuses.

Back on point — what can be done in 15 minutes?

- The script for the movie, “Pitch Perfect” was written in 15 minute intervals while the writer was on his daily commute.
- Jamie Oliver has a series (and cookbook) on complete, healthy and delicious meals that can be made in 15 minutes or less
- Joan Bolker has written a book on how to write a doctoral dissertation in 15 minutes a day
- According to the European Journal of Applied Physiology, 15 minutes of resistance training a day is just as effective at boosting metabolism as 35 minutes
- Read a book a month

15 minutes a day = 91 hours and 15 minutes a year.

We can all find fifteen minutes in a day. Maybe the question should be:

What can you do with 91 hours?

Why and Where Can I Get 15 Minutes?

Your day is already packed, so where is this magical fifteen minutes going to come from? Also, why fifteen?

Fifteen minutes is the least intimidating amount of time while still being able to accomplish something substantial. If it still feels like a giant block of time, we'll tackle that issue later.

With your day already jam packed, where is this time going to come from? Allow me to introduce you to the single most important answer to that question:

No.

Start learning to say no to something in your day that is taking up time. Say no to checking your social media feeds endlessly in the morning.

Say no to having coffee, or a drink, or dinner, with somebody you didn't really want to see in the first place.

Say no to optional commitments at work that you feel obligated to, but won't actually do anything for you in the long run.

Say no and say it often.

What to Focus On

There's a lot that can be done in fifteen minutes if you're willing to commit. With so many options available, and the many things you want to do with your life, where do you start?

I'm going to elicit the help of the Medicine Wheel from the Indigenous peoples to help us out on this one. There are many variations on this teaching of what each quadrant represents, but balance is the common key. According to the Medicine Wheel, each person is made of four different quadrants:

Physical, Emotional, Mental and Spiritual

The idea is to balance yourself within the centre of this circle in order to have a fulfilled life. Depending on how you already spend most of your day, you should aim to start with the opposite quadrant.

If you spend most of your day sitting and working on cognitive (or even mind numbing) tasks, focus on the physical.

On your feet most of the day? Activate your mind.

Spend all your day being sucked into other people's drama? Do something spiritual.

Already feel spiritually strong? Get in touch with your inner self... or the emotions of another.

Or you can focus on a project that's been on the back burner of your mind and haven't gotten around to it yet.

Just pick something.

Avoiding Procrastinating

You picked your task and a fifteen minute window is available to you, but the time goes by without you doing a thing. You beat yourself up and tell yourself that next time will be different. Sound about right?

The longer you spend thinking about doing something and actually taking action on it, the less likely you are to do it. You need to be able to shut down the part of your mind that resists taking action.

The first step is to identify when the procrastination dialog in your brain turns on. Here are some cues:

“I just need to...”

“Right after I...”

“I wonder if...”

“Do I really...”

Next is to stop the statement in its tracks and just start. Some people use timers, others set up reward systems and some will swing the opposite way and use punishment systems.

Please, don't stall by researching the “best” way to get to work. That in itself is a procrastination roadblock, which I'll cover soon.

15 Minutes Is A Lot

If trying to schedule fifteen minutes on your day just isn't going to happen, start with the smallest slice of time, or task, that you can. Consistently do that every day, pushing yourself to go just a bit further every time and see what happens. It won't seem like much in the beginning, but the results compound over time.

The initial takeoff isn't going to be your ideal, but it'll be a lot more than nothing.

For instance, if writing for fifteen minutes seems impossible — just write a single sentence. You can even do it on your phone instead of sending a text message. The next day, write a few sentences. The next day, a few more.

My plan to get exercising was to start by doing a single push-up, a sit-up and a squat. The next day, I did two of each... then three... then four... etc. It was easy because the resistance to such a small amount was next to nothing. Was it going to put me in supreme shape over the course of a month?

Heck no.

Did it build a habit of exercising every day, one that I look forward to and now do without excuses?

Yes!

The Japanese have a term for this approach called kaizen. It's remarkably effective, but completely under-appreciated in North America.

Why?

We love the big, bold, flash in the pan, overnight results. The slow, steady and long road always wins... but those are never the stories we hear or praise.

Which Tool Should I Use?

This is a major procrastination point that's cost me tons of time in my own life. Constantly on the search for the "best" tool, or "best" method, I would spend hours researching.

It's a dead end.

For every "best" tool or method, someone else will suggest something conflicting. We live in an era where information is overwhelming and you can get caught in the trap of trying to sort it out for yourself. The truth is this — the best method or tool is the one you use to get started.

There's no point in buying a \$1000 knife set for your kitchen if you don't know how to chop an onion. As a writer, I've fallen victim to this trap.

I've tried Word, Google Docs, Scrivener, OmmWriter, FocusWriter, Q10, Dragon Dictation, Google Typing, Windows Speech Recognition, Blue Cherry MX Keyboards, Brown Cherry MX Keyboards, Pomodoro Timers, Spreadsheets to track writing, Snowflake Method Outlining, Pyramid Outlining, Pantsing, Team Writing, Writing Competitions and Habit Trackers.

You know what I wasn't doing?

Writing.

Once I got in the habit of writing every day, I was able to sort out what tool would work best for me. I also realize what works best for me isn't going to necessarily work for others.

In your case, it's only fifteen minutes (or less) we're working with right now. Don't get hung up on this point.

The Most Dangerous Word that Will Always

Derail You

Tomorrow.

Never Miss Two Days

Life can take us by the reigns and we can find ourselves at the end of some of those days missing out on everything we normally wanted to happen. Even with our best intentions and efforts, these days are going to happen.

We shouldn't feel guilty for a day.

Two days is when you hit the danger zone. It's difficult, but still easy, to recover from one missed day. However, once you miss two days, your mind starts reinforcing the excuses you created to miss the second day. You can almost be guaranteed you'll miss the third day and then drop off completely.

Even if you can only do the smallest amount to keep your efforts going, do not miss two days in a row.

****If you get extremely sick, or there is a death, that takes precedent over anything else.****

5 Minutes or Less

If you want the biggest payoff to your day, here are a few activities you can do in five minutes or less.

Meditation — five minutes of formal meditation can calm the mind, build your focus and lower levels of anxiety.

The key with meditation is to not think of it as an activity, but a choice you make all day long. The practice (however long you can make it) is a primer for everything else you do and not the end in itself.

Gratitude Journal — We have over 30,000 thoughts a day and the majority of them are negative. Negativity sticks instantly, where something positive takes longer to root itself.

Spend a few minutes everyday writing down ten things you are grateful for in life. Think big, think small and think of ten. Doing this everyday will put your head in a much better place to deal with all of life's challenges.

Do Nothing — don't check your phone, read a book, write anything down, or do anything. Teach yourself how to be bored and you'll spark your creativity in incredible ways.

The Ideal Time and Environment

The ideal time in your head will never happen. Being in your ideal environment before starting is also not likely.

Conditions are never going to be perfect when you start.

When you look at others who are much further ahead than you, it's important to understand they created those ideal conditions over time. They also created it based on their circumstances and what works for them. To try and emulate it right off the bat will lead you to two issues:

1. It probably won't work for you.
2. You will be waiting forever for those conditions to be met.

Do the best you can with what you have and over time, those conditions will change in your favor.

Staying Inspired

You have all you need to get started and get going, but what happens after the initial spark is gone?

I wish there was a silver bullet to offer, but it doesn't exist. If you want to stay inspired, you must force yourself to keep going everyday.

It helps if you've started small, which is why the fifteen minutes I suggested is ideal. It's not an inordinate amount of time and a lot can be accomplished if you keep at it. Make sure to keep track of how much you've accomplished after every fifteen minute session, then look at what you've done at the end of the week... then the end of the month...

This can be a huge motivator.

You'll be amazed at how much you've done in such a short amount of time, using only the limited time you've promised to give yourself.

Staying Focused

We live in an age where focus is the most precious resource. Me asking you to stay focused for fifteen minutes may seem like the hardest thing to achieve when there are a million distractions at your beck and call.

Focus is a matter of not allowing yourself to be interrupted. Building that ability is a matter of practice, which must be done every day. Once the focus muscle gets stronger, you'll be impressed at how much you can shut off the rest of the world while you get to work.

Here's a few things you can do to provide yourself the optimal conditions to help build that focus muscle:

- Try to get your fifteen minutes done in the morning before the storm of the day takes over
- Don't check your phone first thing in the morning
- Don't check your email first thing in the morning
- Don't check your phone second thing in the morning
- Wake up fifteen minutes earlier
- Go to bed fifteen minutes earlier the night before
- Don't sleep beside your phone

- Don't sleep with your phone in the room
- Seriously — don't check your phone first or second thing in the morning

I know I'm harping on the phone a lot as a destroyer of focus, because it's not the only agent responsible for killing it, but eliminating it as a distraction does wonders for your focus.

If you can't get your fifteen minutes done in the morning, then keep the following rule in mind:

The more time that passes after a thought, the less likely you are to take action. The time between a thought and an action should be less than five seconds, otherwise, it's probably not going to happen.

If You Want This to Stick

If you really want this habit to stick in your life, you cannot be motivated by external factors. You need to ask yourself the question,

“What am I doing this for?”

If the answer is to impress others, show-off, earn money, fame, etc...

You might get there, but you won't be happy about it. After all, what's next?

More money to make?

More people to impress?

Disdain for the people who are now following your every move?

The motivation needs to be intrinsic.

Brandon Sanderson, a best-selling epic fantasy author, asked himself at the beginning of his journey if he would be happy getting to the end of his life with 100 unpublished books, but with books he loved to write. When he realized his answer was yes, it didn't take long before he made it big.

Mindfulness is a Real Thing

A major part of staying focused is to engage in the practice of mindfulness. I know it's a buzzword that's being thrown around everywhere right now, but its roots run deep within our ancient history.

It's a practice that is found across cultures and religious practices. It teaches us to be in the present moment, overriding the part of our mind that wants to hijack your attention to something else.

You can plan for your future, but when it's time for action, be in the present. The fifteen minutes you've set aside for whatever you're doing should have your full attention. Of course, this is going to take some practice as we love dwelling in the future... or the past.

The wonderful thing about mindfulness is it can be practiced every moment of every day. All it takes is a moment to realize you're not present and then bring yourself to it. Every time you do that, you build the focus muscle even further.

It also has an added bonus of lowering anxiety levels.

Challenge Yourself

Once you get a rhythm going, start to challenge yourself a little more each day. You can challenge yourself to push a little more, spend a few more minutes, or say no to one more thing.

Don't push yourself too hard at first. Think of it as a marathon that will last the rest of your life. Give it too much now and you'll drop out before you even get a chance to see what you're capable of in the end.

Challenging yourself also has the added bonus of giving your brain some novelty in your daily routine. It'll go a long way to preventing yourself from getting bored with what you do, even when it becomes a habit.

Don't think your best years are behind you either. Dame Barbara Cartland broke a Guinness World record for publishing 24 books in a single year... at the age of 77. She died having published 723 books in her life and having another 119 written, but unpublished.

You Don't Need More Inspiration

You already know what you need to do.

Looking for inspiration somewhere else isn't going to help you if you don't take action. I touched upon this in, "Keep the Fire Burning," but it's worth repeating because I've fallen victim to it many times as well.

The next book isn't going to magically change things.

The next article isn't going to magically change things.

The next instructional video isn't going to change things either.

Neither is the next online course.

None of those will do a thing if you're not already committed to taking action. After you get the ball rolling, then you can look into what others are doing for ideas. I even included an appendix with all the books, videos and courses that inspired this piece of work. Until then, you need to take action.

Just fifteen minutes.

Make it happen.

Summary

1. 15 minutes is 91 hours a year.
2. Say no more often.
3. Focus on something opposite to what your day consists of, or a major project you want to complete.
4. Procrastination is waiting too long between a thought and an action.
5. If 15 minutes is too much, do the absolute smallest amount and build on it.
6. Don't get hung up on the "best" tools, just use something.
7. Never say tomorrow.
8. Never miss two days in a row.
9. Meditate, be grateful or do nothing if you only have a few minutes.
10. The ideal time and environment doesn't exist now. Work towards it.
11. Keep track of what you've accomplished.
12. Stop checking your phone every 5 seconds.
13. Make sure your motivation is internal.
14. Mindfulness practice works.
15. Challenge yourself a bit more every day.

Make it happen.

Reference Guide

The ideas presented in this book are a cumulation of personal experience and the amalgamation of several books, articles, courses and videos. Since this is the synergy of *many* resources I've read/viewed over the years, there are no specific page numbers or references. However, should you wish, here is the list of specific sources that were ruminating in my head as I wrote.

Books

Deep Work - Cal Newport

Essentialism - Greg McKeown

The War of Art - Steven Pressfield

Udemy Course

Productivity Hacks for Writers - Jessica Brody

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