



The 5 Choices: The Path to Extraordinary Productivity

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The time management experts at FranklinCovey share their five critical techniques for avoiding distractions and paying focused attention to our most important goals and tasks in our daily lives: This book “fits a real need in these turbulent, but opportunity-rich, times” (Steve Forbes).

Every day brings us a crushing wave of demands: a barrage of texts, emails, interruptions, meetings, phone calls, tweets, blogs—not to mention the high pressure demands of our jobs—which can be overwhelming and exhausting. The sheer number of distractions can threaten our ability to think clearly, make good decisions, and accomplish what matters most, leaving us worn out and unfulfilled.

Now FranklinCovey offers powerful insights drawn from the latest neuroscience and decades of experience and research in the time-management field to help you master your attention and energy management through five fundamental choices that will increase your ability to achieve what matters most to you. *The 5 Choices* is time management redefined: it increases the productivity of individuals, teams, and organizations, and empowers you to make more selective, high-impact choices about where to invest your valuable time, attention, and energy.

The 5 Choices—from Act on the Important, Don’t React to the Urgent, to Rule Your Technology, Don’t Let It Rule You—will not only increase your productivity, it will also provide a renewed sense of engagement and accomplishment. You will quickly find yourself moving beyond thinking, “I was so busy today, what did I actually accomplish?” to feeling confident, energized, and extraordinarily productive.

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Cara says

I've already heard most of this stuff before, but there were still a few really good tidbits in here. This is the book that said that, if you're writing down things that you've already done just so you can check them off, you're trying to give yourself dopamine hits. (p. 39)

The basic premise is that most people spend at least 40% of their time doing stuff that doesn't matter. If you can reclaim even a little bit of that time, you can be amazingly more productive. Ideally, if you minimize the time you spend doing stupid stuff and/or rushing around like a chicken with its head cut off, you can transform your life to one of meaningful, satisfying work; quality time with your loved ones; rest and renewal; and harmony among all of the parts of your life. I'm certainly in favor of that.

The 5 choices are:

1. Act on the important. Don't react to the urgent.

Some things are important (Q2), some are urgent (Q3), some are both (Q1), and some are neither (Q4). Minimize or eliminate the things that aren't important. Invest time in things that are important but not urgent, so you can minimize how much you have to deal with urgency.

This is pretty obvious in a way, but I think most people still struggle with it. Personally, I often run into the problem of having too much that's important and urgent to be able to do the things that will prepare me for the future and prevent later crises. Definitely want to work on that.

2. Go for extraordinary. Don't settle for ordinary.

This sounds a little mushy, but the idea here is to realize you have tons of roles in life, identify the ones that are most important to you, and think about what you really want to achieve in each of these roles. Then think about how you'd go about doing that. You can write it as a statement in this form:

As _____ I will _____ by _____.

Ex. One of Jaivon's roles is husband. He renames this role "Kalisha's best friend" because that's meaningful to him. His statement is:

As Kalisha's best friend, I will create an enduring relationship of trust, safety, and mutual discovery by actively sharing her goals and dreams, spending quality time together, and earning her complete confidence in all my activities and interactions with others.

3. Schedule the big rocks. Don't sort gravel.

The idea here is to block off time for the most important things you do, and put it in your appointment calendar so nothing can get scheduled over it. Ex. Rick's appointments with himself to program. Otherwise, you'll spend all of your time reacting to emails and other little junk and never get to the important stuff.

The authors recommend having a master task list and keeping ALL to-do items on it. For any task that comes to you, it goes on the master list, or it goes in the trash. (Hint: if it's urgent but not important, it goes in the

trash.)

Planning: each week, review your roles and goals. That will keep you in touch with why you do everything you do. Then schedule the most important things for the week. Then organize the other stuff. Each day, look back over how the day went, what you finished, and what you didn't. Reschedule any unfinished important stuff. Also, capture any important insights or bits of info. Then figure out your must-dos for the next day, schedule them, and organize any other tasks you may have.

4. Rule your technology. Don't let it rule you.

Anything that comes in is either: trash, an appointment, a task, a contact, or information. If something is trash, discard it. If it's an appointment, schedule it on your calendar. If it's a task, do it, delegate it, or add it to your master task list. If it's a contact, record it in your contacts. If it's information, file it.

The authors suggest having one system for each of the four useful things. For example, have ONE calendar for all of your appointments in all areas of your life. That way, you can't double-book yourself. Have ONE place you keep all of your contacts. If it's electronic, make sure all of your devices can access and edit. If it's paper, just have one copy that you always have with you.

For email, set up filters so you don't even have to see most of the trash. For everything else, deal with it immediately. Ex. If it's an appointment, schedule it and archive the message. If it's a task, put it on your master list or delegate it. If it's a document, file it.

As you're doing this, set up links so you don't have to go looking for the stuff later when you need it. For example, if there's a document related to a meeting, set up a link to it in the calendar entry for that meeting.

5. Fuel your fire. Don't burn out.

The five drivers of energy are: move (not just exercise but also moving around throughout the day), eat, sleep, relax, connect with others. We know we need these things. If we see them as Q2 (important but not urgent) investments, maybe we'll actually do them.

p. 184

"The shift in thinking over the past several years in the athletic field is that, rather than focusing on the problem of overtraining, a more helpful approach may be to focus on the problem of under-recovery." Aha!

Emma Sea says

I recommend this book if you have never heard the story about the rocks, the sand, and the cup of coffee, and you are unfamiliar with the four quadrant approach to task management. Otherwise, there is nothing new here. I found this surprising, as it's a 2014 book.

Kiona Meade says

I really, really liked this book. Great tips on how to improve productivity. They are covered elsewhere in the

world, yes, but I think this book was pretty simple and straightforward--it didn't complicate things.

Jenna Van Volkenburgh says

This book did a great job of explaining time management, balancing your time to get the most out of it. It redefined extraordinary productivity, which redefines what our time is worth. I felt that it was harder to apply to personal or student time management, but then again it was classified as a business and economics book, so no hate. It was well written and easy to read. I highly suggest reading "The 7 Habits" first.

Lara says

Asked to read this for work. It can be summed up as follows: manage your time wisely. Skip this schlock.

Josh Burgess says

Nothing mind-blowing here.

Mihai Zoican says

Much more palatable and applicable to my life than the original 7 Habits book. Good stuff.

Elizabeth Chadsey says

I definitely get into business books easier when they've got a personal, memoir-style tone. This one is more instructive. That being said, the 5 Choices are valuable ones; for ME, I'd need to re-read and highlight, as if I'm studying for a test in order to really absorb the information. That same absorption happens naturally when I'm really interested in the ~story~ in a book of this same genre.

Allan Laal says

basically an updated version of Getting Things Done

Amanda says

I read an abridged booklet edition of The 5 Choices.

Viraj says

Steven Covey's 7 habits... is the basis for this book.

The 5 Choices are:

1. Act on the Important, Don't React to the Urgent
2. Go for Extraordinary, Don't Settle for Ordinary
3. Schedule the Big Rocks, Don't Sort Gravel
4. Rule Your Technology, Don't Let It Rule You
5. Fuel Your Fire, Don't Burn Out

Good about this book is that after reading it, it motivates folks to make changes starting with small changes. However, a lot of places the feel one gets from the book is such that one thinks whether the author is a mother and considers the readers to be 5 year olds... Some places the book goes too much in detail. The number of words could have been reduced by 30+%.

In any case, it is a a good effective read...

Jim Razinha says

I'm not a fan of Stephen Covey's stuff, and this is FranklinCovey redux (it should have been titled "The 5 Habit Choices of Highly Successful Extraordinarily Productive People"), but it was recommended and I read it. Fortunately, there is little substance because nothing of this is new and it's a quick read. Most of these books are three page tracts blown up with fluff. This is a single page flyer. Let me save you some time:

- Don't get sidetracked from what's important (Act on the Important, Don't React to the Urgent);
- Don't settle (Go for the Extraordinary, Don't Settle for Ordinary);
- Don't putz around with the little stuff (Schedule the Big Rocks, Don't Sort Gravel);
- Step away from your phone and computer (Rule Your Technology, Don't Let It Rule You);
- Don't forget to take a break (Fuel Your Fire, Don't Burn Out)

Ah, the elusive in all these books Common Sense. Well, it always seems elusive to the respective authors.

Oddly, in the first appendix, the authors list and over-explain the Top 25 Email Protocols ("top", meaning more? ouch.), the first of which is "Keep it short". They didn't with their list.

Some are going to think this is a game-changing book. Cheers to them. I hope they use it as a jumping off point.

Emily says

I love these "how to make a to do list" books, so that's my bias.

This one is a blend of classic Franklin Covey (there's a refined version of the 4 Quadrants) and David Allen's GTD workflow, also presented with "Zen/Eastern wisdom" metaphors. There is still the "fit the big rocks in

the jar" analogy but this one focuses on processing the endless streams of less important gravel that clog up our lives. I mostly liked it because it argues for the value of putting everything on your calendar, and despite recent trends that is really all that works for me. But there is no earth shattering new approach here.

Mostly this seems like Franklin Covey Inc. wanted to update 7 Habits for people who are never going to carry the heavy paper planner around. They embrace the digital here, though they stop short of making any specific software suggestions. My big peeve is that Franklin Covey still has not managed to develop and market an iPad app that would replace the old paper planner. Several other entities have attempted it but none of them actually work like a Franklin Planner. I don't understand why Franklin Covey can't get this done when they have been promising it for years. Did they not write it down in their planners? C'mon already.

In the meantime, maybe some of the suggestions in this book will be helpful.

Julie says

The book is roughly divided into 3 parts - Decision Management, Attention Management, and Energy management. I didn't find the last two particularly interesting or innovative (about the use of to do lists, how to handle emails and organise yourself for Attention Management, and the usual exercise/eat/sleep well and maintain strong relationships for the last one). Decision management on the other hand I found more interesting although the ideas are probably not that innovative either :-) I liked the concrete advice on how to distinguish between what is important and what is only urgent, and how to organise yourself (and your life really) to try to reduce stress and time-wasting due to the less important stuff taking over. The bigger questions around reflecting on the different roles you have in your life, how they matter to you and how to create a fulfilling life around them left me thoughtful as well.

Denton Peter McCabe says

I would give this three stars for myself, a lot of this information is obvious and redundant, however. . if you really feel you need help with time management, this is a helpful book. Pick it up and put this information into practice!!I would recommend this for managers, business consultants, and employees who wish to gain a little edge over their peers. It's worthwhile and a rather quick read.

Now that I have this Q4 activity out of the way. . on to Q2 shit.
