Deep Work by Cal Newport

Deep Work is 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. It is necessary to wring every last drop of value out of your current intellectual capacity.

The ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy. The few who cultivate this skill, and make it the core of their working life, will thrive.

We must cultivate an ability to produce real value in an increasingly distracted world; and recognize a truth embraced by the most productive and important personalities of generations past: **A deep life is a good life**.

The Three Ideas

Deep work is: **(1) Valuable** (it is needed to win in the new economy, it helps you learn hard things quickly and produce at an elite level), **(2) Rare** (we are constantly connected and distracted) and **(3) Meaningful** (it is a craft like that of the blacksmith that is satisfying and meaningful).

The Four Rules

There are four rules to doing Deep Work: (1) Work Deeply, (2) Embrace Boredom, (3) Quite Social Media and (4) Drain the Shallows.

1. Work Deeply

There are 6 strategies to help you do deep work:

(1) Select a Depth Philosophy: (a) Monastic (single focus), (b) Bimodal (divided focus between deep and shallow), (c) Rhythmic (time for deep work every day), and (d) Journalistic (fit deep work into your schedule wherever you can).

(2) Ritualise: You must decide: (a) Where you will work (location) and for how long (duration); (b) How will you work once you get started? (Rules like no internet usage and Processes that support deep work) and (c) How will you support your work? (Rituals and Aids such as coffee or food, access to all you need).

(3) Make Grand Gestures: Do something to show you are serious about doing deep work - go big.

(4) Don’t Work Alone: Deep work is both an individual and a collaborative endeavour.

(5) Execute Like a Business: Apply the insights from 4DX to your deep work: (a) Focus on the Wildly Important (say Yes to something really important), (b) Act on the Lead Measures (focus on behaviours that will ensure success - like the number of deep work hours you do), (c) Keep a Compelling Scoreboard (keep in front of you a scoreboard of how many deep work hours you are doing), and (d) Create a Cadence of Accountability (do a weekly review).

(6) Be Lazy: Downtime aids insights, helps recharge you for deep work and limits unimportant work so you need to (a) Have times when you totally detach from shallow or deep work, (b) End you work day at a set time every day and (c) Have a shutdown routine at the end your work day: make sure there are no urgent message that need attention, transfer new tasks to a task list, skim all tasks and check calendar for next few days to check for urgent items or deadlines, make a rough plan for the next day and say something like, “Shutdown complete”!

2. Embrace Boredom

Some secrets to getting comfortable not always having to do something: (1) Wean your mind from a dependence on distraction. (2) Don’t take breaks from distraction, rather take breaks from focus. (3) Schedule internet blocks when you go online.

3. Quit Social Media

Three ways to deal with social media:

(1) Change your Approach: Some people use internet tools that provide some benefit despite the high cost. Rather use a craftsman approach where you choose the tools that help your craft. Find the vital few network tools that you should be using by (a) Identify the main high-level goals in both your professional and your personal life. (b) List two or three important activities that help you satisfy each goal. These activities should be specific enough to allow you to clearly picture doing them. (c) Consider the impact of the network tools you currently use. (d) Make a decision to keep using this tool only if you concluded that it has substantial positive impacts and that these outweigh the negative impacts.

(2) Do a 30 Day Detox Experiment: Quitting all social media and after 30 days of self-imposed network isolation evaluate what you have lost and only rejoin services you really need.

(3) Don’t Use the Internet to Entertain Yourself: Make deliberate use of your time outside of work. Plan how you spend your free time so you don't default to media. Give your brain a quality alternative like a hobby!

4. Drain the Shallows

To limit the amount of hours that you work and thereby decrease the amount of shallow work you do and increase the quality of your deep work there are 5 secrets:

(1) Schedule Every Minute of Your Day: Plan what you are going to do in every 30 minute block of your day, accurately estimate task times, schedule overflow blocks with a split purpose to

finish off or do something different, be liberal with your use of task blocks by planning many in your day and change them if necessary.

(2) Quantify the Depth of Every Activity: Identify where work is **Shallow** (non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted) or **Deep** (activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit) and bias your time towards Deep work using the following 3 secrets.

(3) Ask Your Boss for a Shallow Work Budget: Decide what percentage of your time can be spent doing shallow work - like maybe 30% and stick to the ratio with your bosses blessing.

(4) Finish Your Work by Five Thirty: Identify a time in your day after which you do not work anymore - with no exceptions! This requires fixed-schedule productivity that uses guidelines such as: Don't say Yes to things that lead to shallow work; Be clear when you refusal something but ambiguous in you explanation for the refusal; Resist the urge to offer a consolation prize when turning down an invitation; Mention scheduling conflicts when you turn down a request on your time.

(5) Become Hard to Reach Via Email: Here are 3 secrets: (a) Make people who send you email do more work to get hold of you by using a sender filter, (b) Do more work when you send or reply to emails to limit follow up work, and (c) Don't respond to every email you receive.

Conclusion:

A commitment to deep work is a pragmatic recognition that the ability to concentrate is a skill that gets valuable things done. The deep life requires hard work and drastic changes to your habits. If you are willing to sidestep these comforts and fears, and deploy your mind to its fullest capacity to create things that matter, then you'll discover that depth generates a life rich with productivity and meaning.