Did you go through a rebellious stage when you were a teenager? Mine started late when I was 24 years old, and my weapon of choice? Reading. I started my reading habit as soon as I finished my undergraduates, just when the required reading had stopped, and apparently this was my best attempt at making the statement “I do what I choose to do, not what you tell me”.

Once I got my first taste of freedom, my next big decision was, what to read.

I’m a gamer at heart, and in games, you are typically given a skill tree to pick and choose your special skills and perks. Players usually start with a small pool of points to allocate to the tree, and will earn more over the course of the game. To most experienced gamers, the most obvious choice is to pick the skills with the highest leverage first, for example, skills that earn you more extra experiences or gold over the duration of the game, so the earlier you obtain such skills, the higher the return over time (think compound interest). And of course, to my young brain, real life = video game, thus, I had my crosshair aimed squarely on productivity, leverage and all.

And so In my very first Amazon purchase (back when Amazon only sold books), the order had two books:

- Getting Things Done by David Allen
- The 4-Hour Work Week by Tim Ferriss

This little “Avengers of Productivity” combo made me feel I could do anything and everything, all within 4-Hours a week...or so I thought. Over the years, I’ve chased the Tim Ferriss mirage by stacking one productivity book over another, high enough for me to use as a stool to get into The Thinker pose, wondering why I’m still not there yet.

With my frustration mounting, my rebellious way was triggered...I picked up a book called - Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals. Within its first few pages, it had promised to be an anti-productivity book. I was intrigued, I ripped off all my Tim Ferriss posters and began reading.

Within chapters, it showed me the errors in my ways.

Getting everything done? Not realistic. There will always be more things to do. (Think Netflix - always more shows to watch)

Zero inbox? More like Sisyphus’s inbox, your quick email responses are met with even quicker replies.

One day everything will be under control? That one day might not come, you are here, today, and we need to get through today first.

The book argues focus on productivity alone is not the solution. Completion of tasks will only beget more tasks. And the reason we take on as many things as we do, which leads to exhaustion and procrastination, is because of our unwillingness to accept what is.

And what is? What is is we are human, and with it, all the wonderful properties that we naturally inherit - one of which is a finite amount of time, attention, and energy. No we cannot do it all, and thus, we need to choose and prioritize. And more importantly, be at peace with this reality and the choices that we make because life is filled with unlimited choices and things to do.

But before you unlearn anything, no, the book is not telling us to deprioritize efficiency and effectiveness. Rather, it is telling us to focus more on what matters, and to focus on the process, not the end result of checking tasks off. Very similar to the message from James Clear in Atom Habit - to focus on what happens daily (habits), rather than the results we are trying to achieve, results which are out of our control.

And in an age where we are faced with information/task overload, connected to work 24/7, and armed with more productivity tools than ever before so we can get more done (Asana, Notion, Roam, Omnifocus etc.). Four Thousand Weeks is a timely book that brings warm comfort to those of us struggling with our respective versions of David Allen's inbox.

PS: Tim Ferriss, if you are reading this, I'm still a huge fan, please DM me.