

Deep Work by Cal Newport Book Summary

Deep Work: 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 skills, and are hard to replicate.

The state of mental strain that accompanies deep work is also necessary to improve your abilities.

The ubiquity of deep work among individuals is important to emphasize because it stands in sharp contrast to the behavior of most modern knowledge workers.

Average knowledge worker = Over 60% electronic communication & internet searching. Close to 30% reading and answering emails.

Shallow Work: Non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate.

Spend enough time in a state of frenetic shallowness and you permanently reduce your capacity to perform deep work.

Network tools are distracting us from work that requires unbroken concentration, while simultaneously degrading our capacity to remain focused.

Our work cultures shift towards shallow work, exposing a massive economic and personal opportunity for the few who recognize the potential of resisting this trend and prioritizing depth.

To remain valuable in our economy you must master the art of quickly learning complicated things. This task requires deep work. If you don't cultivate this ability, you will fall behind as technology advances.

The Deep Work Hypothesis: The ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at the same time it's becoming increasingly valuable in our economy. As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive.

Highly skilled workers are good at working with intelligent machines, people that get laid off due to automation are not good at working with intelligent machines and are replaced by intelligent machines.

The superstar workers will do well in the new economy because the talent market will become universally accessible so those at the peak of the market will thrive and the rest will suffer. This is the case even when the talent advantage of the best is small compared to the 2nd best tier.

Hearing a succession of mediocre singers doesn't add up to a single outstanding performance - talent isn't a commodity you can buy in bulk and combine to reach the needed levels.

The owner class will become more and more successful as technology advances because advances in technology lower the amount that needs to be spent on labor.

Two core abilities for thriving in the new economy: quickly master hard things; produce at an elite quality and speed - these core abilities depend on your ability to perform deep work.

To learn requires intense concentration - the differences between expert performers and normal adults reflect a life-long period of a deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain.

Deliberate practice requires focused attention and feedback.

By focusing on a skill, the specific relevant circuits are forced to fire, repeatedly in isolation. This causes the skill to be cemented by myelination of the relevant neural circuits, via oligodendrocytes.

Batch hard but important work into long uninterrupted stretches.

High-quality work produced = Time Spent x Focus Intensity

Each time you switch tasks your attention lags.

People experiencing attention residue after switching tasks are likely to demonstrate poor performance on that next task - the more intense the residue the worse the performance.

Deep work optimizes performance.

In a business setting, without clear feedback on the impact of various behaviors on the bottom line, we will tend toward behaviors that are easiest at the moment.

Things that lower productivity and workplace satisfaction: Frequent Meetings; regularly checking emails; open offices; social media; administrative tasks.

Clarity about the importance also clarifies the unimportant.

Busyness as a proxy for productivity: In the absence of clear indicators of what it means to be productive and valuable in their jobs, many knowledge workers turn back toward an industrial indicator of productivity; visibly doing lots of stuff.

We no longer discuss the trade-offs surrounding new technologies, balancing the new efficiencies against the new problems introduced. If it's high-tech, we assume it's good.

Deep work is unpopular because it builds on old-fashioned non-technological values, like quality, craftsmanship, and mastery while rejecting distracting technological behaviors like social media.

Focus on the positives.

Our worldview is based on what we pay attention to.

The idle mind is the devil's workshop... When you lose focus, your mind tends to fix on what could be wrong with your life instead of what's right - A workday driven by the shallow is draining and upsetting.

The best moments occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.

You have a finite amount of willpower that becomes depleted as you use it.

Confidence goes a long way in motivating hard efforts.

Waiting for inspiration to strike is a terrible plan. Ignore inspiration.

Think like artists but work like accountants.

Decide: where you'll work; how long you'll work; how you'll work; how you'll support your work.

Focus on the important.

The more you try to do the less you accomplish.

Act on the lead measures.

Keep a compelling scoreboard.

Create a cadence of accountability.

For decisions that require the application of strict rules, the conscious mind must be involved.

For decisions that involve large amounts of information and multiple vague, conflicting constraints, your unconscious mind must be involved.

Downtime helps recharge the energy needed to work deeply.

The work that evening downtime replaces is usually not that important.

Deep work has a 4-hour limit.

Add a shutdown ritual at the end of the workday that includes sorting out emails, and social media, creating plans for incomplete tasks, and organizing the next workday.

Embrace boredom to increase your mental capacity.

Multi-tasking turns you into a mental wreck.

Don't take breaks from distraction. Instead, take breaks from focus.

The use of a distracting service doesn't reduce your brain's ability to focus. It's the constant switching from low-stimuli/high-value activities to high-stimuli/low-value activities at the slightest hint of boredom or cognitive challenge, this teaches your mind to become intolerant of the repetition, and weakens your focus.

Use tools that have a net positive impact on professional & personal success and happiness.

In many settings, 80% of a given effect is due to 20% of the possible causes.

Deep work tasks require more training to become proficient in compared to shallow work tasks.

A focused life is the best.