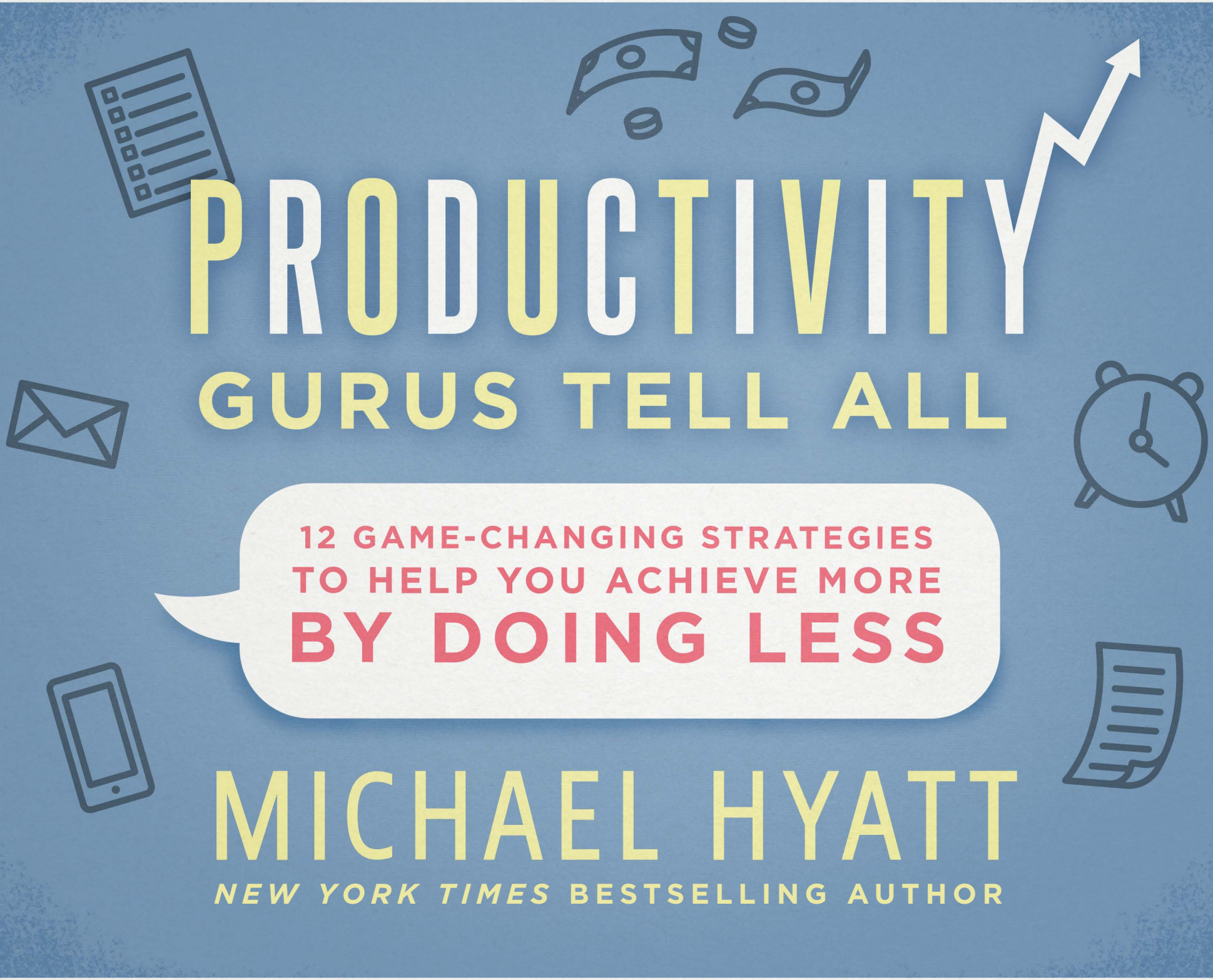

PRODUCTIVITY
GURUS TELL ALL
12 GAME-CHANGING STRATEGIES
TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE MORE
BY DOING LESS
MICHAEL HYATT
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION



The way we're doing productivity isn't working. I hear stories and regrets that confirm it whenever I talk with entrepreneurs, executives, and other busy leaders. The old methods are no match for all the challenges of today's work environment.

Most of our productivity models come from efficiency experts in the age of manufacturing. These were days when people lived near their jobs, worked a limited and defined set of repeatable tasks, and could contribute to the bottom line by marginal improvements to their efficiency.

But today's entrepreneurs and executives live and work in a much different world. We sometimes have long commutes to work—or work virtually and have no commutes. We have amazing variety in our tasks, some of which are new every day. And we contribute to the bottom line by leapfrog innovation on new and significant projects, not marginal improvements on existing processes.

When we try to cram the old methods into the new world, we get inefficiency and burnout. We get a lot of things done but not always the right things. And we leave a lot undone—especially when it comes to our most important projects and relationships.

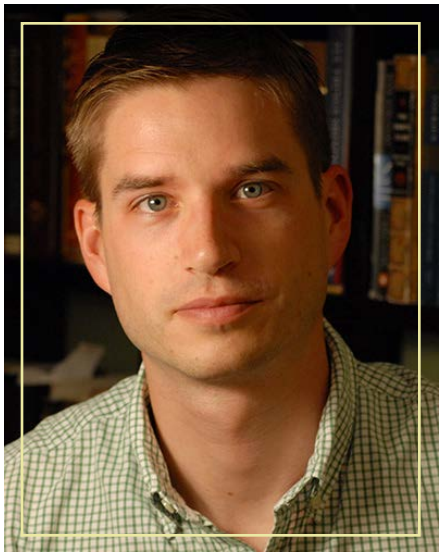
Thankfully, there's a new, emerging science of productivity that can help leaders like us. I recently spoke with six of the leading voices in this new field and have distilled twelve new strategies here in this ebook we can put to use starting today. Here's how I've grouped them:

- KILL THE DISTRACTIONS | **CAL NEWPORT**
- UPGRADE YOUR HABITS | **GRETCHEN RUBIN**
- GET THE WORK DONE | **JASON FRIED**
- FOCUS ON EXECUTION | **CHRIS McCHESNEY**
- LIMIT YOUR COMMUNICATION | **ERIK FISHER**
- GET THE REST YOU NEED | **SHAWN STEVENSON**

Each section contains two game-changing strategies you can start using immediately. Instead of doing more by burning yourself out, these will finally empower you to achieve more by actually doing less, conserving your time and energy for the work and people that matter most in your life.

KILL THE DISTRACTIONS

If we want to be productive, we have to stay on task. But that's harder than ever today. When I talk with busy entrepreneurs and executives, they tell me the main productivity challenge they face is constant interruptions. They're contuinually dragged away from meaningful work by endless distractions.



Cal Newport is an associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University and the author of an amazing book called *Deep Work*. I asked him about distractions and I think his insights can help us all.

STRATEGY NO. 1. ***FACE YOUR DISTRACTIONS***

Most of us know better than to try multitasking. The research is clear and compelling. When we do it, we're actually less productive. But a lot of people still switch between tasks every few minutes.

"They're populating [their] work with a lot of what I call 'just checks,'" says Cal, "which is every 5 to 10 minutes you do a quick 'just check' of your email inbox and then back to the thing, and then a quick 'just

check' of texts, a quick 'just check' of Facebook." What's the problem? "The new research tells us there is a significant harm to these 'just checks.'" Cal says when we break our attention it negatively affects our attention for ten or twenty minutes at least. "It's like you're taking sort of an anti-mental enhancement pill. It means most of us are actually working with a serious self-imposed cognitive handicap and we don't even realize it."

So the first strategy is facing our distractions. We need to recognize them for what they are—we're not just flipping between different tasks. We're actually killing our focus.

STRATEGY NO. 2. ***EMBRACE BOREDOM***

A lot of time we switch between tasks because we're bored. If that report or spreadsheet doesn't hold our interest, we can always jump over to Twitter for a moment. But Cal says we need to embrace boredom.

"I love the idea of being bored for a couple of reasons," he says. "First, it means I'm not filling my life with small busyness that takes up my time but doesn't produce value. Second, if you're addicted to distraction, if your mind has learned that at the slightest hint of boredom you are going to give it some sort of novel stimuli on your phone or on the computer, it will become very difficult to succeed with deep work when it comes time to do deep work. If your brain is addicted to distraction, it can't concentrate when it comes time to concentrate. So boredom should be as important to you, as a cognitive athlete, as eating well and getting sleep should be to you if you're an actual physical athlete."

UPGRADE YOUR HABITS

If you struggle with implementing the first two strategies, the real problem might be counterproductive habits. I wanted to know more about habits and how we can change them so I spoke with **Gretchen Rubin**, the the author blockbuster bestsellers like *Better Than Before* and *The Happiness Project*.



Habits have a lot to do with our productivity. Gretchen calls them "the invisible architecture of our days." Because our habits are invisible, we're not always aware of them or how they're affecting our lives. This is especially problematic if some of our work habits are keeping us from being productive. These third and fourth strategies can help.

STRATEGY NO. 3. ***HARNESS THE POWER OF HABITS***

"Research shows habits are about 40 percent of everyday life," says Gretchen. "If we have habits that work for us, we're a lot more likely to be happy, healthy, and productive. If our habits don't work for us, that's a much bigger challenge."

The trick, she says, is to harness this power and create positive impact in our work and beyond. "The more things we can make into habits, the more we can grease the wheels on the things we know are going to make us happier." If we can harness that power, we can put at least some of what we do each day on autopilot, and that saves us energy we can use better elsewhere. But it's not always easy. "The struggle is really to follow through and do it," she says. "It's not identifying it. It's sticking to it for a lot of people."

So how do we do that?

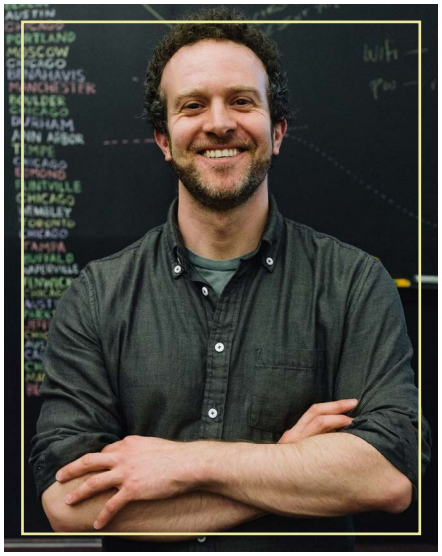
STRATEGY NO. 4. ***PUSH DOWNHILL***

When it comes to adopting new, positive habits or dropping old, negative ones, Gretchen says, "The key to changing habits is to think about what kind of person you are. . . .A lot of times when people. . .feel frustrated by their inability to follow through, it's because they're trying to do it in a way that isn't right for them."

The more heroic and difficult the change, the more likely we're just setting ourselves up for failure. Then we trigger shame and all sorts of negative emotions. If we want to upgrade our habits, Gretchen says we shouldn't push uphill. Instead we should work with what's most natural for our given personalities. What's convenient for us? What's inconvenient? Start answering those kinds of questions and we're more likely to find a solution that works for us.

GET THE WORK DONE

A lot of work we do no longer happens in the office. Why? Because the modern workspace is practically designed to hijack our attention. From small distractions to major derailments, our days are full of interruptions.



Jason Fried, the cofounder and CEO of software company Basecamp, has spent years trying to overcome this challenge. He's shared his findings in a popular TED Talk and the bestselling books *Rework* and *Remote*. Two strategies he shared with me stand out as immediately helpful for most busy entrepreneurs and executives.

STRATEGY NO. 5. ***WORK ALONE***

"People are working longer and longer and longer hours," Jason says. "It's not because there's more work to do, though. It's because they aren't able to get work done at work anymore. . . . It's chaotic all day long at work. There are meetings, people are pulling you aside, whatever it is. So people have a hard time finding those moments when they can for long stretches of time really get into a zone. A zone is really where you do your best work."

The answer, says Jason, is to try carving out time to work alone—he calls it the "Alone Zone."

He recommends one day a month when companies intentionally limit their internal communication. "Leave everyone alone one day a month. That's it. Just one day a month. You will see that that is the best day of the month for people in terms of getting work done and building the skills and the muscles to be self-aware of this and also to be independent." As an entrepreneur or executive you probably have the autonomy to do this far more than once a month. Try it.

STRATEGY NO. 6. *FORGET ABOUT IDEAL SOLUTIONS*

Another challenge we face is perfectionism. If we're trying to find the ideal solution for a problem, we're likely to get less out of that Alone Zone time than we might otherwise get. If we're going to get the work done, we need to change the way we see solutions.

"There should be at least two versions of the solution once you've figured out what the problem is," says Jason. "One of them should be the really fast one that gets you 80 percent of the way there, and the other one should be, 'If that's not good enough, where would we take this if we wanted to hit 100 percent?' I've found in most cases the quick win is more than enough."

It's another version of the just-ship-it mentality. "If you spend all this time trying to get something right, you put it out there, and you realize it's wrong, you're better off finding that out much sooner. You can put the same amount of time in, but most of that time will be on iterating based on some truths you figured out once something is actually out there."

Jason says it's best to ask, "What's the quickest way to fix this problem?" If the solution works, great. That's time saved for something more important. If the solution needs improvement, even better. Now you can iterate in real time and make improvements that match real life.

FOCUS ON EXECUTION



After the fifth and sixth and strategies, we nee to go deeper into the realm of execution. How can we as leaders ensure the results we're after? **Chris McChesney** is FranklinCovey's Global Practice Leader of Execution. He's also the coauthor of *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*. I spoke with him about the challenge. Here are two key strategic takeaways from our conversation:

STRATEGY NO. 7. ***FOCUS ON THE WILDLY IMPORTANT***

"What we've found is there are some very basic human tendencies that are kind of our worst enemy when it comes to execution," says Chris. "One of them is that we grossly underestimate how much focus is actually required." What's the solution? Focus on the wildly important.

There are dozens of important initiatives and challenges in our businesses at any given time. But some are more important than others. The question to ask, says Chris is this: "What's not going to change on its own?" Many initiatives have their own momentum. Those bases are covered. But make a major difference we need

to focus on the one or two things that require our full attention to move the needle. Those are our wildly important goals.

STRATEGY NO. 8. ***PICK THE RIGHT METRICS***

We typically use metrics to see if we're reaching our goals. But Chris says picking the right metrics can actually drive achievement, not just measure it.

Chris distinguishes between *lag* and *lead* measures. "Just because you can measure something doesn't mean it needs to be a goal for optimization." Lag measures look backwards. Think about an income statement; it reports what already happened. But lead measures look forward. They track the activities that end up on the income statement.

Measuring lags is important, but measuring leads is critical for execution because it predicts and influences the outcome. And we have control over it every day.

LIMIT YOUR COMMUNICATION



Communication is essential to business. But it can also be a major interruption to us. And that's especially true if when we think about social media. Thankfully, **Erik Fisher**, host of the amazing podcast *Beyond the To-Do List* and social media manager at *Social Media Examiner*, has some excellent advice.

STRATEGY NO. 9. ***LIMIT YOUR COMMUNICATION***

"You don't have your email open all day every day," says Erik. "That would be a cardinal sin in terms of productivity. You don't leave browsers or apps open all the time." The idea here is to be intentional about our focus. When we leave open channels to communication, we're leaving open channels to interruptions. So close them.

"In fact," says Erik, "take it one step further: turn off notifications. Don't get pings on your desktop or your mobile phone, etc. I literally have phone calls and texts turned on on my phone, and those are the only alerts I get."

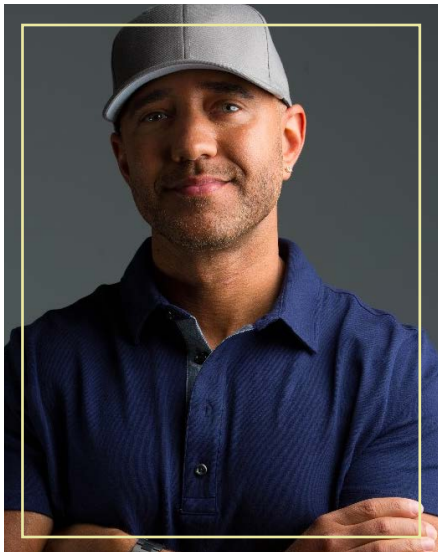
STRATEGY NO. 10. ***LIMIT YOUR ENGAGEMENT***

Erik next recommends that leaders limit our engagement, especially (a) the *scope* and (b) the *services* we perform. "At certain times, you move in and you say, 'Okay, depending upon my goals and my set times of the day, I will go check certain inboxes.'" If we don't limit our scope, our communication will gobble our calendar.

Beyond time, Erik says we need to ask about our purpose. "What are you using social [media] for? Are you there to interact? Are you there to do customer service? Are you there as a solo person, or are you there with a team? Can your team go through your account, see which ones are worth responding to or which ones are just @ mentions, and then send the link to that tweet to you in an email? Then all you need to do is go to your inbox, click on that link, hit reply, and then close the window quickly."

Both of these communication strategies compel us to do more with less. The time and energy we conserve in our communication can be redirected toward more profitable projects and relationships.

GET THE REST YOU NEED



Entrepreneurs and executives are usually busy—really busy. And there's an idea out there that says, "Maybe you if you skimp on sleep, then you can catch up and be more productive." But this idea will eventually backfire. It probably already has for some of us.

Shawn Stevenson created the *Model Health Podcast*, which was featured as the No. 1 health podcast in the country on iTunes. He also wrote the book *Sleep Smarter*, and I spoke with him about how sleep affects our productivity.

STRATEGY NO. 11. ***COMMIT TO HIGH-QUALITY SLEEP***

Nothing affects our ability to focus like sleep. "This one is super important because I truly believe that today focus is a premium," Shawn says. "We're the most distracted society in the history of the world."

Shawn referenced a study published in *The Lancet*. Subjects in a test were deprived of sleep for twenty-four

hours. “First of all, they made 20 percent more mistakes doing the exact same [task], and it took them 40 percent longer. They lost efficiency, they lost effectiveness. There’s a big difference between doing work and actually being effective.”

When we skip sleep we downgrade our performance. The answer, says Shawn, is getting high-quality sleep each night. It increases energy, mental function, everything. It’s like a secret weapon.

STRATEGY NO. 12. ***SLEEP FOR SUCCESS***

Many times we get low-quality sleep, what Shawn calls “Twinkie sleep.” So how do we get high-quality sleep? Shawn recommends:

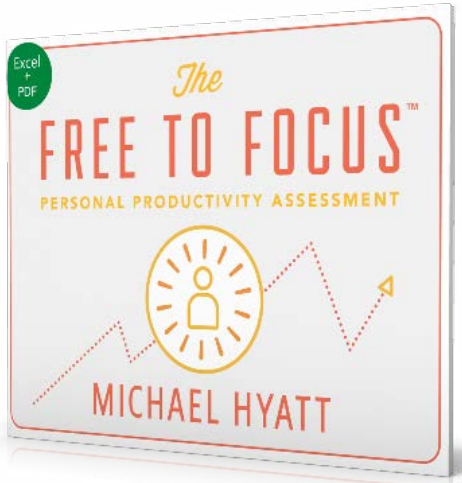
- Set a technology curfew. (Also use night-shift settings when available to kill blue light in the evening.)
- Kill the lights and get blackout curtains if you need.
- Set the temperature low. How low? “Researchers have found is the ideal room temperature is actually quite cool at 62 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit,” says Shawn.
- Create a bedtime ritual and stick with it.

The key thing is to experiment and optimize your sleep for success. “Find something that resonates with you and it’s just going to pay off big dividends in the end.”

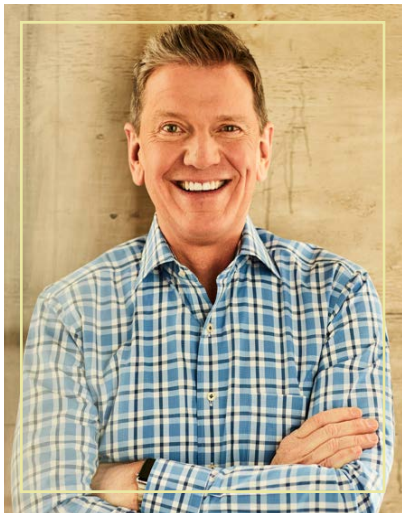
HOW PRODUCTIVE ARE YOU REALLY?

Take my free self-assessment and discover what you're doing well—and what's holding back your productivity. Your score will help you determine exactly what your next steps should be. Download it here:

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Michael Hyatt is the founder and CEO of Michael Hyatt & Company, a leadership development firm specializing in transformative live events, online training, and planning tools. Michael and his team help overwhelmed high achievers win at work, succeed at life, and lead with confidence. Their online magazine at michaelhyatt.com gets almost a million pageviews every month.

Formerly chairman and CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers, Michael is also a New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today bestselling author of several books, including Your Best Year Ever, Living Forward, and Platform.

Michael has been married to his wife, Gail, for forty years. They have five daughters, three sons-in-law, and eight grandchildren. They live just outside Nashville, Tennessee.

Visit him online at MichaelHyatt.com.

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