



WINNING
THE HOW TO PLAN A SUCCESSFUL
WEEK, EVERY WEEK
WEEK

DEMIR and CAREY BENTLEY



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WINNING THE WEEK

How To Plan A Successful Week, Every Week

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*For hard workers who need more breathing room
to chase their dreams*



INTRODUCTION

**IT'S 6:15 ON A FRIDAY NIGHT, AND YOU'RE COMING HOME AT THE
END OF A HARD WEEK...**

Not the kind of week where all the lights turned green and everyone laughed at your jokes, but sadly a regular kind of week, where you tried to spin all the plates and some of them crashed to the floor. You've been through the wringer, and let's be honest: it shows. Trudging through the front door, you drop your bags and toss your keys onto that little shelf with a mirror (technically, it's called the foyer mirror). You can't help but catch a glimpse of yourself in that mirror, with tired eyes but bravely holding it together. Then you swiftly move on because it's Friday night, damn it, and you're determined to get as much "happy time" as possible. Bring on the Chardonnay!

But wait. Something happened there, and you missed it. Rewind the tape.

That glance into the mirror was the critical dividing line between your work life and your personal life. Let's pause right here and give this moment its due. What did you see when you looked at yourself in the mirror? It's natural to look a little haggard because the week was a battle. But did you feel like you were the winner of that battle, lending your struggle dignity and purpose? Or were you the loser, returning home under a cloud of shame and self-doubt?

I playfully call this the Foyer Mirror Test. That moment when you enter through the door and set down your keys, you are at a critical fork in the road: This is where you decide whether you won the week or lost it.



For most people this happens unconsciously, but this tiny decision has monumental ramifications. If you decide that you were victorious, you go on to treat yourself like a hero returning from a glorious battle. Putting your phone on its charger, you eagerly embrace home life. You change into comfy clothes and blast your favorite playlist. Pouring a glass of wine, you toast to yourself, and that first sip is pure celebration. Despite the exhaustion (or maybe because of it), there's a sense of accomplishment and pride. If you think about work at all, it's to exult in your victory and possibly brag to your partner. Feeling genuine closure on the week, you give yourself permission to become a person again, not just some employee on the eighteenth floor. This is the best version of yourself at the end of a week, and if this were how we all felt on Friday, the world would be a much better place.

Sadly, this isn't the way this story goes most of the time. There's a "defeated version" that goes more like this:

That moment you look in the foyer mirror, you unconsciously decide that you lost the week. You can't put your finger on it, but a faint cloud of guilt and anxiety follows you around. You keep replaying scenes from the week in your mind—your brain's way of trying to get closure. But it's not working. Despite your best attempts to shake it off, you can't stop thinking about work—which is ironic because at work you couldn't focus on the task at hand for wanting to think about anything else. Now back at home, you're stuck in "work mode." You begin cooking dinner as if it's yet another problem to be solved, another obstacle to overcome. In fact, all of your interactions at home just seem

like more problems, sucking the joy out of moments that should have been savored. Pouring your second glass of wine, you realize that you can't remember drinking the first one, much less enjoying it.

As a productivity coach, I have heard variations on this same story thousands of times. In the "victorious version" of the story, a person comes home, gets closure on work, and proceeds to enjoy their life. They genuinely feel restored after a weekend like this, and come Monday they're chomping at the bit to get back to work and tackle big problems.

But I'm sure you can guess that, more often than not, I hear the defeated version of this story. The version in which the person can't get closure on work, so they can't allow themselves to relax. Stuck in zombie mode, they feel the weekend slip by too fast. In the best-case scenario, they are able to force a smile and make a good show of it, but their heart isn't really in it. In the worst cases, these are the weekends when they wish they had a do-over. Either way, come Monday, they are exhausted. It doesn't take long to burn out when you're having week after week like this.

Having coached so many people on the front lines of their productivity battle, I've come to believe this is a nearly universal phenomenon. Every person has a moment, whether they detect it or not, when they decide whether they won their week or they lost it. And that decision determines whether they allow themselves to release the past and come fully into the present to enjoy their life.

THE CONQUEROR'S CURSE

Last year I was having lunch with a friend who was visiting me in Medellín, Colombia. Surrounded by oversized greenery, tropical flowers, and bird calls, my friend conceded, “You’ve got a pretty good life down here. But...isn’t it draining to be constantly working with underachievers and burnouts?” I almost choked, then burst out laughing. Are my clients underachievers? A bunch of low-performing burnouts?

Quite the opposite. Most of my clients have stunning résumés, and they operate successful brands and growing businesses. They include executives at top tech companies and even famous Hollywood actors—people who have climbed to the heights of their profession.

No, people don’t seek me out because they lack success. They seek me out because they aren’t *enjoying* their success. In some cases, they are straining under the weight of success. These people have been winning big for the majority of their adult lives, *but that’s precisely the problem*. Life has a way of loading you down as you climb to the top. We just collect more responsibilities: marriages, homes, kids, volunteer and work commitments. And a big life can weigh a lot. At the same time, we steadily lose the energy—and even the passion—that we once had—just when we need it the most!

This phenomenon is what I call the Conqueror’s Curse: winning life’s battles when you’re young loads you down with more territory you have to defend as you get older. You’re spread thin and

fighting on multiple fronts, even as the energy you once had for the fight diminishes. If you knew how driven and independent my clients were, you'd understand what a bitter pill that is for them to swallow.

Some clients come to me because their progress in life has slowed to a halt. They know they have the potential to do more, but they are so loaded down with responsibilities, they can't seem to move an inch. In fact, they start to sense that the tide of the battle is shifting against them. Often the best they can do is mount a brave defense, keeping the enemy at bay to maintain their position for as long as possible. But any victories they have are quickly eclipsed by the sense that they are nevertheless (slowly) losing the war. Without that forward momentum, their valiant efforts just give way to frustration and defeatism.

Other clients come to me in denial that the tide had turned against them. They don't want to see that they are losing more weeks than they are winning. But deep down, they still feel it—that creeping sense of dread, the permanent low-grade anxiety—which means that, more often than not, they deny themselves permission to live their life to its fullest. This makes a twisted kind of sense because it's impossible to relax when it seems like the enemy is at your gates.

Worst by far are the clients I call “grinders.” These are highly motivated individuals used to putting their head down and doing hard work. Their entire life, their superpower has been ignoring pain and just “getting the work done,” but all the things they stuffed away in youth are now exploding like a volcano in midlife. I've seen the results firsthand, and it can be an ugly reckoning.

Let me ask you: Is this ringing any bells? Do you give it “your all” at work, but still feel like you’re falling behind? Or do you feel trapped beneath your potential while all your energy is devoted to keeping your head above water? And because of that, are you denying yourself permission to enjoy your life?

NEARLY WORKING MYSELF TO DEATH

It sure rings bells for me, because I lived that life too.

In July of 2010, I was in the prime of my career. I had just been promoted and was now one of the youngest senior equity analysts on Wall Street. I was making regular television appearances on financial news networks like CNBC, Bloomberg TV, and Fox Business.

But instead of flying high, I was flat on my back (literally), recovering from surgery in a hospital bed. This was my second surgery to battle the runaway effects of an intense but mysterious autoimmune disorder. I’ll spare you the gruesome details of how my digestive system went awry, but it wasn’t pretty. I had tried hard to ignore it for as long as I could, hoping it would go away. But now it was affecting my work, taking me out for days or weeks at a stretch.

I wasn’t a hotshot—I was a hot mess!

My doctors were puzzled by someone so young suddenly starting to see critical system failure. As happens so often in the

case of autoimmune diseases, the doctors couldn't agree on a diagnosis. And the treatments they had tried weren't working. Finally, one doctor thought to ask me, "How many hours are you working, by the way?"

"Never less than eighty hours a week—sometimes as many as one hundred!" I bragged.

I wasn't remotely ashamed of my long work hours. Like many New Yorkers, it was a point of personal pride! In case you're not familiar, the work culture in New York City is brutal. They celebrate "hustle culture," a euphemism for brute-forcing your way to success by working around the clock. And I was a true believer in the cult of hard work. I worked nights and weekends all throughout my twenties and thirties. Even as I suffered consequences like ill-health, massive weight gain, and failed relationships, I knew it would eventually all pay off with interest.

But I was wrong. It didn't pay off. It landed me in the hospital, facing the risk of early death. And just like a believer losing faith in his religion, I felt betrayed and stupid and lost.

It's estimated that 24 million people in the United States currently have an autoimmune condition—which is about one in every fourteen people. That means a lot of folks you know are managing one of these nasty conditions every day. These strange diseases (like rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, Crohn's disease, and celiac disease) involve your immune system going into overdrive and attacking healthy cells in your body. In the very worst cases, entire systems can fail. Even in mild cases,

these are chronic conditions, meaning that there is no “cure”—they will impact your quality of life for the rest of your life.

These conditions are often caused by stress. In a massive thirty-year study of over a million people, scientists from the University of Iceland found a strong link between psychological stress and physical inflammatory conditions. Individuals with high levels of stress—induced by trauma, lack of sleep, or overwork—were up to forty times more likely to develop an autoimmune disease.

After learning about my insane working hours, my doctors asked me about my stress levels (they were sky-high) and how much I was sleeping (not nearly enough). With those answers in hand, my three doctors finally converged on a diagnosis. Due to my chronic overworking, I was now at risk for “sudden occupational mortality,” a condition where a young person who appears to be otherwise healthy dies prematurely from the stress of overwork. In plain language: I was working myself to death. Though it’s not a common way to die in North America, it’s well-known in Asian societies, going by the names *karoshi* in Japan, *gwarosa* in South Korea, and *guolaosi* in China.

My doctors’ prescription was upsettingly simple. I was to immediately limit my working hours to no more than forty per week. For me, this felt like telling a professional basketball player, “You can keep playing, but you have to do it with one hand tied behind your back!” I was furious because this felt like an impossible limitation that would definitely spell the end of my career. Thankfully, once again I was very wrong. Those doctors set me on a path that changed my life forever.

THE AMERICAN DREAM—OR THE AMERICAN TREADMILL?

I'm not alone in getting carried away with working too much. We're suffering through a particularly difficult period when it comes to work-life balance.

Economists delight in data that shows that we aren't working any more hours than our parents' generation, or the generation before that. But when I tell my clients that, they are dumbfounded. My clients who have been working since the 1980s tell me that they have felt a dramatic increase in their working hours. And they aren't alone: 40 percent of workers feel that their workload has increased in the last three to five years. So what gives here? Have we just gotten weaker? Are we a bunch of whiners? As a practitioner working on the front lines, I find this data to be misleading to the point of gaslighting. Three trends are conspiring to disguise increased working hours and pressures.

First, in most families, both partners have to work in order to make ends meet. So even if both partners are working an "average" workweek, the fact that they are both working puts incredible strain on a family unit. A UK study of the impacts on family life found that families had to work in "shifts" to manage the load, with half of families unable to eat meals together most days. They found that only a minority of "dual income" families worked the standard nine-to-five hours. Instead, many of them were working a "second shift" after the kids went to bed at night to get everything done. This led to lower-quality family life, strained relationships, and higher divorce rates.

Second, technological advances have allowed us to bring work home, resulting in a disastrous invasion of our personal time. Knowing how bad this has become, most HR departments are careful to encourage employees to sign off at 5:00 p.m. But managers in these same companies send the exact opposite message, celebrating and promoting the employees who work around the clock. This creates a “race to the bottom” culture where people feel tremendous social pressure to work after hours if they want to advance their careers. A recent survey found that 92 percent of workers regularly work on evenings and weekends, with 40 percent of people being “always available” for their work. The only people who can put a stop to it—employers—have a strong disincentive to do so.

Finally, we’re getting less “lifestyle” for our labor. The average American worker today is 400 percent more productive than a worker was in 1950. Theoretically, this means that one spouse should only have to work eleven hours per week to maintain the same standard of living that we enjoyed in 1950. Wouldn’t that be nice? Instead, the opposite has happened. Again, economists claim that incomes have risen, so what are we complaining about? But current inflation measures fail to adequately account for the most significant markers of a middle-class lifestyle: owning a home and a car, having health coverage, and paying for childcare, education, and end-of-life care. The costs of these critical goods and services have exploded at a rate that far outpaces base inflation. Put simply, a middle-class lifestyle costs more than it used to, something that any first-time homebuyer in a major metropolitan area or anyone putting a kid through college could tell you.

This is the reality I felt working in finance in New York. Despite having a top-tier job, I saw no path to owning a home. Now, having coached thousands of people, this is the reality I see every day on the front lines. Even with two incomes, families are struggling to maintain the lifestyle that came much more easily to their parents' generation. That puts tremendous pressure on families and partners, pressure that threatens to break up families. At the same time, work has invaded every nook and cranny of our life—in some cases even our dreams!

ESCAPING OVERWORK

Within a week of my doctors' ultimatum, I went from working eighty hours a week to working forty hours a week. My symptoms completely subsided in less than two months, and I was feeling healthier than ever. And my work wasn't suffering. Far from it—I got a huge promotion! My health crisis ended up being the forcing function that helped me discover a way of working less while experiencing more success, happiness, and longevity. I call it The Winning The Week Method.

I used this method to rapidly advance my Wall Street career. Combining it with other productivity hacks, I eventually reduced my Wall Street work hours to just two a week. Wanting to see how far we could go, my wife, Carey, and I broke free of the rat race and ultimately achieved within five years what I call the Four Freedoms:

1. *Financial Freedom:* Starting \$100,000 in debt, we became debt-free. A short time later, we hit our financial independence goal, which means we can retire whenever we choose. This financial freedom has radically changed our relationship to work. Today we work because we want to, not because we have to.
2. *Time Freedom:* In 2015, Carey and I committed to working less than thirty hours a week, and it's a promise we have kept religiously. Last year I averaged twenty-seven hours per week. That free time creates space for the good stuff in life, like working out, taking a nap, or just spending an afternoon on the couch listening to an album.
3. *Career Freedom:* With financial stability and excess time, Carey and I are able to focus on only the work we want to be doing. Safe to take bigger risks, we experienced career success that we never imagined possible. Today we get to work on things that inspire us and focus our efforts on the areas where we can do the most good.
4. *Spiritual Freedom:* Now that work no longer steals oxygen from the other important parts of our life, we've seen those other areas of our life blossom. We travel frequently with our daughter, take time for ourselves and each other, and have an active spiritual practice. In other words, we have time to be present for what's truly important in life.

For me, all of those freedoms came from one simple point of origin: getting organized and consistently winning my weeks. Given that relatively rapid transformation, I had to wonder: Why hadn't someone taught me this earlier in life? I hadn't had one class on productivity in high school, college, or the workplace. Why didn't anyone teach me how to manage my workload? The answer is frightening: We can't teach it because we don't know it. We're all hanging on by a thread, just trying to keep it together.

Inspired by our experience escaping overwork and taking back our lives, Carey and I resolved to help other people get organized and do the same. We started our company, Lifehack Method, to teach people to take back control of their time and create the Four Freedoms in their own lives. We've helped over fifty thousand people, working with hotshots and average Joes alike. We've helped millionaire business owners and executives from big companies like Facebook, Google, Uber, and PepsiCo. But we've also worked with nonprofit executives, pastors, stay-at-home parents, and everyone in between. Our mission has been to help anyone suffering due to their workload and to show them how to create a powerful workflow, get back on offense, and see themselves progressing to their best life.

Knowing that we can't fit all of our methods into one book, our goal in this book is to offer the reader the keystone piece of our methodology, what we call The Winning The Week Method. This is what turned my life around when I was on the brink. It's a simple yet powerful framework for handling the strain of modern life with ease and without ever burning out. We've created an operating system for winning your week, every single week. This is something that anyone can implement right away to see transformative results but also forms

the foundation upon which to build more advanced productivity skills. Carey and I are equal partners in every way, and we wrote this book together, but we have chosen to narrate in my (Demir's) first-person voice. It makes for easier reading and felt natural to us, given that I do most of the coaching on the front lines.

If you already know a bit about productivity but still feel like something is missing, this book will be right up your alley. I hope it will give you that “I know kung fu” moment where things finally click into place. If you're new to productivity, this book will provide you with a foundation to build on as you progress to more advanced techniques.

To be clear—I'm not promising you that everything will magically start going your way. Instead, I'm promising you a method to help you move the big things forward despite the obstacles and consistently stay on offense instead of defense. At the minimum, you'll find that this method will make your life easier and more enjoyable. Taken to the extreme, though, this method can lay the foundation for seemingly superhuman feats of productivity.

But be warned—this book is not a “flavor of the month” productivity fad. If fads were going to work, they would have worked already. This method is designed for people who are ready to buckle down and face this productivity problem head-on. If you have the courage to do that, I promise that when you look at yourself in the mirror on Friday night, you'll know that you won your week, and you won big. And come Monday morning, you'll be chomping at the bit to get back in the game.

Let's dive in.

PART 1



BUILD A WINNING PLAN

1



WHY WIN THE WEEK?

I NOTICE THAT MANY OF MY CLIENTS UNCONSCIOUSLY USE BATTLE or war analogies when talking about their week. Maybe you find yourself saying things like:

“I’m dying here.”

“I’m losing ground.”

“I’m overwhelmed.”

“I’m on defense, not offense.”

“I’m winning the small battles but losing the war.”

Let me suggest a better analogy for winning your weeks: a professional athlete playing their sport. Sport is an obvious proxy for war, but it's a far better analogue for work. Unlike war, in sports you can lose a lot of games and keep playing—because losing a game is not a death sentence. Even better, in sports no one is expected to win every game—you just need to win more than you lose to be considered a winner. The same goes for work.

That doesn't mean there aren't consequences in sports, though. There are moments when people get cut from the team or simply fail to progress to the next level. Like when a player's contract isn't renewed, or they don't make the cut moving from high school to college soccer. So in sports, there are severe consequences for one's performance. But everything isn't riding on the outcome of one game. The consequences are spread out over time, giving players space to learn and improve. Even if an athlete gets cut from the game altogether, they get to live on and play a different game that pays their bills. In that way, sport is a much more forgiving enterprise than war.

I'd like you to think of yourself as the star player playing the game of your life. Much as in sports, the consequences of winning or losing this week aren't life or death for you. You won't be loved or hated based on any single week of your game. And you can lose a lot of games/weeks and still make it to the playoffs of your career. Ironically, there's a lot of losing involved in winning, and even some winning involved in losing.



But in life, as in sports, there are real consequences for consistently poor performance in the medium and long term. You could get “benched,” meaning your poor performance results in missing out on prime opportunities to shine. You could also get “cut from the team,” as in getting fired or losing an opportunity to advance to the next level. And since we’re all aging, we don’t get the chance to hit reset and start over again. Some windows of opportunity that close will never be reopened.

I introduce this sports analogy because it’s useful on multiple levels in explaining my approach to winning the week.

I've come to see that a week is an ideal increment in which to tackle your productivity—one “game” in the tournament of your life. Why a week, and not a day, a month, or a quarter? Given how much I emphasize this increment of time, allow me to peel back some layers and explain why I think the weekly focus is so powerful.

REASON #1: IT MAPS WELL TO REAL LIFE

If you like the thought of approaching your work like a game, and you're looking to map that onto real life, the week is the obvious choice. A weekly cadence matches a rhythm that we already have built into the fabric of our society: the workweek and the weekend. You're already attuned to this rhythm in so many ways: you “start the game” on Monday morning, then continue making your plays and overcoming obstacles throughout the week. Then on Friday night, this week's game is over, and the weekend offers you a chance to reflect on whether you won or lost. After getting some rest, you start a new game again on Monday.

Where else in our world do you find a matching cadence of work and rest? Not monthly, or even quarterly. Possibly annually (with the holidays), but now we're talking about time increments that are too large and unmanageable. A week is large enough to accomplish a great deal, but small enough to generate lots of learning opportunities.

Think about how a soccer team continually improves. At practice, the players learn new strategies, which they try in a game. Afterward, they can rewatch the recording of the game and identify what went wrong, what went right, and what to work on in the following practice. Then it starts again from the beginning, except this time with better information. That's their feedback loop: practice, play, rewatch...practice, play, rewatch.

Now imagine a team that doesn't have a feedback loop in place. Sadly, I don't have to imagine this scenario, because when I was in high school, I was on the worst soccer team in our league. We got clobbered by every single school. Not for lack of trying—we practiced hard and truly wanted to win! But our coach didn't have a feedback loop in place, so despite our best efforts to improve, we kept making the same mistakes over and over again. Not only did we fail to improve—we actually got worse because we grew disheartened and frustrated, which opened the door to fatalism and a victim mentality.

This happens in our work too. Without an effective feedback loop, we keep making the same mistakes, growing frustrated, and even wanting to quit. But used properly, a weekly approach to tackling goals can become that powerful feedback loop, giving you regular chances to rest and reflect on how to improve. Each week can become an opportunity to try new things, evaluate your wins and losses, and fine-tune your approach. This kind of strategy results in small but very consistent incremental improvement. The compounding effect of those improvements quickly snowballs and becomes exceptional progress.

REASON #2: YOU CAN'T WIN EVERY DAY, BUT YOU CAN WIN EVERY WEEK

Expecting yourself to be perfect (or even good) every day is an impossible standard, because your performance will always vary. Even at your very best, the chaos of life will throw you curveballs. Why yoke yourself to that impossible expectation? I love playing to win the week because it means I don't have to be perfect every day. I can have lots of "bad days" and still win my week. I'll go even further: sometimes I feel like I got my butt kicked every single day, and yet I look back and realize that I won the week overall. Has that ever happened to you?

My client Alexis is a great example of this: she suffered from a bad case of perfectionism, pushing herself hard to grow her franchise business, even as she tried to be an exceptional mom to her three daughters. Her focus on being perfect every day had driven her to the edge of madness. I'm not kidding—there was a crazy look in her eyes when we first spoke. When I gave her permission to lose some days but still win the week, she immediately felt a sense of relief, almost like a weight had been lifted. At the same time, she started knocking down milestones that she'd been slipping on for over a year. Fast-forward eighteen months and her company had become one of Inc. 500's fastest-growing franchises. When I caught up with her, I asked her what had changed. How had she become such a superstar?

She laughed, "What's funny, Demir, is that I still feel so sloppy. I definitely wouldn't want anyone to see me behind the scenes of any given day. But I have to admit, I'm way more relaxed. I'm not driving myself nearly as hard. And even though I'm still getting

my butt kicked on some days, I'm winning nearly every week... nailing milestones and targets. I never feel perfect at any given moment, but when I look back on the last twelve months, I can't believe the difference in what I've accomplished. So I guess the results speak for themselves."

I find it significant that Alexis still describes herself as "sloppy" despite her transformation and unmistakable business success. This reveals something important about winning your week: it doesn't have to look pretty all the time to result in a win. In fact, it won't look pretty all the time.

**A PRODUCTIVITY SYSTEM THAT
DEMANDS PERFECTION IS
INHERENTLY UNSUSTAINABLE.**

@DEMIRANDCAREY

REASON #3: A WEEKLY APPROACH OFFERS MORE POTENTIAL PATHWAYS TO YOUR WIN

Another reason I like the idea of winning the week is that it opens up more pathways to a win. And the more potential routes you have to hit your goal, the more likely it is that you'll reach it—not to mention you'll feel less stress when one pathway is invariably blocked.

Flexible dieting is a great example of this effect in action. Flexible dieting means you get to eat anything you want, as long as it fits into your weekly calorie and macro targets. Although my identical twin brother had incredible success with flexible dieting for years, I resisted. I thought it required bodybuilder-like discipline. But finally, in the face of total failure after trying everything else, I broke down and tried it. To my surprise, instead of feeling rigid, I found that flexible dieting was...well, flexible.

I could make food choices that matched my mood, hunger, and environment each day. And all I had to do was make sure the total amount of protein, fats, and carbohydrates I consumed fit my target percentages by the end of the week. It's been years now, and I've found this approach to be sustainable and highly enjoyable, because the diet doesn't require perfection at every moment. I can make infinite food choices—even food “mistakes”—and still find a way to hit my targets and win my week.

A weekly workflow brings that same kind of flexibility to your productivity. You can have a bad moment or bad day and make up for it in another moment or on another day. You can take that walk when the sun is shining or ditch a few hours of work

to spend time with your kid after they've had a rough day. In that way, there are infinite choices you can make and still win your week.

My client Catherine captured this feeling perfectly:

There was an ease today that I haven't had in a LONG time. I was able to deal with a quick emergency trip to the doctor for my son's ear infection, be there for my eleven-year-old daughter when she had some drama with a friend, take a twenty-minute nap, and even take my dog for a walk. And I still got my number one priority done for the day. I was able to go make dinner without work anxiety hanging over my head. I am free for the rest of the evening and kind of feeling a bit lost. I'm not sure how this is possible, but it's SO eye-opening. I've had a noose around my neck for years.

Wow...I have a sense of hopefulness that this is how my life can feel all the time. No doubt there are still hard days ahead, but I'm going to keep this one for the record books—how I aspire to feel every day!

Rather than hoping that everything will go well during your week, I invite you to expect that it won't. Pulling your focus out to winning the week allows you to flow around obstacles and bend with the chaos of your life. No matter how things go awry—and they will—you can navigate adverse circumstances and reach your final destination.

REASON #4: A WEEKLY APPROACH ENCOURAGES YOU TO SYNCHRONIZE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY SKILLS INTO A COHESIVE WHOLE

All too often new clients come to me obsessed with niche productivity topics. The hot topic seems to change every few months, depending on what the gurus say online. These same clients are annoyed (and rightly so) that their productivity isn't great, despite all the effort they put into executing these productivity fads over the years.

The reason they aren't seeing results is simple. When you follow these "flavor of the month" productivity fads, you lose sight of the larger picture of your *workflow*. Workflow is an idea that encompasses everything that has to happen for you to get your work done and move the ball forward: the disciplines, the mind-sets, the techniques, the technologies, and the systems. I help move my clients away from productivity fads to a whole-systems approach, where the focus is synchronizing your productivity skills into a cohesive whole and getting the sensation of what it feels like when it's all working in harmony. This is an essential prerequisite for more advanced productivity practices—which is why so many folks get stuck. The tail is wagging the dog.

Think back to the first time you rode a bike. In the beginning it was overwhelming because it seemed like ten different skills: steering, pedaling, balancing, braking, navigating, and so on. You probably even crashed a couple times because it was so overwhelming. But eventually all of those skills synchronized until they became one integrated experience: simply riding the

bike. Once you had that rhythm, the bike just felt like an extension of yourself. Even after years of not riding, many people can pick it right back up again.

In the same way, there's a "feel" to your workflow—a synchronization of disparate skills into one cohesive experience. You'll know you've had your breakthrough moment when you stop feeling like you're doing ten separate things at once and everything merges in a way that feels almost effortless. Once you have that "feel"—that muscle memory—it's impossible to lose, sort of like riding a bike. By zooming out to a weekly view of your productivity, the emphasis on your productivity shifts from the micro to the macro. Instead of obsessing over perfecting disconnected productivity techniques, a weekly approach begins to integrate them all into one workflow.

REASON #5: A WEEKLY APPROACH LEVERAGES THE POWER OF PARKINSON'S LAW

Have you ever noticed that when you're under the gun—facing a deadline—you can get a month's worth of work done in one week? But without that deadline, you could drag out a day's worth of work into a week or even more?

Cyril Northcote Parkinson famously wrote, "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion." Since then, Parkinson's law has become the best-known explanation for why we can take three months to write a twenty-page essay or miraculously finish it in just one day. The problem with Parkinson's

law is that most of the time it works against us. Giving yourself three months to work on a project usually means you're going to do it the week before it's due. Ironically, giving yourself too much time to work on something can have precisely the opposite effect you intended.

The good news is that Parkinson's law can work powerfully in your favor. By cleverly playing with deadlines and setting a ceiling on the amount of time you're willing to spend on each project (also known as time boxing), you can create a sense of urgency that teases out your best performance. I find that a week is a good-sized chunk of time in which to take action on your biggest priorities. It's small enough that you don't procrastinate, but big enough to make a considerable dent in even the largest of projects. My clients are often surprised to find that they can accomplish something in one week that they had thought would take a month. Computer programmers call this a "sprint." It's a short period of time where they go all out to try to build something new. I find that thinking about your week in the same way leverages Parkinson's law to your maximal benefit.

No matter how big my goals are (writing and promoting this book took almost two years), I always break those goals into weekly sprints that I can cognitively manage. Thus I'm constantly leveraging Parkinson's law in my favor. Working like this generates a beneficial type of stress called eustress that keeps me primed and motivated. We'll talk more about eustress in Part 2 of this book.

CHAPTER RECAP

Killing yourself at work but still “losing the week” is no way to live. If you want to start hitting your goals without getting burned out or having to be perfect all the time, then you should zoom out to view your productivity with a more generous lens. I recommend playing your game on a weekly basis, because a week is a good-sized increment of time in which you can get a lot wrong and still pull out the win by Friday evening.

You’ll find that a weekly approach forms the basis of a powerful feedback loop. It opens up infinite paths to winning your week, even as it’s a far more humane way to live and work. A weekly approach will help you keep your perspective on what’s really important and keep you on the right side of Parkinson’s law. Most of all, it encourages you to synchronize all your productivity skills into a cohesive whole, leading to that breakthrough where your performance improves even as work starts to feel easier.

Hopefully I’ve convinced you, or at least gotten you interested. Let’s start exploring The Winning The Week Method.

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