

BOOK

Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World

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SYNOPSIS/APPLICATION

Newport is a contrarian whose goal is to move people to pursue greater productivity. This requires more than merely working harder, but focusing on intensity in distraction-free environments. Leave your multitasking at the door. There's a different way to get things done in today's economy.

QUOTES ABOUT DEEP WORK

"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 skill, and are hard to replicate."

"Shallow Work: Noncognitively 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."

"Deep work is not some nostalgic affectation of writers and early-twentieth-century philosophers. It's instead a skill that has great value today."

"We have an information economy that's dependent on complex systems that change rapidly . . . To remain valuable in our economy, therefore, you must master the art of quickly learning complicated things. This task requires deep work. If you don't cultivate this ability, you're likely to fall behind as technology advances."

"The ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is 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."

"Three to four hours a day, five days a week, of uninterrupted and carefully directed concentration, it turns out, can produce a lot of valuable output."

QUOTES ABOUT DIFFERENT KIND OF WORKERS

"The High-Skilled Workers Brynjolfsson and McAfee call the group personified by Nate Silver the "high-skilled" workers. Advances such as robotics and voice recognition are automating many low-skilled positions, but as these economists emphasize, "other technologies like data visualization, analytics, high speed communications, and rapid prototyping have augmented the contributions of more abstract and data-driven reasoning, increasing the values of these jobs." In other words, those with the oracular ability to work with and tease valuable results out of increasingly complex machines will thrive."

"The Superstars The ace programmer David Heinemeier Hansson provides an example of the second group that Brynjolfsson and McAfee predict will thrive in our new economy: "superstars." High-speed data networks and collaboration tools like e-mail and virtual meeting software have destroyed regionalism in many sectors of knowledge work. It no longer makes sense, for example, to hire a full-time programmer, put aside office space, and

pay benefits, when you can instead pay one of the world's best programmers, like Hansson, for just enough time to complete the project at hand."

"The Owners The final group that will thrive in our new economy – the group epitomized by John Doerr – consists of those with capital to invest in the new technologies that are driving the Great Restructuring. As we've understood since Marx, access to capital provides massive advantages. It's also true, however, that some periods offer more advantages than others. As Brynjolfsson and McAfee point out, postwar Europe was an example of a bad time to be sitting on a pile of cash, as the combination of rapid inflation and aggressive taxation wiped out old fortunes with surprising speed (what we might call the "Downton Abbey Effect")."

QUOTES ABOUT MASTERING DEEP WORK

"Two Core Abilities for Thriving in the New Economy 1. The ability to quickly master hard things. 2. The ability to produce at an elite level, in terms of both quality and speed."

"To join the group of those who can work well with these machines, therefore, requires that you hone your ability to master hard things. And because these technologies change rapidly, this process of mastering hard things never ends: You must be able to do it quickly, again and again."

"To learn hard things quickly, you must focus intensely without distraction. To learn, in other words, is an act of deep work."

"To build your working life around the experience of flow produced by deep work is a proven path to deep satisfaction."

"Within the overall structure of a project there is always room for individuality and craftsmanship... One hundred years from now, our engineering may seem as archaic as the techniques used by medieval cathedral builders seem to today's civil engineers, while our craftsmanship will still be honored."

"You need your own philosophy for integrating deep work into your professional life. (As argued in this rule's introduction, attempting to schedule deep work in an ad hoc fashion is not an effective way to manage your limited willpower.)"

"I instead tend to map out when I'll work deeply during each week at the beginning of the week, and then refine these decisions, as needed, at the beginning of each day (see Rule #4 for more details on my scheduling routines). By reducing the need to make decisions about deep work moment by moment, I can preserve more mental energy for the deep thinking itself."

"In a New York Times column on the topic, David Brooks summarizes this reality more bluntly: '[Great creative minds] think like artists but work like accountants.'"

"Your capacity for deep work in a given day is limited. If you're careful about your schedule . . . you should hit your daily deep work capacity during your workday. It follows, therefore, that by evening, you're beyond the point where you can continue to effectively work deeply. Any work you do fit into the night, therefore, won't be the type of high-value activities that really advance your career; your efforts will instead likely be confined to low-value shallow tasks (executed at a slow, low-energy pace). By deferring evening work, in other words, you're not missing out on much of importance."

"Deep work is exhausting because it pushes you toward the limit of your abilities. Performance psychologists have extensively studied how much such efforts can be sustained by an individual in a given day.* In their seminal paper on deliberate practice, Anders Ericsson and his collaborators survey these studies. They note that for someone new to such practice (citing, in particular, a child in the early stages of developing an expert-level skill), an hour a day is a reasonable limit. For those familiar with the rigors of such activities, the limit expands to something like four hours, but rarely more."