

Why Deep Work Matters in a Distracted World.

Deeper connection to our work :

The idea of 'deep work' is nothing new. The term was recently coined by Cal Newport, a professor, scientist, and author of "Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World." According to Newport, deep work is classified as 'professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limits.' It's been practiced in some ways or another by everyone from Carl Jung to United States President Barack Obama.

President Obama, a well-known 'night guy,' logged time deep into the evening from his office, reading, writing speeches, preparing memos, examining documents, and thinking. He'd be able to finish things during the late night hours that drew constant focus from the leader of the free world during the day. "Everybody carves out their time to get their thoughts together. There is no doubt that window is his window," said Rahm Emanuel, Mr. Obama's first chief of staff. "You can't block out a half-hour and try to do it during the day. It's too much incoming. That's the place where it can all be put aside and you can focus."

Carl Jung was so passionate about decoupling from the trappings of the world, he built a stone complex in Switzerland he could retreat to when he needed to reflect, think, and write. In his memoir, Jung credited the escape as being important to helping him be satisfied, sufficient, and restful.

These two examples seem almost contradictory. In fact, they are classic illustrations of escaping to a place of comfort as a way to get stuff done. If deep work is a vehicle for concentration and thinking that produces work, it can happen in the Oval Office or in the mountains of Switzerland. It's the ritual, scheduling, and location of the work that matter.

How to create meaningful work:

Deep work does not have to be tedious. In fact, it can be enjoyable, creative, meditative, and thought-provoking. Here are some tactics to integrate the principles of deep work into your schedule:

1. Work deeply:

It takes great patience and practice to get to the point where you can integrate long stretches of deep work into your schedule. Newport created an equation to explain the intensity required of deep work and compared it to students who pulled all-nighters in college.

Work accomplished = (time spent) x (intensity)

Work at a high level with dynamic and intense intervals that increase over time to produce a desirable outcome. Get in the zone for at least 90 minutes build up to periods that last anywhere from two to four hours, or more.



2. Protect your time:

Maintain a set of rituals and routines to ease deep work into your day more easily. Try implementing scheduling tactics into your workflow like:

A) Tallies – Keep a tally of the hours you spend working, or when you reach important milestones like pages read or words written.

B) Deep scheduling – Try scheduling deep work hours well in advance on a calendar, like two or four weeks ahead of time.

Scheduling and tracking time has a huge benefit of giving time back. Many academics, authors, and scientists have been able to produce ample amount of work while working normal hours and having time for personal pursuits or family on evenings and weekends.

3. Train your brain to do nothing:

Try for a moment, to sit still and do nothing. How long do you find it takes until the social stimuli and buzzing signals of your mobile device prove too much? If you can embrace sitting quietly meditating or thinking, or even staring into space, then you can train your brain to spend more time in deeper work.

4. Quit swimming upstream:

Decide for yourself what restrictions you can place on email and social media by removing it from your work week altogether, or by logging out and staying off for an entire day. Evaluate your personal and professional life and experiment where social fits and where it doesn't. Your result may be a month-long digital detox, or completely cutting the cord on social.

5. Cut the shallow work:

Endless meeting requests and instant email responses are turning knowledge workers into 'human routers' that create the shallow work that defines many of workplaces. We've been groomed to reply and respond because it feels like we're accomplishing something, when in reality, we're not.

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