

**MAKE TIME: HOW TO  
FOCUS ON WHAT  
MATTERS EVERY DAY**

*by Jake Knapp &  
John Zeratsky*

*Summary & Worksheet*

## The Book In Three Or More Sentences:

A productivity book full of short absurd-sounding tactics that promise to change how you use technology. In *Make Time: How to Focus on What Matters Every Day*, the two authors will help you divorce the attention-grabbing infinity pools - i.e. noisy sites and social media - and make you less busy and less distracted. A great read that will remind you what to prioritize plus show you how to design a life absent of wild busywork.

## The Core Idea:

Getting more done is not about multitasking or racing through tasks. It's about figuring out what actually matters and designing a life around those things. In the book, Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky offer a framework that will show you how to make time for your family, business, whatever. Then, explain how to set boundaries and obstacles to protect yourself from the Busy Bandwagon (our chaotic culture obsessed with productivity) and the Infinity Pools (apps and sites that always have something new to show).

### *Highlights:*

- *Change your defaults to change your life.*
- *Focus on one important thing per day - your highlight.*
- *Block Infinity Pools - online places with endless replenishing information.*

## 5 Key Lessons from Make Time: How to Focus on What Matters Every Day:

- *Lesson #1: We Spent Most of Our Time Responding To The Defaults*
- *Lesson #2: Start Your Day With One High-Priority Goal*
- *Lesson #3: Stay Laser-Focused and Away from the Always-Connected World*
- *Lesson #4: Use Your Body To Energize Your Brain*
- *Lesson #5: Take Time to Reflect On What Worked and What Didn't*

### Lesson #1: We Spent Most of Our Time Responding To The Defaults

If your to-do list is crammed with tasks, what you least want to hear? I bet it's, "let's add another meeting to your calendar."

If you know what to do you want more alone, uninterrupted time so you can focus and do your damn job. Not pretend to care about the slides scrolling in a room full of other people thinking the same as you, "this meeting is crap!"

But that's how our society operates. Instead of focusing on the priorities, by default, we do what other people do or ask us to do.

We strive to be responsive. We fill our calendars with meetings. We engage in meaningless chats and tasks only because other people do them. Eventually, this way of living becomes the normal way of living.

These things became our defaults.

And the biggest defaults in our chaotic world are the following two mentioned in the book:

The two forces that force you to be busy:

- The Busy Bandwagon: Currently, everyone in our society believes that in order to become successful in life you need to fill every breathing minute of your time with to-dos – more meetings, more emails, more networking. Checking email and responding to requests shouldn't be avoided, it should be anticipated.
- The Infinity Pools: The authors call Infinity Pools all the sources of

endless replenishing information that aim to keep you inside for as long as possible – imagine social media websites.

These two forces, when not properly managed, become our defaults.

Meaning that we don't question their existence. We don't stop ourselves and ask, "Hey, why am I using Facebook? Probably I should stop and finally start writing that novel I always wanted?"

Nope. We don't have such an internal dialog going on inside our busy heads. We hop on the bandwagon, and we stay inside the pools that offer endless pleasure because everyone else is there.

Sadly, this way of living takes us further away from what we want from life.

Fortunately, though, the authors of Make Time created a 4-step framework (discussed in the other 4 lessons) that can help you set your own defaults and focus on what you consider important.

*“While the Busy Bandwagon defaults to endless tasks, the Infinity Pools default to endless distraction. Our phones, laptops, and televisions are filled with games, social feeds, and videos. Everything is at our fingertips, irresistible, even addictive. Every bump of friction is smoothed away.” Jake Knapp & John Zeratsky*

## **Lesson #2: Start Your Day With One High-Priority Goal**

Setting multiple goals and complex tasks is not the proper way to get more done. You need to focus on one thing.

“What will be the highlight of your day?” ask the authors of the book.

Starting your day with one simple goal in mind will prompt you to actually do it.

Here are a few tactics from the book that will help you find your highlight and explain why it's important:

- Prioritize your life: Not quite sure what life is all about? You lack meaning and purpose? Make a list of the things that matter in your

life. Think about what's most meaningful to you (but will also be beneficial) and focus on the important tasks that will help you make progress.

- Write it down: As obvious as it sounds, writing your main task for the day is the first thing you need to do. By putting our goal on paper we increase the likelihood of accomplishing it. Once you have it on paper you can glue it on your forehead or give it to your wife so she can later keep you accountable.
- Groundhog it: It's a new day and you're not quite sure what to do? Repeat yesterday. If you're a writer this will be pretty obvious – simply write. For other industries, it can be a bit more difficult (launching rockets) to do the same as yesterday but you surely can find something related to what was important the day before.
- Design your day: If you want to get shit done you need to design your day around your highlight. This means that you should first schedule time to accomplish your priority for the day. Then, everything else gets planned.
- Bulldoze your calendar and say no: Rarely things go as we planned. Something happens and then something else happens. Eventually, you end up responding to emails and watching Netflix. When your calendar looks like a shopping mall in the middle of a Black Friday sale – crowded and chaotic – see what you can ditch. As the authors write, “Imagine a tiny bulldozer driving through your calendar, pushing events around.” Re-arrange things to find the time. If this doesn't work out – just say no to the unimportant tasks.

*“When you schedule something, you're making a commitment to yourself, sending yourself a tiny message that says: “I'm going to do this.” Jake Knapp & John Zeratsky*

## **Lesson #3: Stay Laser-Focused and Away from the Always-Connected World**

Once you know what's your highlight, you need to make sure it gets done.

And in the era of endless distractions, the only way you can get actually finish tasks is by entering Laser mode.

The logic behind this tactic is quite simple: “The best way to defeat distraction is to make it harder to react.”

Here are a couple of tactics to reclaim your time from the despotic technologies:

- Remove Infinity Pools from your device: Not that we're mentally weak, devices are simply designed to lure us in. The best way to gain more time and reduce the chances of getting distracted is by permanently removing apps that are purposefully created to distract you – mainly email and social media apps.
- Log out from everything: Even if you do need to use email or send a tweet, log out once you're done. Logging out of social media is the worst nightmare of app creators. They want to keep you inside for as long as possible so they can show you ads. By logging out you're gaining back your control and making figures like Mark Zuckerberg a little less rich.
- Put a timer on the internet: Ultrafast internet connection is always available – no matter where we are. But this is worse than TV. Unlike the screen attached to your wall, you don't have a remote control to turn off your Wi-Fi. What you can do though, is to put a timer on your router or install software to temporarily block the internet. With nothing to check, focusing on your task will be surely prioritized.
- Spot time craters: "I'll just update my Instagram profile, how long can that take?" According to the public – a few hours. See, we rarely think about the consequences when we publish something online. Though posting a tweet will take you no longer than 60 seconds, the subsequent events can smash a whole hour of your day. After all, you'll return at least a couple of times to check how your tweet is "performing." These are the so-called time craters. Don't create them yourself if you want to stay focused.
- Schedule email time and empty your inbox: Checking and replying to emails it's a job on its own. On average people receive around 100 emails per day. The best thing you can do to free up some time for other things is to schedule email time. Forget the notion about inbox zero. Having 0 emails is nice to have but in reality, if your main goal is to empty your inbox you'll literally sit and reply to emails throughout the whole day.

*"Above all, taking control of your inbox requires a mental shift from "as fast as possible" to "as slow as you can get away with." Respond slowly to emails, chats, texts, and other messages."  
 Jake Knapp & John Zeratsky*

## **Lesson #4: Use Your Body To Energize Your Brain**

Your body is not merely a vessel to transport your brain to meetings and conferences. It's something that requires maintenance, too.

A lot of people forget that.

Unfortunately, the way the world operates is also contributing to our abnormal weight and intolerance towards our physic. Since there are so many fun things we could be doing, we start to believe that working out is only for teenagers – it's not.

The third step to make more time is to add some movement in your day. Because as the authors argue inside the book, “If you want energy for your brain, you need to take care of your body.”

It might sound counterintuitive – how spending time working out will help me make time? Well, if you never set foot in a gym you'll likely to get tired quickly. This will make you weak and you'll most probably hop online for some quick social media checking. Which, of course, always expands.

Here are tactics that will help you get moving:

- Keep moving: We might have access to sophisticated tools and gadgets but our core needs are no so different from our ancestors who lived inside caves. And do you know what they did through most of their day? They moved around. Not like us, stuck behind a computer. To keep your energy high, it's vital to keep moving. Even if you exercise for about twenty minutes a day in your apartment, do it. Don't stress about going to fancy gyms. The important thing is to make a move.
- Eat like a hunter-gatherer: Do you know what was missing 10,000 years ago? Grocery stores. A simple way to keep your energy up is to eat like a prehistoric caveman. “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” Whenever possible, eat real food – not some stuffed with sugar microwave food. Throw out your snacks and stack your refrigerator with greens, apples, and other fruits.
- Stay hungry: There's always food around. If it's not lunchtime we're most probably having a snack. That's our modern default. Our offices are full of treats and it's hard to say no to yet another birthday cake. If there're no apples in the office, pack one when you go leave the house. Pretend that you're a toddler. After all, you won't give your kid a pack of Cheetos before lunch.
- Experiment with caffeine: Most people get up and prepare a coffee. Most of the time they don't need it, this is simply their daily ritual. You can change this default and drink coffee (only) right before you crash. This way you'll get the most out of this black energizer.
- Take a walk in the woods: Forget about the bus or taking your car – take a walk to the office. Not only you'll boost your energy, but you can also use the “free” time when walking for thinking or for listen-

ing to a podcast. If there's a park around, great, take a detour and enjoy the nature around. Studies mentioned in the book show that even brief exposure to a forest lowers our stress levels.

## **Lesson #5: Take Time to Reflect On What Worked and What Didn't**

You're missing out if you're not analyzing your day and making proper adjustments to your schedule.

And I get why you don't do it. You're busy. We all are.

But taking some time at the end of the day to see what happened, why it happened, and what can be done to make it better is a great way to optimize your results. Or in other words, reflecting.

This is the fourth step of the Make Time framework.

There are no fancy tactics in this section of the book. You don't need a complicated note-taking app to take notes of your day either. You just need a sheet of paper and a couple of spare minutes at the end of the day to see what was done and think about what can be done better.

In the book, the authors recommend taking note of the following things before going to bed:

- Writing down your highlight – and did you make time to do it?
- Measuring your focus level – how will you measure your level of focus?
- What tactic did you try today – and how did it go?
- Tactic to try tomorrow – what you want to try tomorrow to make sure you stay focused?
- What you're grateful for today?

The more you reflect on how your day is unfolding, the better you'll become at changing your defaults.

And when you change your nasty time-consuming defaults you will literally change your life for the better.

*“Don't worry about committing to a lifetime of evening journaling (we're not there yet, either).” Jake Knapp & John Zeratsky*



## Actionable Notes:

- Create a little inconvenience: The main reason you're unable to escape the modern trap of liking pictures and sharing what you had for dinner is because it's so convenient. Apps are designed to suck the life out of you. To take the control back, add a little inconvenience. Log out of your accounts. Delete them from your phone. Change the password for Facebook with a really complicated one and forget where you wrote it down. Adding a little discomfort to your life can be a good thing.
- Prioritize your highlight: Do what's important first, then everything else. You can't have too many important things for the day. When you get up, or even better, before going to bed, ask yourself: "What's going to be the highlight for tomorrow?" Scheduling time for what's important will increase the chances of doing this thing.
- Set expectations: Do you respond immediately when someone sends you a message? If you are, you're surely distracted. Make it hard for people to contact you and set expectations. Reply on your own terms – when it's time to check email for example. Don't teach other people that you're always available. It might sound like a jerk move but once others are used to your inevitability, they will respect you for that.
- Take care of your body: Unless you're athlete, don't aim for a ripped beach body. But don't neglect it. Exercising and eating proper food are the best ways to ensure your mind will stay sharp. And this shouldn't take a lot of your time. A 10 minutes workout is usually enough to keep your energy up.
- Groundhog it: Don't know what to do today? Repeat yesterday. Getting better at one specific thing requires months of hard work – usually doing the same thing. If you're a writer, and if you want to make it big, it's obvious that you need to write daily. But don't just repeat yesterday, take note of what worked and double down on that while removing the fluff.

## Commentary and My Personal Takeaway

We evolved to love novelty because this helped us find food and new opportunities. We evolved to love stories because they helped us learn how to communicate. Nowadays, though, these same things that helped us level-up as a species are collapsing our productivity.

Fortunately, we have *Make Time: How to Focus on What Matters Every Day*.

This short how-to book will equip you with the tools you need to abandon the self-sabotaging activities you do online. Quit the nasty habits that keep you falsely busy and prevent you from hopping inside the Infinite pools that exist solely to fragment your attention.

The book is packed with bite-size tips that will help you, finally, manage your time. The tactics will motivate you to re-think your relationship with technology and finally make time for what's important.

If you're a clumsy internet user and if you constantly find yourself in the middle of the endless online abyss, this book is for you.

Key takeaway:

Take better care of your body. If your energy is low you'll be more likely to ditch your rules and indulge in low-level activities. Regularly exercising will not only help you get fitter, but it will also help you resist the surrounding distractions.

## Notable Quotes:

*“Combine the four-plus hours the average person spends on their smartphone with the four-plus hours the average person spends watching television, and distraction is a full-time job.” Jake Knapp & John Zeratsky*

*“And if these Infinity Pools are hard to resist today, they'll be harder to resist tomorrow.” Jake Knapp & John Zeratsky*

*“You can't go live in a cave, throw away your gadgets, and swear off technology entirely. But you can redesign the way you use technology to stop the reaction cycle.” Jake Knapp & John Zeratsky*

## *What to read next:*

- Actionable [Book Summary: Mastery](#) by Robert Greene
- Actionable [Book Summary: The Wisdom of Insecurity](#) by Alan Watts
- Actionable [Book Summary: The Great Mental Models \(Vol. 1\)](#) by Shane Parrish

# INTERACTIVE SHEET FOR NOTE-TAKING

*Reading alone won't help you understand the actionable notes. You need to engage with the content. Answer the question below (just type inside the boxes) to outline your future steps:*

1. Add a little inconvenience to the sites that are taking most of your time:
2. Before going to bed, ask yourself, "What's my highlight for tomorrow?"
3. Schedule time for distractions - checking email, checking social media:
4. Schedule at least 10 minutes per day for exercising:
5. Don't know what to do today? Repeat yesterday:

*Don't forget to save your changes.*