

Productivity Game



PDF Package

*75+ one-page summaries of the
best books on personal productivity*

by Nathan Lozeron

Table of Contents

Introduction

Section 1: Success Mindset

<u>Page</u>	<u>Book</u>
9	Mindset
10	Productivity Principle: Growth vs. Fixed Mindset
11	SuperBetter
12	One Small Step Can Change Your Life
13	The Compound Effect
14	Barking Up The Wrong Tree
15	Ego is the Enemy
16	The Obstacle is the Way
17	13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do
18	12 Rules for Life
19	The ONE Thing
20	Essentialism
21	Productivity Principle: Positive 'No'
22	Your One Word
23	Awaken the Giant Within
24	Man's Search for Meaning
25	Psycho-Cybernetics
26	The Dip
27	Grit
28	Can't Hurt Me
29	How to Stop Worrying and Start Living
30	The Upside of Stress
31	Decisive
32	Thinking, Fast and Slow
33	Smarter Faster Better
34	Principles
35	Designing Your Life
36	The Code of the Extraordinary Mind
37	Born for This
38	So Good They Can't Ignore
39	Mastery
40	The Talent Code
41	Range
42	Originals
43	Give and Take
44	How to Win Friends and Influence People
45	The Coaching Habit
46	Never Split the Difference
47	Getting to Yes

48	Crucial Conversations
49	The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team
50	Productivity Principle: The Five-Minute Favor
51	Extreme Ownership

Section 2: High Performance Habits

<u>Page</u>	<u>Book</u>
53	Atomic Habits
54	Mini Habits
55	High Performance Habits
56	The Rise of Superman
57	Productivity Principle: The 4% Zone
58	Spark
59	Are You Fully Charged?
60	The Miracle Morning
61	Own the Day, Own Your Life
62	Why We Sleep
63	The Willpower Instinct
64	The Power of Full Engagement
65	Indistractable
66	Stillness is the Key
67	Performing Under Pressure
68	Emotional Agility
69	Meditations
70	10-Minute Toughness
71	10% Happier
72	The Happiness Advantage
73	Choose Yourself
74	Drive
75	Switch
76	Rethinking Positive Thinking
77	The 5 Elements of Effective Thinking
78	The First 20 Hours
79	Make It Stick
80	Unlimited Memory
81	Limitless
82	A Mind for Numbers
83	The Art of Learning
84	Ultralearning
85	Peak
86	The 4-Hour Chef
87	How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big
88	The Charisma Myth
89	Made to Stick
90	Presence

91	The 5 Second Rule
92	Hooked
93	Your Brain at Work

Section 3: Business Strategy

<u>Page</u>	<u>Book</u>
95	The Personal MBA
96	Rework
97	\$100 Startup + 100 Side Hustles
98	Zero to One
99	Blue Ocean Strategy
100	Competing Against Luck
101	The Lean Startup
102	Sprint
103	Perennial Seller
104	To Sell Is Human
105	Influence
106	Exactly What to Say
107	Start with Why + Find Your Why
108	Building a StoryBrand
109	The E-Myth Revisited
110	Anything you Want
111	Good to Great

Section 4: Execution

<u>Page</u>	<u>Book</u>
113	Make Time
114	The Effective Executive
115	The War of Art
116	Measure What Matters
117	Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time
118	The 12 Week Year
119	The 4 Disciplines of Execution
120	When
121	Flow
122	Deep Work
123	Productivity Principle: Intensity x Time
124	Productivity Principle: Predict to Perform
125	Productivity Principle: Process vs. Product
126	Little Bets
127	Eat That Frog!
128	Getting Things Done
129	The Bullet Journal Method
130	The Checklist Manifesto

131	Productivity Principle: Batch Buckets
132	Tribe of Mentors
133	The 4-Hour Workweek
134	How to Have a Good Day

Section #1:

***Success
Mindset***

Insights from *Mindset* by Carol Dweck

Do you feel like you are constantly being judged? Do you go out of your way to 'look smart'?

If so, you've adopted what author Carol Dweck calls a fixed mindset. A fixed mindset sees himself or herself and everyone around them as possessing a set amount of cognitive and physical ability.

A fixed mindset thinks: "If I appear to be bad at something (school subject, sport, business skill, etc.), I'm haven't been blessed with the gifts to do it well."

This belief seems innocent, but it ultimately leads to a life of fear, avoidance, and low interest for anything outside of your comfort zone.

Why?

If something is uncomfortable or hard, then you just don't have the mental or physical capacity to do it. If it's hard and uncomfortable now, it will always be uncomfortable and hard for you.

Luckily, you can change your mindset and learn to be more curious than afraid and sustain your interest and effort when things get hard.

The first step to going from a fixed mindset (believing challenges are a threat) to a growth mindset (believing that challenges are a chance to grow your mental and physical abilities) is to realize the truth about your brain.

Over the past 40 years scientists have shown that we can change our brains and grow our cognitive abilities in three fundamental ways:



You can physically grow sections of the brain

Several years ago, before taxi drivers used GPS, brain researchers took brain imaging scans of experienced London taxi drivers. Researchers (Maguire, 2011) noticed that the more times a London taxi driver had spent driving a taxi in London, the larger a region of the brain associated with spatial awareness and memory (the hippocampus) had become. The brain scans revealed that the more demands London taxi drivers put on their brains (the more they had to navigate the challenging London road system), the more they were able to expand a region in the brain and do their job more effectively.



You can speed up your brain circuits

However, not all brain regions can physically expand, therefore, other brain regions need to make brain circuits faster. This is achieved through a process called 'myelination.' As I briefly touched on in my 'Deep Work' book summary, when you focus intensely on a single subject for a period of time, you start forming white sheathes on your brain cells call myelin. This myelin is like the insulation on the copper wires inside your home. A brain circuit with myelin can transmit information ten times faster than a brain circuit without myelin.



You can re-wire your brain

One peer reviewed study (Taub, 1995) showed that when a person practices the guitar for thousands of hours, they activate more of their brain than novice players. When novice guitar players play the guitar, they only activate a region in their brain associated to a finger in their left hand (the hand they use to play different notes). However, when experienced guitar players play the guitar, they expand the activation of their brains to include regions associated with the fingers and palm of the left hand. It's like re-wiring a house to make a light switch that used to only turn on a lamp in your living room, and now it turns on two or three additional lamps in the house.

Once you know the truth about your ability to grow, it makes sense to change the way you think about challenges:

- When a fixed mindset person approaches a challenge, he or she thinks: "Will I look smart or stupid while doing this?"
- When a growth mindset person approaches a challenge, he or she thinks: **"How might I learn and grow?"**
- After a difficult challenge, a fixed mindset person will think, "I'm not smart enough to do this."
- After a difficult challenge, a growth mindset person will think, "I'm not smart enough to do this, **YET.**"

By making the transition from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset your story goes from: "I am who I am. My personality, my intelligence, and my talent are fixed." To **"I am a constant learner. My abilities are constantly evolving and growing."**

"Did I win? Did I lose? Those are the wrong questions. The correct question is: Did I make my best effort?" If so, he says, "You may be outscored but you will never lose." - Carol Dweck

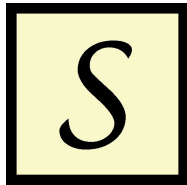
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Section #2:

High Performance Habits

“The most effective (improvement) method of all: deliberate practice. It is the gold standard, the ideal to which anyone learning a skill should aspire.” - Anders Ericsson

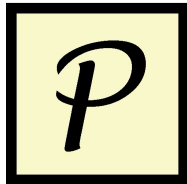
Turn your practice sessions into deliberate practice sessions by adding S.P.I.C.E.:



Specific performance target

If you have vague performance targets like ‘get better’ or ‘succeed,’ you’re simply wasting your time. To improve performance, you need specific performance goals. Steve Faloon was able to recite 82 digits by having clear goals the entire way. If he could successfully recite 39 digits, his sole focus was getting to 40 digits.

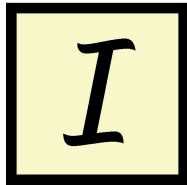
“Deliberate practice involves well-defined, specific goals and often involves improving some aspect of the target performance; it is not aimed at some vague overall improvement.” - Anders Ericsson



Periods of intense undistracted focus

Before Steve attempted 39 digits, he gave himself an exciting pep talk (“You got this Steve!”) before concentrating intently on the numbers Anders gave him. For those 1 hour sessions all that mattered was hitting his targets.

“Deliberate practice is deliberate, that is, it requires a person’s full attention and conscious actions. You seldom improve much without giving the task your full attention. It isn’t enough to simply follow a teacher’s or coach’s directions.” - Anders Ericsson

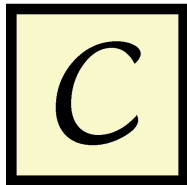


Immediate feedback

To discover a mental representation that works, you’ll need to test various mental representations during each practice. In order to verify if a representation is effective or not, you’ll need to receive accurate and immediate feedback. The quicker the feedback, the faster you’ll improve your mental representation.

Steve knew if his approach was working after each attempt. Imagine if he had to wait 10 minutes before knowing whether the last six attempts were correct...

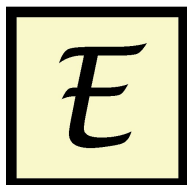
“Without feedback— either from yourself or from outside observers— you cannot figure out what you need to improve on or how close you are to achieving your goals.” - Anders Ericsson



Cycling between comfort and discomfort

Approach skill development the same way you’d approach bodybuilding: a period of discomfort (lift weights slightly heavier than what you can currently lift) followed by a period of ease and comfort (recovery phase) to grow new muscles and lift larger weights next week. Improvement only comes from a willingness to push yourself beyond your comfort zone followed by a willingness to fully rest and recover (expert performers sleep on average 8.5 hr / night).

“Deliberate practice takes place outside one’s comfort zone and requires a student to constantly try things that are just beyond his or her current abilities. Thus it demands near-maximal effort, which is generally not enjoyable.” - Anders Ericsson



Expert coaching from proven performers

Expert coaches provide effective mental representations to jump start your progress.

Expert coaching also heightens each aspect of the deliberate practice method by:

- Ensuring you know the path to excellence and providing intermediate goals along the way.
- Using social pressure to hold you accountable and raise the intensity of practice.
- Providing accurate and immediate feedback because they know exactly what to look for.
- Pushing you harder than you want, but not pushing you too far.

“Deliberate practice develops skills that other people have already figured out how to do and for which effective training techniques have been established. The practice regimen should be designed and overseen by a teacher or coach who is familiar with the abilities of expert performers and with how those abilities can best be developed.” - Anders Ericsson

The Ultimate Goal:

“Deliberate practice both produces and depends on effective mental representations. Improving performance goes hand in hand with improving mental representations; as one’s performance improves, the representations become more detailed and effective, in turn making it possible to improve even more.” - Anders Ericsson

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Section #3:

Business Strategy

Insights from *The Personal MBA* by Josh Kaufman

Do I need an MBA to be a successful businessperson?

"Here's the answer: five simple words that will save you years of effort and hundreds of thousands of dollars: Skip business school. Educate yourself." – Josh Kaufman

3 Disturbing Truths about MBA School

- MBA School debt takes the average MBA student 12 years to pay off.
- MBA Schools teach out-dated business practices that are worthless by the time you graduate.
- Getting an MBA degree doesn't guarantee you a high-paying job or make you a skilled manager. One Stanford University study analyzed MBA graduates for 40 years and found that having an MBA had zero correlation to career success and salary increases.

After learning these disturbing facts about MBA School, author Josh Kaufman decided to skip MBA School and teach himself the fundamentals of business. After reading 100's of business books, he realized that business was far less complicated than he initially thought. In fact, every successful business could be explained using the following 5 part system:

5 Part Framework to Evaluate Any Business



Value Creation: Is the business creating something people *actually* want to buy?

In the book 'Trade-Off: Why Some Things Catch On, and Others Don't,' Kevin Maney identifies two primary characteristics of products and services that people are willing to pay for: convenience and high-fidelity.

- Convenience means quick, reliable, easy, and flexible.
- High-fidelity means high aesthetic appeal, high emotional impact, and a high degree social status.

"If you're craving pizza, a table at the original Pizzeria Uno in Chicago is high-fidelity; Domino's home delivery is convenient. Accordingly, Pizzeria Uno benefits more from making the dining experience remarkable, while Domino's benefits more from delivering decent pizza as quickly as possible." – Josh Kaufman



Marketing: Is the business attracting and holding people's attention?

When Apple announced the first iPod, they told the world that the new device would be "1000 songs in your pocket." This headline was remarkable at the time, and it violated people's expectations. The goal of every marketing team should be attracting attention through remarkable and unexpected messages.

"In the classic marketing book Purple Cow, Seth Godin uses a wonderful metaphor to illustrate this principle. A field full of brown cows is boring. A purple cow violates the viewer's expectations, which naturally attracts Attention and interest. If you design your offer to be Remarkable— unique enough to pique your prospect's curiosity— it'll be significantly easier to attract attention." – Josh Kaufman



Sales: Do people believe and trust the business enough to make a transaction?

If a stranger were to walk up to you at the bus stop and offer you \$20 in exchange for \$10, would you make the transaction? Probably not, because you don't believe or trust the offer is legitimate. However, if your friend standing next to you could vouch for this stranger, you'd probably make the transaction.

Sales is all about making a customer believe and trust the business can deliver on it's promise. The quickest way to build belief and trust is social proof. Examples of social proof include one hundred 5-star Amazon reviews, or getting a recommendation from a key influencer like Oprah. Thousands of people trust Oprah, and that trust is transferred to any product she recommends, leading to thousands of sales.



Value delivery: Is the business exceeding customer expectations?

Customer expectations have to be high enough for the customer to make an initial purchase. After the purchase is made, however, if the performance of the offering surpasses customer expectations the customer will be more likely to buy again and recommend the business to friends.

Zappos, the online shoe company, provide their customers with free expedited shipping, despite not advertising free expedited shipping; the surprise that comes from exceeding customer expectations is far more valuable. The best way a business can reliably exceed customer expectations is building efficient systems of delivery, and providing excellent customer service.



Finance: Is the business making more money than it is spending?

The final part is straightforward: ensure more money is coming in than going out.

"It's really not any more complicated than that. Yes, there can be fancy models and jargon, but ultimately you're simply using numbers to decide whether or not your business is operating the way you intended, and whether or not the results are enough...to justify all of the time and effort that goes into running the operation." – Josh Kaufman

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Section #4:

Execution

Insights from Deep Work by Cal Newport

“My commitment to depth has rewarded me. In the ten-year period following my college graduation, I published four books, earned a PhD, wrote peer-reviewed academic papers at a high rate, and was hired as a tenure-track professor at Georgetown University.” – Cal Newport

Shallow Work: non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks that can be completed in a semi-distracted state. Shallow work includes answering email, sorting documents, and running errands. The less engagement your work requires, the more shallow it is.

“In an age of network tools, knowledge workers increasingly replace deep work with the shallow alternative—constantly sending and receiving e-mail messages like human network routers, with frequent breaks for quick hits of distraction. Larger efforts that would be well served by deep thinking, such as forming a new business strategy or writing an important grant application, get fragmented into distracted dashes that produce muted quality.” – Cal Newport

Any task that you complete while in a semi-distracted state will likely be automated in the near future (completed by software programs and/or robots). Or the task will be completed by several thousand people around the world who are willing to do it for far less money than you are doing it for. The more shallow work you do, the less rare and valuable your skills are, and the more likely you’ll be replaced by a cheaper alternative.

Deep Work: hard but important intellectual work that is completed during long uninterrupted periods of time. Deep work requires a state of distraction-free concentration to push your cognitive capabilities to their limit and create new value that is hard to replicate. Here are 3 Examples of Deep Work:

- Writer Mark Twain worked in a cabin isolated from the main house, requiring his family to blow a horn to attract his attention for meals.
- While writing the Harry Potter books, JK Rowling’s only tweet for the first year and a half after joining Twitter was: “This is the real me, but you won’t be hearing from me often I am afraid, as pen and paper is my priority at the moment.”
- CEO Bill Gates famously conducted “Think Weeks” twice a year, during which he would isolate himself in a lakeside cottage to do nothing but read and think big thoughts. One think week led to the famous “Internet Tidal Wave” memo which led to development of Microsoft’s powerful web browser.

If you want to develop skills and produce work that the world considers rare and valuable, you need to develop a daily deep work ritual.

4 Deep Work Ritual Requirements:



Dedicated workspace

“Your ritual needs to specify a location for your deep work efforts. This location can be as simple as your normal office with the door shut and desk cleaned off (a colleague of mine likes to put a hotel-style “do not disturb” sign on his office door when he’s tackling something difficult). If it’s possible to identify a location used only for depth—for instance, a conference room or quiet library—the positive effect can be even greater.” – Cal Newport



Exact end time

“Give yourself a specific time frame to keep the session a discrete challenge and not an open-ended slog.” – Cal Newport
By establishing a clear end time for each deep work session, you give yourself permission to focus intensely and experience discomfort because you know exactly when the discomfort will end.



Easy starting sequence

“Your ritual needs rules and processes to keep your efforts structured. Without this structure, you’ll have to mentally litigate again and again what you should and should not be doing during these sessions and keep trying to assess whether you’re working sufficiently hard. These are unnecessary drains on your willpower reserves.” – Cal Newport



Power-ups

“Your ritual needs to ensure your brain gets the support it needs to keep operating at a high level of depth. For example, the ritual might specify that you start with a cup of good coffee, or make sure you have access to enough food of the right type to maintain energy, or integrate light exercise such as walking to help keep the mind clear.” – Cal Newport

“If you don’t produce, you won’t thrive—no matter how skilled or talented you are.” – Cal Newport

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