

# Deep Work:

## How to Survive the Attention Economy

### Why Deep Work is a game changer for leaders [in 3-minutes]

The average CEO has just 28 minutes of uninterrupted focus a day. For the rest of the time, they are fielding 50 to 60 interruptions per day, 80% of which are considered unimportant. Given that it then takes 23 minutes to get back on task after such a distraction, it is little wonder that people aren't spending time in "the flow state": a space where people are up to five times more productive.

So, how can leaders overcome distractions and spend more time in a powerful flow state?

We've turned to Cal Newport's Deep Work for answers. Deep Work offers a method for minimising interruptions and maximising our capacity for deep thinking, achieving a flow state where high-quality work is produced.

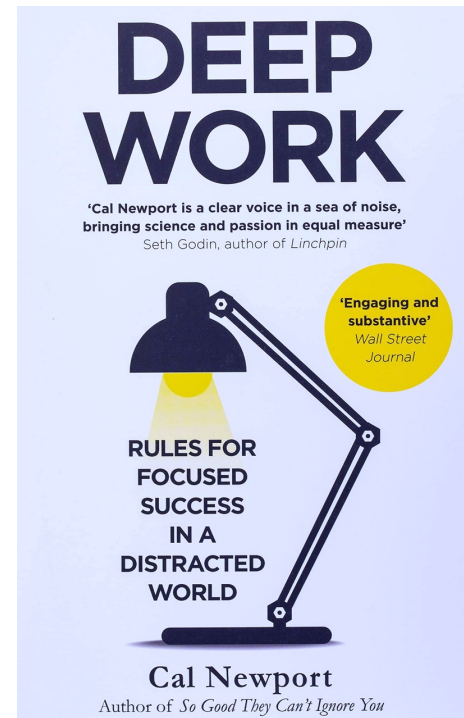
**High-Quality Work Produced**  
**= (Time Spent) x (Intensity of Focus)**

Deep Work refers to professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that unlocks our cognitive potential. It can help leaders produce at an elite level by consolidating work into intense and uninterrupted pulses.

We have a finite amount of focus that becomes depleted as we draw on it. By creating habits that allow for periods of unbroken concentration, leaders can benefit significantly from deep work practices.

So what are the best leaders doing to improve focus and effectiveness? Below are some of the key insights gleaned from Newport's work:

**"To produce at your peak level, you need to work for extended periods with full concentration on a single task free of distraction."** Cal Newport



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



**“Once you are wired for distraction, you crave it.”** Cal Newport

## Drain the Shallows

By reflecting where typical work activities sit on a spectrum from shallow to deep, leaders can prioritise focus and unlock powerful flow states. Draining the shallows involves the following 3 steps:

1. **Place typical work activities on a spectrum from shallow to deep** (shallow includes involvement in low value activities such as unimportant meetings or spending excessive time on social media; deep being spending time engaging in complex problem solving or strategy development).
2. **Bias your time towards deep work and set aside time blocked portions of your day for managing your shallow workload.**
3. **Finish your day at a designated time** (e.g. 5:30pm). Newport calls this commitment *fixed-schedule productivity*, as he fixes the firm goal of not working past a certain time and then works backward to find productivity strategies that allow him to meet this goal. *Fixed-schedule productivity* is a meta-habit that’s simple to adopt but broad in its impact. If you have to choose just one behaviour that reorients your focus toward the deep, it should be this one.

## Embrace Boredom

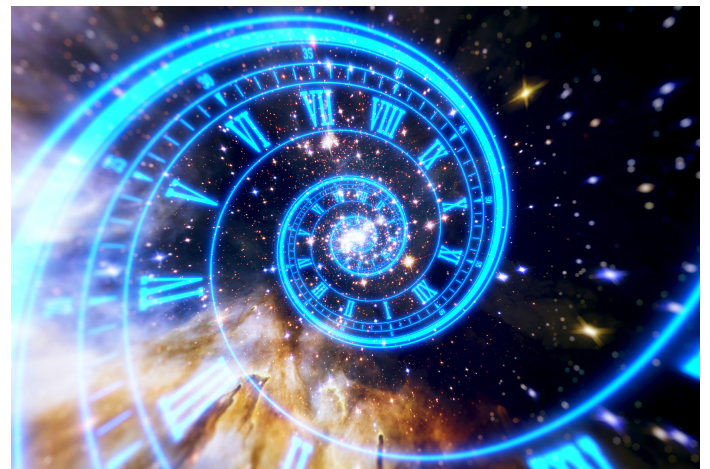
Our brains become dependent on on-demand distraction, as dopamine is released whenever our phones light up with a new message or request. It is hard to shake the addiction, even when you want to focus on a given task. By embracing boredom, however, we can begin to wean ourselves off the dopamine loop and rehabilitate our ability to focus.

## Work Like Teddy Roosevelt

Inject the occasional dash of Roosevelt intensity (no e-mail breaks, no daydreaming, no social media browsing) into your workday. Roosevelt dashes leverage artificial deadlines to help systematically increase the level of focus that can regularly achieved – providing a kind of interval training for the attention centre of the brain.

## Meditate Productively

The goal of productive meditation is to take a period in which you are occupied physically but not mentally – walking, jogging, driving, showering – and focus your attention on a well-defined professional problem. As in mindfulness meditation, it is important to continue to bring attention to the problem at hand when it wanders or stalls. While the end goal of productive meditation differs from traditional meditation, it is also an exercise in maintaining focus and resisting the lure of distraction.



**“If you are interested in developing a deep work habit, you must fight to get there.”** Cal Newport

## In a Nutshell

Between learning how to direct your focus and weaning yourself from the dopamine loop by embracing boredom, you can develop deep work rituals that allow you to enter into the productive flow states more often. In doing so, you maximise your ability to focus on the thinking necessary to produce high-quality work in the face of distraction.

For those of you who are familiar with and like my longer (A3) summaries - [click here](#).