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DECLUTTER YOUR MIND

Simple and Effective Strategies to Free Yourself
from Anxiety and Worry



John Williams

How to Declutter Your Mind

*Simple and Effective Strategies to Free
Yourself from Anxiety and Worry*

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Introduction

“You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.” – Marcus Aurelius

The mind is a powerful thing, yet very little is really understood. Did you know that, even though scientists have spent years trying to figure out exactly how the mind works, what thoughts are, and what the “mind” really is, they still do not fully understand what goes on in the brain, apart from the physical structure that this very important organ in the human body presents.

We rely on our minds so much. During the day, we depend on our brain to think, to process information, to store memories, to remember names, locations, and to remind ourselves that we have to go to that very important meeting. We then rely on our brains to remember vital information that we have to present at the meeting. These are only a few ways that we utilize our minds every single day in order to be productive – not only in the workplace but also generally in life.

Even when we go to sleep at night, our minds do not stop functioning. The brain processes all the memories of the day and creates new pathways to store these memories. Dreams are also an action of the mind.

So, we can all agree that the mind is a truly amazing thing and that human life would not be as advanced as it is today without all the great minds that have allowed us to accomplish so many things in the past.

As we rely on the mind each day, take in information, and continuously overload ourselves with stress, there is one particular problem that we have all come across, a cluttered mind.

When the mind becomes cluttered, it is so much harder to think clearly to focus on any given task at hand. You may find yourself working on one thing, but your mind is busy with something else. This is common for people who have too much on their plate, and it can be detrimental when you try to focus on being productive at work, but your mind won't allow you to focus on a specific task or

project that you need to complete.

The fact that you are reading this book means that you probably find yourself struggling to concentrate. Perhaps your memory is foggy, all because there is always too much on your mind. Well, first off, a congratulation is surely in order – you have now taken the first step to uncluttering your mind, which will ultimately help you relieve some of the stress that comes with a mind that is filled with too many thoughts, memories, and information at a single time.

In this book, I am going to take you through a few processes, tips, strategies, and effective techniques that will all contribute to uncluttering your own mind. At times, things may not seem obvious – with some tips, you may not be sure how they will ultimately contribute to a clear mind, but I urge you to follow through on all the tips I share with you, and you will surely experience great peace of mind by the time you have completed the book.

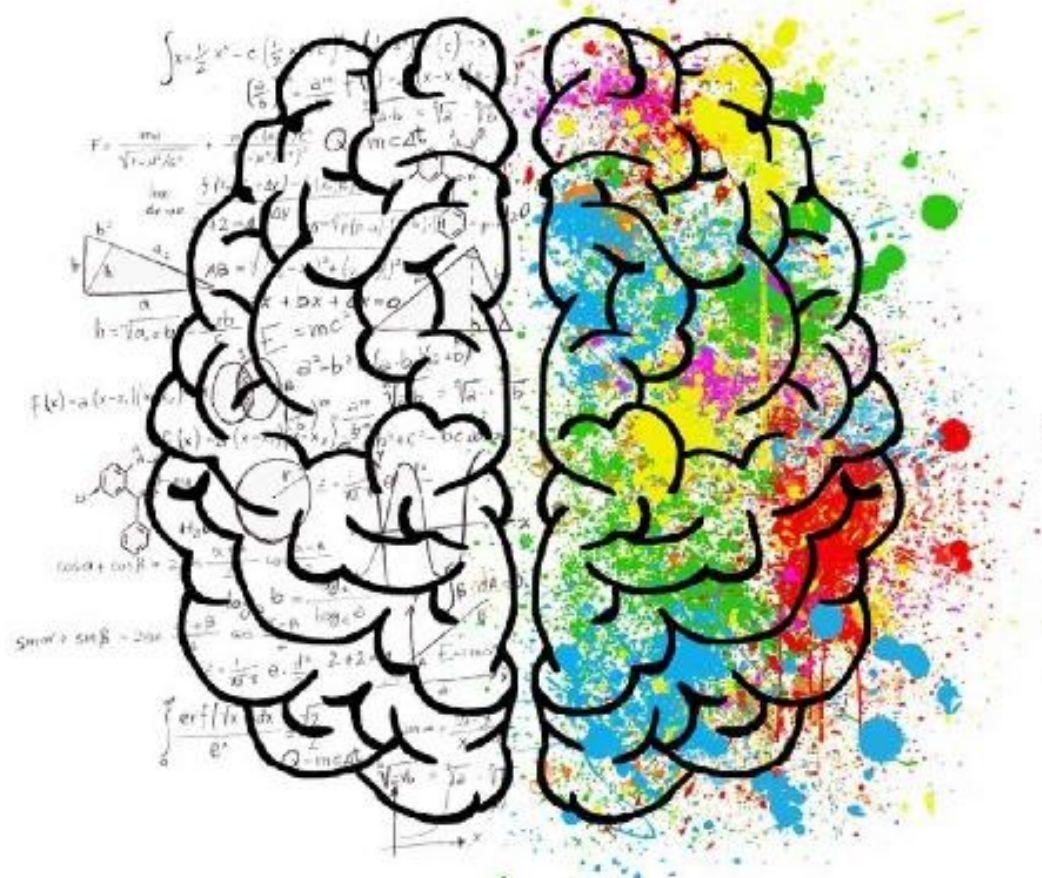
We will start by addressing the reasons why our minds become cluttered, and then take a look at how you can calm your mind down in order to take better control of your own thoughts. We will then move on to some habits and strategies that you should implement into your day-to-day life to experience a reduction in the clutter that is inside your mind all the time. From there, I will start to touch upon a few topics like sleep, your diet, and even exercise, and explain to you how habits in your current life situation might be contributing to a foggy brain that is cluttered with irrelevant thoughts, memories, and ideas.

Chapter One: Understanding Why Your Mind Is So Cluttered

Tackle One Task at a Time

To have a clear mind that is uncluttered, you first need to understand why your mind is cluttered in the first place. As we go about our daily lives, it becomes so easy to forget that we should take things slow sometimes or just take a quick break now-and-then. We continue to fill our brains with data – often, the data that we add to our already overloaded mind is irrelevant to the task at hand.

This is the primary reason why so many people find their minds cluttered all the time. That two hours you spend on Facebook each day, combined with the television shows you watch before bed. Add all the stress that you have at work. Perhaps you are studying as well, adding even more information that your mind needs to process and memories that you create.



Is Your Mind Cluttered?

Before we proceed, let me first share with you a few signs that you may notice, signaling that your mind may be cluttered. While it may seem obvious what symptoms you will experience with a cluttered mind, we sometimes get so used to how our minds function and of the untidiness of our thoughts, that we do not immediately realize that the mind has become 'cluttered.'

Sleep disturbances are some of the most common signs that people tend to experience with a cluttered mind. You get out of the shower and jump straight into bed, but no matter how tired you are, your mind keeps wondering and refuses to shut down, so you can fall asleep. A lot of people may think that they are suffering from insomnia, when, in actual fact, they simply have too much on their mind.

A lot of the symptoms that may signal having too much on your mind seem unusual. For many people, a constant increase in stress might be a symptom. You may start to become forgetful and experience mental fatigue, along with a foggy mind. You may even feel tired – with so much information on your mind, and your brain needs to work really hard. Some people also tend to become obsessive about the smallest things – this could even be a sign that there is something lingering on your mind that needs to be attended to.

Difficulty focusing on tasks that you need to complete is another sign that you have too much information overloading your brain. For many people, the focus is broken when they start to concentrate on matters that are not related to the task that they are busy with.

Let's say, for example, you are busy working on a report for one client that needs to be handed in before the end of the day. You also have another report that you need to compile, but for a different client, although the deadline is only tomorrow. Perhaps the second report will take a little longer than the first one, so you decided to tackle the one that needs to be completed and filed today first. While working on the report, your mind will constantly wonder to the other report, thinking about ways that you can make that report perfect, because the second report puts more pressure on you.

Not being able to declutter your mind and think clearly can drastically affect

your productivity while working on that first report. When the report is done, and you have moved on to the second one, you may also find yourself constantly looking back, trying to figure out if the client will be happy with the report you just handed in.

Identify the Reasons for Your Cluttered Mind

Once you have determined that your mind is cluttered, it is time to realize that you need to unclutter that mind to think clearly – this will help to reduce the symptoms that you are experiencing and may even give you a significant boost in productivity.

You will, however, need to identify the particular factors in your life that are currently causing your mind to be so cluttered. For many people, this thought starts with their work. A good idea would be to get out a piece of paper and a pen and to write down everything that is on your mind – do this right now, just write down everything that you think of.

By doing this, you will know exactly all the different thoughts that are currently on your mind. This way, you are able to determine what thoughts are relevant to your current situations, and which ones are not – thus enabling you to know what areas of your life are causing a cluttered mind.

Remember that by thinking, you are really speaking to yourself – so listen closely to your mind and find out what thoughts are important and which ones are not important. This will also help you become more self-aware – and awareness is an important part in the journey to decluttering and clearing your mind.

Chapter Two: Start by Taking a Few Deep Breaths

By reaching this step of my book, it means you have already started to do some thinking – and you have most likely discovered that your mind is cluttered, and you need to do something about it. No need to worry – no matter how many thoughts you are currently processing at a single time, no matter how difficult it is for you to focus on your work, and regardless of how many hours you spend lying awake at night with thoughts racing through your head – in the next few pages of this book, you will discover some very useful techniques that will make all of this something of your past.

We'll start out slow – by simply taking a few deep breaths. Deep breathing is a great relaxation technique that is used by millions of people to help them calm their mind, reduce their levels of stress, and improve their focus and attention on tasks that they are dealing with.



Scientific Evidence of Deep Breathing in Relation to Focus and Mind Cluttering

Scientific studies have been performed, and evidence has been provided, that proves the effectiveness of deep breathing on both physical and psychological responses of the body.

For example, a study¹ conducted by the Beijing Normal University in China tested the effects that a specific deep breathing technique, known as diaphragmatic breathing, has on stress response and attention. The results were quite impressive!

A total of 40 people participated in the study. The 40 participants were divided into two groups randomly. One group was provided training on diaphragmatic breathing, while the other group received no training in deep breathing exercises at all. The study was conducted over a period of eight weeks.

At the end of the study, scientists found that those individuals who had performed the deep breathing exercises had a significant improvement in their attention span when compared to the group that did not receive any training. Additionally, the scientists found that deep breathing also enhanced the ability to focus on a single task. The participants who did not perform diaphragmatic breathing exercises complained that they still had minds that quickly started to wander off subject when they tried to focus on a specific task.

Another study², by the Yeungnam University in South Korea, monitored the effects of mindful breathing exercises on anxiety amongst students taking their exams. There were 36 participants in the study. These participants were divided into three groups, and each individual was randomly assigned to a group. The first group was educated on mindful breathing exercise, while another group was educated on a cognitive reappraisal technique. The third group did not receive any type of training.

Daily updates were requested by each of the students involved in the study. After the study was completed, each student also had to complete a questionnaire.

The study revealed that mindful breathing has a significant positive impact on anxiety, especially in cases where a person is under a lot of stress – such as when

a student enters the exam hall to take a test. Automatic positive thoughts were also improved among the students who practiced the breathing exercises, and the results were more significant than the other two groups of students who also participated in the study.

Even though this study did not specifically focus on mind cluttering or even attention, it is important to note that anxiety can have an adverse effect on different areas of mental wellbeing and performance.

In one study³, conducted by the Joint Doctoral Program of the San Diego State University, together with the University of California, scientists explored the effects of anxiety on attention. They found that anxiety does cause an impairment in the attention span and the ability to focus amongst individuals. The observed impairments became more significant as the level of anxiety in patients analyzed increased.

Practicing Deep Breathing

The studies we looked at should convince you that deep breathing is certainly one of the very first skills that you need to equip yourself with in order to start decluttering that mind. It will help you clear your mind and think better, it will help you calm down and reduce signs of anxiety, and it will ultimately give you the ability to start taking more control over your own mind, as well as your thoughts.

One factor that a lot of people tend to overlook is that how they breathe can affect a large number of processes in their body. Remember that the brain relies on oxygen to survive, but all other parts of the body require oxygen in the blood as well. Breathing is not just about oxygen, however.

The good news is that there are different types of breathing exercises that you can try out – and they are all very easy to adopt. You don't need to go through extensive classes – a few simple tips and tricks, and you'll be ready to calm your mind down at any time with just a couple of breaths.

Belly breathing really is the easiest and simplest option that you can try when it comes to deep breathing exercises. It would be a good idea to start practicing belly breathing at home, as most people find that it is easier to learn this technique when they start out by lying down flat on the floor or on another flat surface.

When you are flat on the floor, you should place one of your hands on your chest, with the other hand on your belly. The hand that is on your belly should be positioned so that it is located just beneath your ribcage.

Now, start breathing. Use your nose to suck in air. Make sure the hand on your chest does not move, but rather the hand on your belly. In other words, your belly should expand while you breathe in, and not your chest. Be patient and take some time – don't breathe too quickly. Take a breath as deep as you can, then breathe out through your mouth, but keep your lips as close as possible to each other. Make sure all the air is out before you take your next breath.

You should repeat this a couple of times. A lot of people tend to do about ten breathes in a row when they feel stressed. Once you master the technique, you

can start doing it while sitting. Make sure you are comfortable and sit straight up when you practice belly breathing.

Belly breathing is not the only technique that you can try out. There are a couple of other useful breathing exercises that you can also use to help you calm down and, of course, to clear your mind at any time of the day.

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is particularly popular, but you should make sure that you master the basics of deep breathing first. With this technique, you would follow similar principles as with belly breathing. You should, however, breathe in at a slower rate – while you breathe in, you should count to four (slowly). After you have breathed in, you should start counting to seven and hold your breath while doing so. After this, start to exhale, while also counting to eight. By the time you reach eight, all the air should be out of your lungs.

This technique should also be repeated a couple of times. With this technique, it is important that you clear your mind and focus on your breathing, as well as the counting.

Each time you practice a breathing exercise and have repeated the technique a few times, be sure to notice how you feel afterward. Notice that your brain is calmer and that your mind feels less cluttered. You need to be more aware of how your mind feels, how your thoughts stop racing, and how your stress and anxiety feels after you have practiced these techniques.

Make it a daily habit to practice breathing techniques, even when you have mastered the art of decluttering your mind. Breathing exercises not only help to keep your mind calm but help you manage your stress better. It keeps your anxiety down, and it will help you stay productive when things around you start to spin out of control.

Minimalist for an Uncluttered Mind

Have you ever walked into your garage, only to be faced with piles of things that you can't even remember where they came from? Walk into your study and open a drawer – there are probably a few items that have piled up there that you don't use. Perhaps there are even some items you can't even recall buying. The thing is, people tend to pile things up. For millions of people, it is very difficult to let go of simple things.

Perhaps you upgraded to a new stove and decided to keep your old stove in the garage. You bought your kids a set of new bikes and decided to put their old bikes at the back of the garage. Every time you buy new utensils for the kitchen, you place the old ones in a drawer or at the back of a cupboard.

We often do not realize how fast things can pile up. Soon, you find yourself struggling to move around in your garage or perhaps a room you have dedicated as a storage unit in your house.

Okay, so I hear you – what does your physical clutter have to do with your mental clutter? The truth is, the more you pile things up in your house, the more frustrated the mind, and the more cluttered your thoughts. It may seem like an irrelevant comparison but bear with me for a moment. I am talking from experience here!

What I am suggesting here is that you adopt a minimalist life. I'm not telling you to throw everything in your house away, don't worry. I'm just telling you that sorting out the physical things in your life and living a simpler, more minimalistic life, can be very beneficial for your mind. When your life is simple, your brain will be less cluttered, you'll feel calmer when you are home, and there will be no need to worry about constantly having to move things around just to make space for yet another item that needs to be stowed away.

A lot of people have already adopted this type of lifestyle, and the benefits are great. A full minimalist lifestyle is not really the most ideal option for every person, but if you follow a few simple tips, you can implement some techniques that those who are living a minimalistic life have incorporated in their life, without going full steam ahead with this particular type of lifestyle.

The idea behind a minimalist life is to have, spend, do, and need less than you did before – a simple lifestyle where you do not grab everything you like at the shop, a life where you are able to let go of items that you do not need anymore.



Getting Started – Set Your Goals

Before you can implement any steps to become more minimalistic in life, you first need to set a couple of goals. Every person is different, which means what would seem minimal to me might not seem minimal to you. For this reason, you will need to do some digging here to find out what minimalism means to you – and to what extent you can go to still feel comfortable with your home, your surroundings, and, of course, yourself.

The idea here is to live a simple and stress-free life. Whether that means simply decluttering your house or going all the way in order to get rid of anything you don't use is really up to you.

Get out a notepad and a pen for this step – you will need it to set some goals. Now, don't do anything yet, just take a walk through your home. Take things room-by-room. Start with your kitchen, then your lounge, then move on to the bathroom, your bedrooms, living room, and your study. Of course, don't forget the garage!

As you walk through each of these rooms, I want you to look at everything that you see. Now, start writing down an inventory. Use a new page for every room. Don't worry about what you really need right now, just plot down what you see. Go through drawers and cupboards and take a good inventory of everything that you have – regardless of whether it is useless garbage or actually important and useful items.

Once you have a full inventory, turn to a new page and start writing down everything in your inventory list that you do not use anymore. At first, you might think that you are actually using everything on that list. There must be a reason why there is an extra set of brushes in your study's drawer, or perhaps a set of extra measuring cups in the kitchen cupboard – stored away along with many other things that you forgot about.

Store Away What You Don't Need, Then Give It Away

After setting up a list of items that you don't really need, get a few boxes and pack those items into the box. I would suggest that you start with a single room. It is a good idea to take things slow when it comes to switching to a more minimalistic life. Let's say you start with your kitchen. Make sure there are enough items to cook with and to dish up for you and your family and pack the rest away. If there are broken products or you have some items in your fridge that seem to be going off, then throw them in the trash. Anything that is still usable, but you haven't used in a while, put them in a box.

Once you are done with the first room, place the box away somewhere, like in the garage. I know that this seems like piling up again, but you now have an uncluttered kitchen (or whichever room you decided to start with). Now, wait an entire month and go about your normal daily routine. If you find that you did not need any of the items that you added to the box within that month, it means you can probably safely donate the entire box to charity or give it to someone who is less fortunate than yourself.

At this point, you should already start to feel a little relieved, walking into a kitchen that is simpler and less cluttered. Now, move on to the next room. Repeat the process. Keep the box for a month and donate everything you did not need in that month.

End the process with your garage. You will most likely not be putting the things in your garage away in boxes, as there might be bikes, an old dishwasher, and perhaps even that washing machine that broke down half a decade ago. Just get rid of these things that are no longer in use. You'd be surprised at how many things we end up storing in the garage, and we just forget about them – you don't need items that you have forgotten about.

Decluttering Your Work Space

You will find that simply throwing away or donating those items that you no longer use is often not enough to truly create a minimalistic lifestyle throughout your entire home. There will still be a lot of items left in your home, often in obvious locations where they can quickly get in your way while you are working – whether working on your laptop in the study or preparing food on the kitchen counter.

Now might be a really good time to start decluttering all your workspaces. While you declutter these areas of your home, be sure not just to dump everything that you find into a drawer and start piling up again. Remember that the items you left in your home are all valuable items that you use – so you should place them in easy-to-reach locations, while still ensuring they do not get in your way when you are busy doing something.

A good idea at this point would be to put up some racks that can perhaps hold your spices, which means there is no need to leave spice bottles on the kitchen counter. Put your DVDs and CDs in a special holder. Create a small hole in your study room's table and run your computer cables, chargers, and other cables through the hole to the power adapters. There are many creative ways that you can better utilize space in your home in order to reduce cluttering and create a more minimalistic appearance.

Simplify Your Wardrobe

While going about the steps above, setting up an inventory of your household items, storing the useless items, and then ultimately giving them away, as well as decluttering workspaces – chances are, you never really thought about your wardrobe. Now, I know that people are usually very keen on all the clothes in their wardrobe – but I can almost guarantee you that there are a few pieces of clothing in there that you haven't worn in quite a few years.



We all have those few pieces of clothing that we cling to, even though they don't fit anymore. Perhaps you have just never really thought of throwing out your old clothes, yet you continue to buy new clothes all the time.

You don't need a new set of clothing, jewelry, shoes, and other accessories every single day. Jewelry can be worn a daily basis. Clothes can easily be cleaned with a washing machine. Okay, I'm not telling you to choose a single outfit and wear it every day, but I am suggesting that you get everything out of your wardrobe and throw it on your bed. Then, go through all the clothes you have, shoes, accessories, belts, and even your hats and socks.

Consider every single item. Ask yourself when the last time you wore that

particular piece of clothing was. There will likely be some clothes that you don't even remember anymore!

Get rid of whatever you don't wear anymore, and only return the clothes you wear on a regular basis to your wardrobe. Everything else – add them to a box, store them away for a month, and then donate them or give them away to a friend.

Give Yourself Time to Adjust

As a final tip before we move on, I just want to note that it does take some time to get used to a new lifestyle. Living minimally is not something that is easy to do for many people at first, so I urge you to give yourself time to adjust properly. Don't be too hasty and avoid rushing things – unclutter your home one zone or room at a time, adjust to the way that new room looks and feels, and then move on to the next room.

Chapter Three: Tackle Your Problems Head-On

Life is challenging and often difficult and tends to throw things our way around every corner. The problem is, if this is your way of thinking, then there is a chance that you may be a little positive. Still, people face problems on a daily basis – this does not, however, mean that we should only focus on those challenges that life presents us with. Unfortunately, it can sometimes be difficult to focus on the good when there is so much negativity and bad in our lives.

When our minds are filled with negative thoughts about the challenges that are making life feel more difficult, then it causes clutter in our minds – this leads to poor performance at work, racing thoughts, and difficulty concentrating, amongst other psychological issues.

I've been there – I know how it feels. Depressive thoughts come so easily, yet they are so hard to get rid of. The reason why you may find your mind cluttered with so many negative thoughts might be because you fail to tackle your problems head-on, and when life presents a challenge, you find a way to “chicken out.”

Start by Facing Reality

It can be hard to face reality sometimes, which is why we often find ourselves wandering off to imagination land in order to help ourselves feel better. When we do not face reality, we are unable to face our problems – in fact, without a healthy dose of reality, how would you truly be able to see what problems are causing you to fall behind and stay behind in life.

Think long-term here. When you start facing reality for what it is, and you acknowledge the problems that are present in your life, it will be easier to face them and to solve these problems. In turn, you would be able to stop thinking about the problems constantly, significantly reducing the thoughts and memories that are cluttering your mind.

To face reality, you will need to embrace your life – just the way it is right now. Even if things are bad, know that they can be better, and then embrace what you have and how things are at the moment. Stop wishing your life would be better and daydreaming about what could be. If you do not start by embracing the present and facing up to the problems in your life, then you won't be able to move forward.

Even though facing your own reality and embracing your life, as well as identifying the problems and challenges you are facing, are all important factors in the process of truly decluttering your mind, I want to put emphasis on the fact that you should really take your time with this as well.

The last thing you want is to make things worse. Decide for sure that you are going to change, that you are going to start facing reality, but allow yourself time to adjust slowly.

It would be a good idea to have a notepad for this step. You can write down things in life that you are thinking about constantly – the challenges that you are facing, problems that are posing a threat to your happiness and, of course, your mental wellbeing.

Facing Your Problems, Overcoming Your Challenges

Identifying issues in your own life that is cluttering up that mind of yours is only the first step to solving them – you will need to embrace every one of these problems and then try to solve them to the best of your ability. When you have a list of such problems you need to solve and challenges that you must overcome, you will be able to determine which ones you can tackle now, and which objectives should be set aside for a later date – don't put them off and avoid delaying for too long, however.

Examples of these problems may include being in a long-time dispute with a family member, breaking off communication with a friend that you are now frequently thinking about, not being able to cope with all the work your boss puts on your back but being afraid of speaking up. Perhaps your partner is doing something that you are not very happy about. Maybe you have too much debt, and you refuse to face up to the debt and make the necessary steps to live a debt-free life again. There are lots of other issues that may be causing you to lie awake at night and leave you with racing thoughts, never having the ability to calm down your mind.

Again, be realistic about the list you have made. Start with those issues that you can tackle right now. If you haven't spoken to a friend in a long time because the two of you had a fight a few years back, then look up their number and give them a call. Chances are, they might be feeling the same way as you do – regretting that fight and wanting to catch up with you again after all these years.

As you face these problems and overcome them one at a time, you are already starting to declutter your mind. With each problem out of the way, there are fewer issues that are constantly coming up in your mind. Negative thoughts are replaced with positive thoughts. You will start to sleep more peacefully at night. Your productivity will start to improve. And, you'll be able to start focusing on things that matter without constantly thinking of that overdue bill that might just cause you to end up with a judgment against your name.

Chapter Four: Don't Be Afraid To Ask For Some Help

I used to tackle everything in my life alone. It was so hard – I could hardly keep up with everything. I believed that I had created those problems in my life and that I was to blame for them; thus, I was the one who would have to solve them. I also didn't want to look weak, so I never really asked anyone for help – I didn't even talk to any of my loved ones about my problems. When someone offered me help because they could see I was struggling to keep my head above the water, I refused.

Things got really bad. I eventually didn't know how to overcome all the challenges that life presented me with. I thought I was going to drown in my own life's problems. This is when a friend of mine didn't offer his help, but rather just gave it to me. Now, I'm not talking about money here – help doesn't always involve something of monetary value. Instead, he demanded that I talked to him about my problems and then he helped me work out a plan that could make my life easier. Additionally, he made a few calls and really came through to help me solve some of the issues that were keeping me awake and giving me those dark circles around my eyes.

In the end, I realized that it was okay to ask for help. Since that time, I have asked a couple of people to help me out here and there – nothing major, only a few small favors. Yet, no matter how small these favors are, they always seem to help me reach the end goal of facing up to the problems I have in life.

Thus, to come to a conclusion on this matter, I want you to know that being too afraid to ask for help is more a sign of weakness than admitting when you are going through a rough time and asking someone to help you out. I'm not telling you to ask a friend for a million dollars now – be reasonable, know what your loved ones can offer you, and then see if they are willing to help you get through a challenge that you need to face.

When they do help you, be grateful, practice gratitude. Don't think to be thankful for what they have done for you and showing your gratitude will be a

sign of weakness – that will be another major mistake from your side!

Keep A Memory Diary and Put It to Good Use.

The next part of my book will require something from your part – a diary. Now, there are two ways to go about this section. You can choose to go with the old-fashioned way, as I did, and buy a diary, along with a pen. This way, you can write down your memories. If you feel that you want to keep up with modern trends, then be sure to check out a diary app. Whether you own an Android or an iOS device, there are loads of applications that you can download for free, which allow you to keep a digital diary with you. In fact, you could even use the regular notes application that comes built into the majority of smartphones these days – just create a new folder and title it “My Memory Diary” or something similar.

Now, to understand this part of my book, you need to understand one of the very important reasons why your mind may be cluttered. We make memories all the time – small ones and big ones. The problem is, we want to cherish those memories for eternity. This is why we often take lots of photos of children while they are still babies and very young. Those moments happen only ones.

At the same time, we tend to create memories in our brains – lots and lots of memories. While our brains do have quite a large capacity to store these memories, it is important to understand that we have to take in new information every single day. Thus, things tend to pile up in our minds, just like they do in our homes.

A memory diary is essentially a book, or a diary, where you plot down all your memories. Even the smaller ones that seem insignificant. When you get an idea, a thought, or make a new memory, add it to your memory diary. While the memory or information may seem irrelevant at this very moment, it may hold value for you later on. This is why you should record everything – once recorded, let go of that particular memory, stop thinking about it. You have recorded it, so you can move on to the next one.

Now, set aside a couple of minutes each day, or perhaps once or twice a week, to go through your memory diary. There is a really good chance that you will discover some interesting things when you look at all of the thoughts you had during the day or during the week. You might even surprise yourself and learn

something new about you – no matter how well you know yourself, people often find that there is always more to learn about themselves than what they already know.

With a memory diary and frequent review sessions where you go over everything that you have jotted down in the diary, you also get a new perspective of yourself, as well as an opportunity for improved self-awareness.

In addition to allowing you to become more self-aware and, of course, to have a view of your own mind, a memory diary is also a useful tool for remembering things. When our brains are overloaded with different types of information, thousands of memories, and a lot of stressors and problems, it becomes quite easy to forget something that is very important. When you write down that important memory you need to remember and cannot afford to lose, then it means you have it on paper (or in digital format if you choose to use an app instead of going the traditional route), so you can easily reference it.

Once you get used to writing down your memories, you can move on to more advanced strategies in regard to keeping a memory diary. Some people tend to create different diaries, each for different types of thoughts.

You might keep one diary to jot down important information like the names of people, places, the location of your next meeting, an important date, or perhaps phone numbers. Another diary might be used for creative ideas that you think of. Maybe you have always wanted to be an author, and you have many stories flowing through your mind. Jot them down, and then you have them for future reference, instead of trying to make sense of all the cluttered memories of past ideas that are somewhere in that galaxy of a mind.

It is also a good idea to keep a different memory diary later on just for random thoughts. We often get those moments where we stare off into a blank space and just think of something irrelevant to the situation that we currently face. While the thought seems completely irrelevant, there is often meaning behind that particular thought. In such cases, write down those random thoughts and come back to them later one – when you have time to think more clearly, they might suddenly start to make sense.

Don't be afraid to become creative or to experiment with memory diaries. Draw pictures if there is something visual that you want to remember. Paste a couple of photos if that would really help to complete the memory. The possibilities are endless – every person has their own way of being creative. This is your private

diary, so don't worry if you are not an artist. You will be able to make out what you drew, and you are the only one meant to see your diary.

Scientific studies have even been conducted on the benefits that a diary has for a person. For example, one study⁴ by the University of Michigan in the United States looked at how expressive writing in a diary could be useful amongst individuals with major depressive disorder. There were 40 individuals who participated in the study, all of whom had been previously diagnosed with this type of depression. The participants were divided into two random groups. The first group was asked to practice expressive writing on a daily basis for at least 20 minutes each day. The second group was asked to write about subjects not related to their emotions.

All the participants were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the study. Scientists found that the group who practiced expressive writing had a significant improvement in the depression-related symptoms that they experienced.

You might be wondering why I decided to include a study on depression and writing in a diary. The truth is, depression causes negative thoughts – lots and lots of them. This is a particularly important cause of cluttering in the mind that you need to be aware of.

Whether you suffer from depression or not, write in your diary. If you don't get time to do so during the day, then try to write down as many memories from the last day in the evening. Make sure to fill in some blank spaces every single day. This will help relieve symptoms of mental illness and even improve your memory, by allowing you to recall what has happened in the past more easily.

Set Up A Schedule and Stick to It

Take a quick moment to think about yesterday. Think about everything you have done – meetings you attended, perhaps you went on a date, you picked up the kids at the school, you went out to buy some groceries. Now, think about anything that you missed – were there any tasks you had to complete but didn't have the time to fit into your day?

I want to place some emphasis on the word “time” for a moment here. Time is such a precious thing, yet it goes by so fast. You will never get yesterday back, and those tasks that you missed could probably have been done without any problems if you properly planned your day.

Time management is a skill that we need to adapt and learn. While some people find that they are naturally good with managing their time, it is still a skill that they developed and perfected over the course of their lives. When you fail to plan for the day and put everything you need to do on a schedule, you will find it much harder to squeeze your daily tasks into the day. Perhaps you will get done with everything, but you might end up washing the dishes and doing the laundry by midnight, which means you will only get two to three hours' worth of sleep.

For many people, developing time management skills, setting up a schedule, and then sticking to that schedule is difficult, especially if you have never done something like this in the past. Luckily, it is possible, and it holds many benefits for you.

Before I go into detail of how you can start setting up a schedule for yourself and how to make adjusting to that schedule a little easier, let's first take a quick look at a study about time management skills.

The Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Iran recently conducted a study⁵ to see how time management affected anxiety, as well as the academic motivation, amongst a group of nursing students. A total of 441 students were enrolled in the study, and they were part of three different universities in the local area. Several tests were performed on all the students, and they were also presented with two questionnaires to complete. The specially designed software was used to collect and analyze all the data presented in the study.

Data presented provided the following statistics amongst the 441 students who participated in the study:

- 58% showed signs of State Anxiety
- 60% showed signs of Trait Anxiety
- 58% showed signs of Academic Motivation
- 49% had developed a decent level of skills in regard to time management

Further analysis of the data presented, and research, provided evidence that improved time management skills had a positive effect on both Trait Anxiety and State Anxiety. Furthermore, students with better time management skills were also more academically motivated.

Setting Up Your Schedule

If you are currently not used to following a schedule and this is your first time setting one up, then you might find it a little challenging. It is relatively simple to compile the schedule but sticking to it may be tougher than you initially think. Still, I really urge you to continue and strive toward sticking to the schedule you compile as much as you possibly can. You will eventually find that this creates a much more organized life, and, in turn, you'll soon start to discover that your mind and thoughts become more organized too. You'll know what you should think of at what times of the day, and when you can let go of certain thoughts.

The first step is to decide on a medium to use for your scheduling. A lot of people leave this part of their planning process for scheduling until a later stage, but I find it to be much easier to start with the right medium or platform. When your schedule is all over the place, it becomes even more difficult to follow through on everything that is listed on your schedule. Choose one platform for your schedule and then only use that platform.

For those who enjoy a more traditional approach, you can buy a calendar or a diary that comes with day-to-day pages. You can then fill in your schedule with a pen.

I personally like to take advantage of my smartphone in this case. My phone has a built-in calendar application that I use to schedule everything, from the smaller tasks that I have to complete toward those bigger projects that need to be completed.

Try to assign a time slot for everything that is on your schedule, whether it is a meeting or having to pick up the kids at school and drop them off at sports practice.

At first, you might have to spend some time monitoring different types of tasks and activities you do on a daily basis. This would help you get an idea of how much time you spend on each task, thus allowing you to allocate a realistic time slot for each of the activities that need to go into your schedule.

There are cases where you need to do something during the day that doesn't really fit into any time slot, as you have all day to do it. For example, you might

have to pick up something at the shop for dinner, which means you have until dinner time to do it. In such cases, hit the “All Day” button in your calendar app – this way, the task will float at the top of your calendar throughout the day so that you don’t forget about it, even though it is not allocated to any particular timeslot in your schedule.

While you are setting up your schedule, it is important that you optimize your time to the best of your ability. Make sure you do not schedule too much, but, at the same time, ensure you utilize as much time as you can during the day.

Schedule for Personal Events Too

When I talk about a schedule with my friends, they usually start to respond by telling me about how many meetings they have to fit into their schedule every single day. For most people, talking about setting up a schedule means work and business – you have to schedule five meetings for the day, as well as time to complete a report, and maybe also set up some time to have Skype calls with clients.

Your work life is one of the main factors that comes to mind when setting up a schedule, but it is important not to overlook the importance of adding some personal things to your schedule as well. A lot of people find that they only schedule for work-related activities and events, which often causes them to miss out on things in their personal life. They schedule their meetings and work until late at night, and never make any time to spend with their loved ones.

For this reason, I want you to focus on personal events, activities, and tasks too when you set up your schedule. Even if you must bring work home now and then, ensure you allocate a few time slots to spend time with your family – remember what I said before, time is precious and time that has gone by will never be repeated.

Start early in the day – maybe allocate some time to jog or hit the gym. Then add a time slot for breakfast, and make sure you have breakfast with your family. Once you get home from work, it's time to prepare dinner. Whether you are making dinner in your home, be sure to set aside some time on your schedule that you can use to help out with dinner and, of course, sit with your family while you enjoy the meal.

Spending time with the people you love is important, and it helps you. You do not want to miss important events in the lives of those you love – when your kid is receiving an award at school, make appropriate adjustments to your schedule to ensure you can be there for them. Maybe your partner got a promotion at work – set aside time to celebrate.

Stick to Your New Schedule, But Don't Beat Yourself Up When You Slip Up

Once you have completed the setup of your schedule, it is time to follow through and, of course, stick to that schedule. Understand that a schedule is a dynamic thing – it can change from time-to-time. You'll get people who call you to change the time or date of a meeting, for example. Be prepared for these cases and make the right adjustments to your schedule in order to ensure you can compensate for lost time or to reschedule when an event needs to be moved.

Even though it is crucial to stick to your new schedule in order to keep your life more organized and help to declutter your days, you should not beat yourself up if you slip up now and then. Sometimes you appoint 30 minutes for a meeting and 15 minutes for a ride to the meeting, but you get stuck in traffic for another 10 minutes, and the meeting lasts 20 minutes longer than what you scheduled for.

It is normal to feel anxious in these situations. You'd have to make arrangements with your next meeting, and you might even end up moving some of the day's tasks over to the next day.

While this may be unpleasant, don't let it ruin your schedule or your ability to stick to your schedule. When something in your schedule slips up, or things don't work out as you want them to work out, then adjust. You need to learn how to deal with these situations without freaking out and beating yourself up.

If you fail to adjust and manage these situations, then they will simply add more anxiety to your mind and cause further cluttering. When you know how to handle the situation, however, you will be able to remain calm and keep a clear mind.

Create A Routine and Follow It

Okay, so I hear you – routines are boring, doing the same thing over and over, day after day. The thing is, creating a routine is productive and really does not have to be as boring as you think it is. A routine is helpful for ensuring that you can stay on schedule with your daily events, and it will ultimately contribute to a life that is far more organized and manageable.

The hardest part of a routine really is the start – setting up a routine, planning it and, of course, starting to follow the routine. The following part is where things get tough. You will most likely need to get out of the “comfort zone” that you have created for yourself if you wish to implement a routine, and for many people, this can be a little daunting. Still, this is a vital part of decluttering your mind and reaching a higher level of control over your own mind.

This part of my book really goes hand-in-hand with the scheduling chapter. A schedule will help you create a better routine, and at the same time, a routine will help you become better at sticking to your schedule.

Start with a Morning Routine

To get into a routine and follow it throughout the day, you need to make sure that you start the day in the right way. If your day starts out slowly, you're more likely to be less productive later on, and you'll get less done. Following through with your routine also becomes more difficult.

This is why I always recommend starting out by planning and implementing a morning routine. In reality, you don't need a complete structured plan for a good morning routine; you simply need to ensure you get up at a certain time and get the day going.

Decide on a time that suits you. While a lot of people suggest that you should get up at 5am in the morning to be more productive – and some studies have also proven this to be true – only you can decide what time is best for you. Try to wake up at 5am for a few days (make sure you get at least seven hours of sleep at the same time, though), and see how your body and mind reacts to this time. If you find that you feel too tired and not at your most productive level when you wake up at 5am, then set the alarm for an hour later.

Make sure you find a time that you can keep to. If you like waking up at 5am, set your alarm for this time every morning. If 6am is better for you, then adjust your alarm clock. When your alarm goes off, give yourself no longer than five to ten minutes to get out of bed.

I know this is a hard step to take. Yet, it is really a big step toward getting into a routine that will allow you to start living a more organized life, which, in turn, will greatly help you reduce the clutter in your mind and focus on tasks at hand.

Your morning routine should not stop with you getting out of bed, though. You need to plan out a few details. Will you start your morning with a glass of ice water or rather have some coffee? Many people depend on their morning dose of caffeine to really wake up, but others rather prefer an option like water, or perhaps even a healthy smoothie.

Try to work in some physical activity as well. For some people, a morning routine at the gym goes a long way toward helping them improve their performance through the day, but others find it harder to work out so early in the

morning. If you're not keen on doing some weights in the morning, consider a quick jog. Even just a session of yoga would be great and help your body relax, and stay calm, contributing to better productivity in the day.

Don't forget a healthy breakfast too! Even though a lot of suggestions have been made that breakfast is not the best thing for you, the right breakfast can help you think better in the morning. You can't really think at your best and be as productive as you can be on an empty stomach.

For many people, reading some inspirational quotes, catching up on some news, or reading a quick short story is also an important part of their morning routine. Try to do something relaxing, something that will help you calm down. Avoid checking up on stocks or doing anything related to work.

Work on A Night Routine

Once you have a good morning routine and you are able to comply with it on a daily basis, you should start working on a night routine as well. One of the most important parts of your night routine is to start going to bed at a fixed time. You don't have to go to sleep immediately when you get into bed but allocate a time where you start to shut down and climb into your bed. Then give yourself a couple of minutes to do something relaxing.

If you enjoy reading a few pages in an inspirational book before you go to sleep, then by all means, do so. Just be sure you get into bed at a set time, and that you put down that book within about half an hour to an hour, switch off the lights, put down your smartphone, and go to sleep.

Your night routine should not only include the time you need to go to bed and your allocated sleep time. You should plan your night out before these events too. It would be a good idea to allocate a routine from the time you get home from work.

You will probably need to start with dinner. You might have to check up on your kids to ensure they did their homework. Perhaps you want to allocate some time to have dinner with the family, and maybe a 30-minute television break for everyone before jumping into the shower and heading off to bed.

It is important to avoid activities that will keep you too active when time draws close to bedtime. Instead, try to focus on more relaxing activities.

This is also where things can become fun, and you can avoid a boring routine. One day, you might choose to catch up on a television series with your partner. The next day, allocate some time for a board game. Perhaps a walk down to the park the next night. The list goes on.

How to Utilize Lists For a Smoother Routine

Now that you know what you should do in the morning and the evening, and most likely during the day as well, in order to stay on routine, it is time to simplify things a little. I personally believe that lists with a couple of checkboxes make things much, much easier. I wake up in the morning, and the moment I get out of bed, I check the first box on my app, which is actually to get out of bed. While this may seem simple, setting up a checkbox or task on a list for every activity that is part of your daily routine really makes things easier, more manageable, and you will be able to track your progress toward implementing and following that routine of yours.

There are some tools that you can use to make the process of setting up lists much easier. I personally use Trello, a convenient app that is all about creating to-do lists. You can set up lists with checkboxes and then just check off those boxes as you complete the tasks one by one.

Everything in your routine – and even those things that have been added to your schedule – should really become part of your lists. Create a new list for every day. Categorize the entries. Create a category for personal tasks, a separate category for work-related tasks, and then one for everything else.

I personally make some time in the evening to set up my list for the next day. I go through my schedule for the next day, consider the routine I have created for myself, and then I start to draft the list for the next day.

My list always starts with “Get out of bed,” followed by “Have a cup of coffee.” After this, I would get into some exercise, read a quick motivational piece, and then start to get ready for work.

Since I usually have a list of my meetings for the next day in my calendar app on my phone, I can even add them to the list. As I go through those meetings during the day, I just check them off.

Coffee with client X at 1pm – check. A quick follow-up Skype meeting with client Y at 3pm – check. A meeting with the board members to discuss funding for a new project at 3.30pm – check.

When I get home, I do not forget about my list. I still have to check off “make

dinner," "have dinner with wife and kids," and then I always have something planned for the night.

This may seem irrelevant to some of you, or perhaps rather like a productivity tip, but being organized in this way really helps to reduce clutter in your mind. You always know what comes next on your list of daily tasks and you check off what has been done. With this, you can quickly put the checked-off tasks behind you and clear your mind of them.

Chapter Five: Tackle One Task at a Time

Multitasking is something that we find ourselves doing, often unknowingly. You get to the office, make yourself a cup of coffee, you catch up with the guys at the same time, check your e-mails, and start to think about that report that you have to start compiling in 15 minutes.

While this isn't the worst example of multitasking and how it affects your brain, it is still something that can quickly clog your brain up early in the morning.

Now, let's move time a little bit forward to later in the day. You have to work on three different projects and get a lot of tasks done for each of the projects before the end of the day. You start to work on one of the projects, but then a client calls you regarding one of the other projects that you have to get done that same day. Thus, you move on to that other project, while still working on the first one in the meantime. You frequently switch between these tasks, thinking that if you multitask, you'll get more done and you'll be able to go home at the end of the day without having to take all three projects home.

Unfortunately, at the end of the day, you realize that you have made a few mistakes on one of those projects. Perhaps you got some of the details mixed up, placed a document in the wrong folder. Now, you have to take all three projects home in order to sort everything out and get it in order, as you have to present those projects to the clients in the morning.

You are really cluttering your mind with too much information. In reality, all the multitasking is really slowing you down, not speeding things up.

A big part of reducing clutter in your own mind is to stop with the multitasking. Stop thinking that if you work on more than a single task or assignment at a time, you'll get things done faster. You're going to be less productive, you're going to be cluttering your mind, and you are ultimately paving the way for many mistakes, which you will have to fix later on, which means you are also creating more work for yourself.

You need to start focusing on one task at a time, and then try to break it up into smaller parts. This is a more productive way, and it will ensure that you can focus on one thing at a time, reducing the risk of cluttering your mind with

information related to multiple tasks and projects.

Why You Shouldn't Multitask

Before we take things one step further and look at how you can start focusing on one task or objective at a time, I want to tell you why you shouldn't multitask. Yes, it will cause an overload of thoughts and processes in your mind, ultimately leading to a more cluttered mind, but there really is a bigger reason behind the idea of focusing on a single task compared to multitasking.

The thing is, research scientists that focus on brain development and identifying more about how the brain works discovered that the brain was not built to multitask. Instead, the brain was really designed to focus on something specific, and then switch from focusing on that topic to another topic – it doesn't focus on two different subjects at the same time.

I have heard countless people tell me that they have “mastered the art of multitasking.” That they can focus on five or six tasks at the same time and get them all done within a few hours at most, without suffering any consequences.

While those people think that they are masters at this multitasking thing, the truth is, their brains aren't really multitasking, and if they decided to rather take things one step at a time, focusing on a specific project and then moving along to the next one, and the next one, until they are done, their work would be more accurate and of higher quality.

Let's consider what happens to the brain when we continuously multitask.

A review paper⁶ prepared by the University of Oregon explains that there are several parts of the brain involved in the process of thinking, being alert, and focusing on a single task. These networks have all been designed in such a way to help a person focus on a very specific object or task that they are dealing with.

For example, the locus coeruleus, the right frontal cortex, and the right parietal cortex are all involved in the process of being alert. Orienting is an activity that involves the frontal eye fields, the superior parietal lobe, the temporal parietal junction, and the superior colliculus pulvinar. Executive functions of the brain are handled by the anterior cingulate, the anterior insula, and the frontal cortex striatum.

All these parts that make up the brain are regulated by neurotransmitters, which

help you focus on a specific task, as well as switch from one task to another task. Dopamine, serotonin, acetylcholine, and norepinephrine are all neurotransmitters that are involved in these particular processes.

This is also where the problem comes in. A well-regulated brain and brain chemicals are maintained when you focus on a task until it is completed, and then slowly switch your attention to the next task.

When, instead, you continuously switch from one task to another task, it means your brain needs to produce chemicals, or neurotransmitters, to regulate the constant switch in focus and attention. This can cause an imbalance in the neurotransmitters and even problems with certain parts of the brain that are involved in alertness, orienting, and focus.

It should also be noted that studies have found multitasking to potentially lower your IQ and it may even yield long-term structural changes to the brain – both negative factors that you need to consider when you go about your daily routine bragging about how well you can multitask.

One paper⁷ explains that a study, conducted by the University of London, found individuals who multitasked to experience a decline in their IQ by around 15 points during the time in which they tried to focus on multiple tasks at once.

Another study by the University of Sussex found that individuals who multitasked more also had a reduction in the size of their anterior cingulate cortex, which is an important part of the brain that has been linked to emotional control, cognitive function, and even empathy.

How to Stop Multitasking and Tackle Tasks One at a Time

I used to be obsessed with multitasking. It surely is unpleasant. I actually struggled quite a bit to get over my habit of focusing on different things at the same time and switching from one task to another all the time. So, know that it will take some time to get out of the nasty habit of always wanting to multitask, if this is something that you are guilty of, but once you break the habit, you will surely start to notice the many benefits almost immediately.

One thing I noticed when I started to switch from multitasking toward focusing on a single assignment or task at a time was a surge in my overall productivity. I never really knew how much multitasking was bringing me down until I stopped doing it.

If you have been following through my book so far and implemented the steps that I have suggested, then you should already now have a schedule and a routine, as well as a daily list of activities. This is where the list starts to become even more useful than before.

Separating your projects and then dividing everything up into smaller tasks will allow you to better prioritize and to ensure that you can focus on completing things one at a time, instead of trying to be everything at the same time.

You have your list with the projects that need to be completed. Now, create smaller lists, one for each of these projects. In these lists, you will add everything that needs to be done. This could include sending a couple of emails, compiling a report, designing a website or a logo, setting up a presentation, and more.

Think about which tasks will take more time and concentration and place them first. Then start to work from the list. Start at the top. Tackle only the very first objective or task, and do not focus on anything else. Once you complete that task, check it off and move on to the next one. Make sure everything that the task involved is completed before you mark it as completed and move on to the next one, so that you do not have to come back later.

Getting Rid of Distractions

To truly stop multitasking and start “unitasking,” a term often used to describe focusing on one task only, you will need to get rid of any distractions that may ward off your attention to something else. This is a very important step to take. I often found myself going back to my e-mail tab while I was working, and then I would see an important email, open it up and before I knew it, I was working on something else and left that task I was busy with for later.

To get rid of distractions while focusing on a task, you first need to ask yourself what your distractions are. If you are like I was, and constantly find yourself switching back to the e-mail tab, then close it. Only open up browser tabs that are related to the specific task at hand. If you use an e-mail application like Microsoft Outlook, then close the application.

A lot of people can't go five minutes without checking up on their Facebook timeline or their Twitter feed. If you feel addicted to your social networking accounts, then put your phone on silent or disable the notifications that those distracting applications send you so frequently. Turn your phone upside down and place it away from your computer. Get to work and do not look at your phone while you are busy with a task.

It is also a good idea to keep only documents and other items related to the specific task that you are dealing with close to you, and to put everything else away. Sort your documents in the order of your task list, and then simply take those documents related to your current task and put them next to you. The other documents can go in the drawer. When you are done with a task, put away the documents and take out the next task's files. This way, you won't find yourself moving back and forth between files related to different tasks or projects.

You will obviously have to get to your e-mails at some point during the day, and you surely deserve a quick look at those Facebook notifications you received. This is why I always create timeslots that are dedicated to going through my emails, sending new emails, and replying to emails. I also schedule some “distraction time” during the day – two sessions each day. This gives my mind a well-deserved break during all the work and gives me some time to look at Twitter and other social media accounts, or read up on some news report

published during the day.

Don't schedule too much time for distractions, or this could become problematic. Rather try to catch up with your friends after you have completed all the tasks on your list.

Chapter Six: Forget About Yesterday

Have you ever found yourself constantly thinking about how you screwed up in a meeting that happened the previous day? Or, perhaps you handed in a report, and it wasn't your best work, so today you are continuously thinking about what will happen if your boss isn't pleased with your work?

When something negative happens in our lives, our minds often becomes stuck with thoughts on that particular event, even when it has passed, and it is already time to move on. This is very common and also a bad habit. There are many reasons why your mind keeps going back to something that happened yesterday, and this is causing thoughts to be present in your mind that are leading to cluttering.

Now, the title of this chapter might be a bit misleading. I don't want you to simply forget about everything that happened in your past. We all have happy memories. That moment you met your partner. Your wedding. The moment you first held your baby. Your graduation day. These are happy memories that are locked in our minds, and we should really remember them for as long as we possibly can.

The memories and thoughts I refer to here are the negative ones that you are constantly thinking about. Those events that happened that are causing you to feel distressed, worried, and making you experience a lack of productivity the next day.

When you get up in the morning, your mind should be fresh, and your thoughts should be cleared out. No need to concern yourself about yesterday. Think about the present – what is going on today, what will happen today, how will you tackle your assignments in the present, not in the past. Yesterday has already gone by, and no matter how much you think of an event that happened yesterday, and no matter how much you worry about it, there really is nothing you can do to change the past... at least not without a time machine, and let's face it, technology still has a long way to go before we can even start to think about something like that!

Why It Is Important That You Let Go of Yesterday

I already explained how constantly thinking about something that happened yesterday will simply clog your mind and further contribute to cluttering, but there are other reasons why you need to stop ruminating about things that happened in the past that caused you distress. In particular, these activities have been linked to poor mental health and adverse effects regarding mental performance.

Harvard Medical School prepared a paper⁸ where they explained how one of their recent studies found a negative link between rumination and mental health. The study was conducted among a group of adults, as well as adolescents. There were 1,065 adolescents involved in the study and a total of 1,132 adults.

The study followed a self-report setting where all participants were asked about past stressful life experiences, along with a questionnaire about symptoms related to depression and anxiety. Participants were also asked about rumination.

The study made two important conclusions that I want you to take note of:

1. Exposure to stressful events in life increased the risk of rumination
2. Rumination was linked to symptoms of anxiety amongst adolescents. Among the adult patients, those who reported ruminating about past life events that were negative had a significantly higher prevalence of anxiety, as well as symptoms related to depression.

What this all means is that constantly thinking about those negative events that took place yesterday is going to make you anxious, and it is going to increase your likelihood of developing depression. Now, if you already experience depression and anxiety symptoms, this may only make things worse.

There is yet another study⁹ that I want us to take a quick look at. The study was conducted by the Psychooncology Research Unit at the Aarhus University Hospital in Denmark. The study looked at how rumination affected both sleep and mood among a group of participants. There were 126 participants in the study, all of whom were current students at a university in the local area.

The study found that rumination, in other words constantly thinking about past

negative life events, was linked to angry moods in the students. This provided proof of mood alterations caused by constantly thinking about the past. Additionally, the study also provided evidence of a link between rumination and depression.

Furthermore, another interesting thing was observed. Those students who reported frequently dwelling in the past had also reported poorer sleep quality compared to the students who were able to let go of the past and focus on the present.

We'll cover the subject of sleep and mind cluttering later on, but this is a very important factor to take into consideration in this chapter as well!

Figure Out Why You're Holding On To Yesterday

To let go of past events and start focusing on what is happening in the present instead, which will ultimately help you unclutter your mind, you first need to discover why you are frequently thinking about that particular event. You also need to notice this. Sometimes, your thoughts can be so cluttered and unorganized, that it can become difficult to know when you are holding on to the past, and when you are simply confused about the present.

There are different reasons why you may find yourself ruminating about what has happened in the past, whether it is something that happened at work or at home. In many cases, you may be constantly wandering back in your mind to that particular event because you are trying to work out a solution to a problem that the event posed. If you still haven't figured out a solution, then you are constantly thinking about that life event, and you are trying to figure out what to do.

Sometimes such an event might cause you to fear similar events in the future. Thus, you constantly ruminate about the event as you are scared that the same thing will happen when working on a different project.

There are times when it is a really bad habit that you developed. There's nothing wrong with you, it is just something that you do, and that you will need to stop doing if you wish to move forward, unclutter that mind of yours, and become more productive at the same time.

Looking at what specifically your mind is constantly going back to can also help to give you a clue as to why you are thinking about it so much, and why it is interfering with your ability to concentrate on tasks that you need to get done today.

How to Stop Thinking About Yesterday

When you are able to identify why your mind keeps traveling back to the past in order to ruminate about something that has happened, then you might be able to tackle this problem by focusing on the reason and the specific event that is causing you so much distress. Unfortunately, there are many cases where we keep thinking about something that happened in the past, yet we are not sure why. You try to focus on your work, a specific task that you need to get done, yet your mind is somewhere else, and your productivity is suffering in the meantime.

Luckily, there are a few ways that you can stop thinking about yesterday and start focusing on the present.

One of the easiest ways that you can alter your focus and get your mind back on track is to allow a couple of minutes to participate in an activity that will help to change your current emotion. When you think about a negative event in the past frequently, then it can make you feel negative thoughts, become anxious, or maybe even angry. You might feel frustrated with the fact that you cannot get your mind to focus on something specific.

By focusing on something that will “lift” your mood, you can get distracted from thinking about that event and start focusing on something else. Every person is different, so you’ll have to determine what is useful for you. If you are able to get into a more positive mood, you might also start to look at that negative event in a more positive way, start to understand that it is part of your past, and that you can do certain things that will help to avoid it from happening again, or to correct the wrong that the event has caused. This way, you’ll be able to stop thinking about it.

If your mind gets cleared and you start to feel positive after a run, then take a quick run. If you enjoy meditating, then have a quick session of meditation. You need to find what works for you.

If you find that this particular strategy does not help you out, then get out a piece of paper and a pen. I’m going to walk you through a quick activity that might seem a little weird and even irrelevant, but you’ll surely feel better afterward.

You see, the problem with thinking negative things about something that has happened in the past is that the brain will often continue to think so because it is difficult to just experience a shift in emotion without any positive reimbursement.

What I want you to do is think about that thing that happened yesterday, or whenever it happened, and write down exactly the issue at hand. Perhaps you handed in a project that you are not very confident about and haven't heard anything back yet. Write down what is bothering you.

Now, write down what you think is going to happen. Since you are constantly thinking about a specific event, your brain is clearly also thinking about something negative that would happen as a consequence of your actions or the event.

Once you have written down the problems, you need to start writing down WHY this "consequence" will not happen. The thing is, when we think in a negative way, we quickly start imagining the worst-case scenario – and often times, this is not what is going to happen. Thus, I need to you write down a couple of reasons why you are overexaggerating.

For example, if you handed in a project that you are not too confident in, your reasons could be that you did adequate amounts of research to support the data you presented, and you presented the project in the requested format. You also followed the instructions that were provided to you.

Once you have written down a couple of reasons why the worst-case scenario will not happen, I want you to think of what happens if the worst-case scenario becomes a reality. Chances are, you will still be alright even if it happened. Write down the reasons why you don't really need to be so worried.

Maybe your boss will complain about the report you handed them, but after that, they will simply ask you for some alterations. You can easily add a timeslot for those alterations to your new schedule and pin it onto your to-do list – problem solved.

After writing down all these things, go over them. Assure yourself that bad things are not coming your way. Read through the reasons why you really do not have to be worried. Remind yourself that, even if things turn out for the worst, solutions are possible, and everything will still be all right. You have no reason to continue worrying about what has happened, as you cannot change the past.

Remind yourself that you do, however, have the power to change what happens in the future, by focusing on what you are doing in the present.

Schedule Some Thinking and Rumination Time

I know that this will go against some of the things that I have just suggested, but please bear with me. Trying to block out all thoughts of past events and problems that are present in your life may not be the most ideal solution for you. No matter how hard you try to get over those thoughts and stop thinking about things that happened yesterday or perhaps even a week ago, your mind might automatically go back to those thoughts at times.

This is why I have some thinking time set up in my daily schedule. I don't need much time. Just about 10 to 15 minutes each day. During this time, I ruminate about things that happened in the morning and perhaps events that took place yesterday.

When you give your brain an allocated timeslot in your daily schedule to think about those things, then there is a much lower chance that you will find yourself constantly thinking about the past as you go about your daily activities. In cases where you do find your brain wandering off, it might also be easier to get your mind back on course since you know that you have that specific time slot that you will be able to think about what has happened, how you are going to deal with any problems that past life events have caused, and other related matters.

Remember to get rid of any distractions and to put work away during your thinking time. You should concentrate on the issues in your life and those particular thoughts that are clogging your mind when you are trying hard to concentrate on your work.

While thinking about any problems that yesterday has caused you to face, it is important not to only look at the problem itself. This is unproductive. Instead of focusing on problems in your life, your thinking time should rather be used to uncover the solutions that will ensure any potential problems that do arise can be dealt with and solved accordingly, and quickly.

Chapter Seven: Plan for Tomorrow

Planning is an essential part of a more organized life and, in the same sense, a more organized mind that is free of clutter. I have already gone through the importance of planning more than once in the book, and again I am going to touch upon this subject, because it is important. While we cannot tell the future, and unforeseen things tend to happen all the time, there are many aspects of the future that we do have control over, and which we can effectively plan for.

Planning out your day should be important. I personally schedule some time every night during which I can plan for tomorrow. In this time, I set up a schedule for the next day, and I create a complete to-do list to ensure that I know what tasks I need to complete. This way, I can get up the next morning and get started checking off tasks on my list immediately.

Making a List of Your Tasks and Activities

When planning out your next day, you should always start by setting up a list of the various tasks that you will need to do the next day. List them all down, no matter how big or small. Once you have done this, you will have a better idea of how busy your day will be, and how you should start your day.

You will need to prioritize these tasks so that the most important ones are at the top, and the lesser important tasks for the day are at the bottom. Make sure those tasks that are not urgent and those that could wait another day if you didn't have enough time to do them are at the very bottom of your list.

To be more productive, it is a good idea to work from the top of the list the next day. I'm not telling you to get out of bed and start working immediately. Have your breakfast, take a shower, and even go for a jog if that is something you enjoy doing in the morning. After this, however, when the time for work comes, start with the important tasks that you have organized at the top of your day's to-do list. People are often more productive when they are still fresh in the morning and tend to get worn out by the end of the day. For this reason, you should start with those crucial daily tasks early in the morning and finish off the day with those tasks that are not so important and easier to complete.

Be Prepared for Tomorrow

Making a list of tasks that you need to tackle tomorrow is not the only way that you can be more prepared. There are other preparation methods that you can also utilize in order to have a more successful and productive day.

As an example, I always ensure that I prepare my lunch the night before. This is a great time-saving trick and only takes a few minutes. I usually prepare lunch for myself, the kids, and my wife, which just makes everything in the morning less chaotic and allows us to eat breakfast together as a family.

If there are enough leftovers from dinner, then I will pack it up and store the leftovers in the refrigerator. This way, we can just warm up the leftovers tomorrow night, and dinner is served!

When it comes to preparing for the next day, don't just prepare your lunch. You should also make sure your bag is packed and ready to grab the next day. If you are done working for the day, pack your laptop in your bag. Make sure all documents you will need tomorrow are also packed.

When you do this, mornings will become calmer and more relaxing. There will not be chaos in your home with everyone trying to get ready to go to work and school. Starting your day in a calmer way will help your mind stay calm throughout the morning and possibly even the rest of the day. This reduces your risk of finding that your mind feels cluttered and will help you think more clearly while working.

Planning for the Future

By “planning for tomorrow,” I literally mean you should be prepared for the next day, but, at the same time, I also mean you should be prepared for what the future holds for you and your family as well.

While you have no control over several aspects of the future, you do have control over how prepared you are for the unforeseen. When you feel prepared and ready to face any of the challenges that life may be throwing your way in the future, then you won’t constantly find yourself worrying about what would happen if you suddenly lost your job, or what would happen if your child grows up and decides to go to a college that is far away from home.

A good way to ensure you are prepared for what the future holds is to sit down with a piece of paper and a pen, and to write down everything that you are worried about – in relation to the future, of course. Anything that comes to mind as a stressor, write it down. Big or small, these matters can all accumulate in your mind and cause cluttering.

Once you have a list of your future worries, start to plan how you can be better prepared for any of those scenarios. You have no idea of knowing if any of them will become a reality, but you can ensure that you know what to do in case that they do.

For many people, the fear of losing their job and income is very real. We are living in a world where unemployment rates are through the roof. This is probably something that you will find on your list of future worries. There are, however, many ways to be prepared. Setting up a savings account and adding a monthly amount to the savings account, while it also builds up interest, is an excellent way of giving yourself peace of mind. This way, you’d also be prepared for any emergencies that require funds.

Don't Overthink About The Future

While I am advising you to be prepared for every day by planning for tomorrow, as well as putting plans in motion for the future, it is also important that you do not overthink things when it comes to planning for the future.

Yes, you need to be prepared for anything that might happen. If you lose your job, your family will need to be supported. You still need to be able to pay for rent or a mortgage, perhaps vehicle finance to ensure you have transport, and you need to buy food. You probably also have a couple of other bills to pay. The solution to such a problem is usually as simple as saving up money as an emergency fund for unforeseen events.

When you have made the appropriate preparations for tomorrow, stop thinking about it. Take some time to relax. Read a book or take a quick course to learn a new skill. Focus on self-investment – spending time in order to help yourself move forward in life. This is a very motivational thing to do and will likely come in handy in your future. In fact, it may even be part of your future plan, yet also a way to appreciate yourself. For example, take a class on coding, and you may find yourself landing a job that pays twice as much as you are currently earning.

The point I'm trying to make here is that you should prepare for tomorrow, be sure that you can handle what life throws your way in the future, and then let it go. Don't fret about something that does not have anything to do with this very moment right now. If your bags are packed for tomorrow, and you have made your list, then you have no need to worry about what is coming your way the next day.

Chapter Eight: Avoid Information Overload

In the 21st century, we are really all exposed to so much data on a daily basis, that most people are suffering from what I like to call “information overload” (I’m not the only one calling it information overload, by the way). This really is one of the main reasons why so many people find that their minds are always cluttered. It is one of the big culprits that makes our mind wander to irrelevant places and thoughts when we are trying very hard to focus on a specific task at hand, leading to a significant reduction in our productivity, and causing us to be late with projects and reports.

The internet is the biggest contributor to the fact that we are facing an information overload crisis in the modern day. The internet is growing day-by-day. There are thousands of new articles being published every day.

Did you know that 79% of the people that populate the U.S. are on Facebook?¹⁰ What’s more – more than half of these people sign in to their Facebook account more than once every single day!

Recent statistics also showed that there are over 440 million blogs on the internet. There are blogs in literally every category you can think of. Want to know which shampoo to use? Or perhaps what beard oil you can use to join that new trend of growing a beard? Maybe you want to know how to fix a broken television? You guessed it – there’s a blog for each of these, and more.

While it is good that you can quickly Google really anything at all and find an immediate answer to your question, or perhaps a solution to a problem you are facing, the growth of the internet is also causing us to experience information overload.

Information overload is a relatively common term today. It describes the fact that we are presented with too much information in our daily lives, which really ‘scrambles’ our brains. Eventually, we do not know what to think of at a single moment in time. Even when it comes to one very specific topic, you will find hundreds of blogs, social media posts, emails, and articles on the internet with unique information related to that one very specific topic. Each one of these articles suggests something else that is different from the rest.

Eventually, you end up not knowing which article to believe, or which tutorial to follow, which blogger is giving you the right advice, or how you should go about dealing with a particular problem that you are currently facing.

All this information is cluttering your mind. It is making it more difficult for you to focus on a single task, because your brain has too much information to process and there is too much that you need to think about.

How to Stop Information Overload

Truly understanding and recognizing information overload is really the first step toward stopping and avoiding this problem that is causing so many minds to become cluttered. You need to identify what type of information you are being overloaded with, as each person really has their own interests and particular things that they search for on the internet.

Determine what channels, platforms, and sources are feeding your brain with too much information. When you search for something online, do you go to multiple blogs to read about it? Do you check the authority of each blog before you read anything that is described in the article you have open? These are factors that can contribute to more information being loaded into your mind.

A few culprits on the internet are more commonly involved in the crisis of information overload that the world is facing. Understanding how these particular platforms are affecting your brain and cluttering your mind is important.

Stop Distractions from Social Media Networks

I think we can all agree that social media networks are really one of the main culprits when it comes to keeping you distracted from work and overloading your mind with information – in most cases, the information obtained from your timelines on social media networks is also completely irrelevant, yet the thoughts will continue to linger in your mind and keep you away from what matters.

For this reason, your social media apps and tabs are some of the first things that you need to pay attention to when it comes to avoiding information overload.

Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google Plus, Pinterest, and all other social media apps that are installed on your smartphone automatically send you a notification when something happens. *John just posted a new photo. Sarah commented on your status. Will shared a post.*

These are all messages that will make you curious if you see them, causing you

to click through. You'll instantly be distracted, and you'll start to take in information that is completely irrelevant to the task that you are busy with. Once you are done, it will take a considerable amount of time to switch your focus back to the task that you were doing. You'll also have to forget about what you just read on the social media app that you just launched. You need to empty your mind of that information.

To be more productive and to avoid social media from overloading your mind, it is important to put away these distractions. Open your social media apps and switch off notifications from them. If you are keen on looking at Facebook on your computer as it is always open in a tab in your web browser, then close that tab. Remove Facebook from your shortcut bar if you have to.

Schedule some time each day to look at your social media accounts. This time should preferably not be while you are at work. Rather, catch up on the latest posts from your friends when you get home from work. During the day while you are working, make sure you switch off anything related to social media that could distract you.

Unsubscribe from Annoying and Irrelevant Emails

I was once faced with a situation where I had over 50,000 unread emails in my inbox. From time-to-time, I would open a newsletter and read it, but in most cases, the emails I received from subscribed newsletters were irrelevant. In fact, I couldn't even remember subscribing to some of the newsletters. We often put our email addresses into subscribing boxes because we think that we are going to receive valuable emails and useful resources. Sometimes we put our email into a box to unlock access to specific content, or to sign up for a membership at a specific website.

Please understand that I'm not saying all subscription emails sent are bad and useless. I'm just saying that a lot of newsletters are only sent to subscribers with the sole purpose of making money from the subscriber. They do not deliver any value, yet they overload you with irrelevant information that will surely fill up and clutter your mind.

After I got fed up with all the emails I was receiving from subscription services, I ended up unsubscribing myself from over 100 different newsletters. I only kept my subscription to those that I found useful.

I urge you to take a close look at your current email inbox. Bring up any email that was sent from a newsletter subscription list. Look at whether the content in that email is useful to you. Chances are, you will find a couple of emails that contain information you will never truly need. If you look at the bottom of these emails, there should be a link that says 'unsubscribe.' When you click the link, you'll be unsubscribed from the list, and you won't receive those annoying emails anymore.

Don't unsubscribe from email newsletters that you like. I enjoy receiving a daily motivational quote, for example, so I have one subscription to such a service.

Now, once unsubscribed, it is important that you also categorize your emails accordingly. If you are using Google's Inbox app, then it will automatically categorize your emails into folders like *Updates* and *Social*. These emails are usually not presented to you as a notification. I personally enjoy using Google Inbox because I only get notifications when I receive an important email. Then, at the end of the day, I can launch the app and go through the category folders in order to catch up with emails that I missed during the day.

If you are using a different app, create a couple of folders and then start importing emails into these folders. Some apps will learn from how you are importing emails and then automatically start importing future emails into those folders.

Be sure that your emails won't become a distraction during the day. If you are expecting an important email, try to figure out at what time the email should come through to you, and then open your email in a tab or on your app at that time to look for the specific email you are waiting for. Don't open any other email, as you will dedicate some time after work to quickly navigate through the other emails that have landed in your inbox.

Limit Your Browser tabs

I often found myself with multiple tabs in my browser open. I developed the habit of constantly opening new tabs without closing old ones. This, in turn, left a tab open for Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and, of course, my emails. Perhaps I read an interesting article earlier on, and I left the tab open.

When those tabs remain open in your web browser, they will continuously be a temptation to go back. You switch back to Facebook just for a quick look and, before you know it, you've spent 20 minutes browsing through your timeline. You switch to that interesting article and then all you can think about for the next 30 minutes is the content of that blog post.

Tabs are distracting, even though you don't always realize it. Thus, I highly recommend you close a tab when you are done with it. Don't keep tabs lingering around and distracting you – this is going to contribute to information overload, and it will cause your mind to become cluttered with useless information.

I also suggest limiting the number of tabs you have open at any given time. I now don't allow myself to have more than three tabs open at a time. If I need a fourth tab, I first look at the three that are already open and decide which one I can close before opening a new tab.

By limiting the tabs that you have open, you avoid keeping websites loaded in the background that are going to overload your mind and distract you from your work.

Do Not Procrastinate

Procrastination is something that many people do. The problem here is they don't always know that they are doing it. Procrastination comes in many different forms.

Let's consider an example. I must complete a report that is currently on my desk. I'm busy doing some research before I start to tackle the report – I need to know a little more about the topic as it is still somewhat new to me.

As I am doing research, I continuously tell myself that I need more information,

even though I already have enough information in my mind to gain a good understanding of what needs to be done. I have already consumed the information needed to get that report done, yet I find myself going back to Google, loading another article, and reading it.

All these articles essentially provide the same information, the data is just presented differently each time. I tell myself that one more article will educate me further and give me an even better chance of perfecting the report.

In reality, this is procrastinating. I already have what I need to complete the project, but I keep postponing and continue with “research.”

People do it all the time, and this is also contributing greatly to information overload. You are cluttering your mind if you are procrastinating. You need to consume the information you need to do a project, and then get to it. Don't tell yourself that you NEED to read another paper on the subject or go through another article. You already have enough information, and everything else you are going to read will just give you the same information you already have.

Chapter Nine: Make Important Decisions

Now, Not Tomorrow

While we are on the topic of procrastinating, I should also note that decisions need to be made. We go through our days having to make many decisions. Some of these decisions are obviously much more important than others.

Regardless, no matter how important or irrelevant a decision that has to be made, it is vital to understand that these decisions need to be decided on. When you delay the process of choosing whether to do one thing over another, or perhaps choose one product over another for your company, as an example, you may find yourself delaying that decision tomorrow as well, and again the next day. Before you know it, a significant amount of time has passed, and this can lead to unpleasant consequences that you will have to face.

To give you some clarity and help you better understand what I mean here, I want us to take a look at a quick example.

You have a meeting that's coming up in a week. There is a lot of planning involved, and you have to decide on a few factors regarding aspects that are directly related to the project. You will need to prepare a complete presentation to show the client next week, where they will decide whether or not to sign a contract with your company.

For the event that you will be arranging, you need to decide on a venue. There are three venues that you need to select from, and you will need to know which venue you will opt for before you start with the planning, as you have to create and present a layout for the client during the meeting.

You are not sure which venue to pick, so you keep delaying. When you delay too much, let's say until Friday afternoon, and you need to present to the clients on Monday, then you won't have much time to do the preparations for the presentation. Additionally, you might find that you are unable to determine the specifications of the venue as the office that is managing the venue closes early on a Friday, which means you are unable to get any specific details for the client by Monday – this would be a consequence of delaying the decision making.

Another important factor that needs to be taken into account when delaying any decision, especially important decisions that may later lead to consequences if you procrastinate now, is that this will cause mind cluttering. You will constantly be thinking about that particular decision, or decisions, that needs to be made. You will worry about what happens if you are too late, what will happen if you make the wrong decision, what the consequences would be.

While it might be intimidating to delay such a decision when you are not yet fully sure which option would be most ideal, it is important to consider all the thoughts that will be continuously racing through your mind. You won't be able to sleep, and you'll suffer from a higher level of stress than usual. Combined with added clutter in your mind, this will all have a dramatic effect on your mental agility and your ability to be productive in your daily life – both at work and at home.

How to Make Important Decisions Today

When it comes to making these important decisions without delay, there are a few strategies that may help you out. Many of us are so swamped with work and other stressors in our life that we often fail to realize how easy it often is to simplify more complex situations and processes, in order to make an important decision.

One of the most crucial factors regarding such a decision is that you take a few minutes of quiet time to yourself. Even if you can quickly squeeze in about five minutes. You need to clear your mind of everything, let go of all the clutter. By now, I have already introduced you to a large number of effective strategies that should help you reduce the cluttering in your mind, so it should be easier for you to think more clearly in your quiet time.

Decisions always have an impact on something, but the impact is not always at the same level. Sometimes, a decision may affect how you feel, such as when you decide not to pack lunch for the day. Often, such a small decision would not have a major impact on your life – you can go to the cafeteria and buy something to eat when you feel hungry or during your lunch hour.

Other times, however, decisions have a much larger impact – such as when you have to make a choice that could mean a client would sign a contract with your firm or rather go to another firm. This can be a major loss, especially when the client would be worth millions to your company, should you make the wrong choice and the client goes with their second choice.

The more of an impact a decision will have, the more you would have to consider the different options and ensure that the one you choose will have a most positive impact on your life or your career, compared to the other options that are available to choose from.

Know Your Goals

Prior to making a decision that will have an impact on your life or your career, such as those that may result in a hire from a client, it is vital that you

completely understand the goals that you are trying to reach with the particular decision that hangs on your shoulders. Understand exactly what needs to be done with that decision.

For example, is your goal to buy a new house? Understand the smaller goals involved as well. When you are trying to buy a house, you want to ensure there is adequate room for your family, so your goal will be to buy a house that has enough rooms, as well as living space, to accommodate everyone. You also have the goal of choosing a house that is close to schools and to your workplace and that of your wife.

At work, you might need to make a decision on a specific client as there is a conflict between two that you can sign. While the primary goal would be to make money through signing one of these clients, another goal may be to sign the one that could provide your business with a longer-term relationship and projects that will last for several years, even if it means a slightly lower profit on the first project compared to the other client.

As you can see, when you understand what the end goals are – all of them, not just the bigger picture – it becomes much easier to make the right decision.

Be Prepared and Well-Informed

You should be well-informed and very much prepared in order to make a decision that will be best for you, your family, or your business, depending on which party the decision will have an effect on. Thus, always ensure that you obtain as much information as possible related to a project, or whatever it is that is involved before you decide on which option you choose.

If you are going to be buying a house for you and your family, be sure to get information on available properties in your desired area from multiple real estate agencies. Also, make sure that you get as much information as possible on each of the available houses. How many rooms are there? How many bathrooms are there? Does the house have a study? Will you be able to park your car in a garage safely? How safe is the neighborhood? How much should you expect to pay monthly on the mortgage?

The same goes for a business-related decision. Have interviews with the clients that will be affected by your decision. Ask the right questions. Know what they

expect. Know what needs to be done. Understand what is involved.

All this information will help you filter out the bad options and choose the option that is best suited for the current scenario.

Make A Biased Decision

It is okay to listen to that gut feeling you get sometimes and to hear out the opinions of other people in your life, whether colleagues, family members, or friends, but it is also important that the decision you made is biased. Even though many would advise being unbiased, I personally find that making decisions in favor of something or someone, such as the parties involved in the situation, really is the best way to go about a decision-making process, and ultimately to avoid constantly finding yourself making delay after delay.

Consider the parties involved and understand what would be considered in their favor when making the final decision. Perhaps your family prefers a dog, so opt for a house with a big yard as compared to a smaller yard or an apartment in a more convenient location – that would be a biased decision based on the preferences of your family.

Weigh Out All the Pros and Cons

Each of the options that you can choose from when you make an important decision has pros and cons involved. It might not always be easy to identify all of the pros and all of the potential drawbacks related to a particular option, but setting up a list of what you know would happen, how you, your family, or perhaps your business could benefit, and what the downsides will be, can be a big help and will ensure making that decision becomes much easier in the end.

Make a list with all the options that are available. Then, set up a sub-list beneath each one. Write down some of the pros and then write down a couple of cons. Be realistic when you write down these factors. Consider all the research that has been done, the information you have gathered, and take the other points I have covered here into account as well.

When you look back at the list you made, you will start to get a better picture of which decision or option is the better choice to make, when comparing the pros

and cons of each option in front of you.

Understand Possible Consequences and Complications

Actions have consequences. Sometimes, even making the right decision in life can pose a threat to someone or to some party, and possibly lead to a series of complications. This is why making a list of pros and cons that can be associated with each option you are facing is often not enough. Additionally, you need to consider the chain of reactions that may occur once you make the decision – you need to do this for each of the options that you have listed.

If you choose a house with a bigger yard instead of an apartment in town, then you might have to drive a long way to drop off the kids at school and to get to the office. The reaction here would be the longer distance, which means a longer driving time in the morning and in the afternoon. In turn, you will have to get up earlier and perhaps move faster in the morning. You will also likely find that you get home later in the evening. This will also push up your monthly expenses for gas. Your car may need more regular services if you are going to be driving longer distances.

The same type of thought should go into decisions that will affect your career and the company you work at, whether you own the company or simply serve as an employee. If you are going to sign one client over another client, due to a conflict of interest or another related matter, then you need to consider possible consequences that may arise when you choose one particular client. If you need to select a venue, consider possible complications that may arise with each of the options.

Time for Action

After you have done thorough planning, you know the pros and cons of every option in front of you, and you should have an idea of the decision you need to make. Things should be much simpler now and give you the opportunity to make the decision without further delay.

When it is time for action, make the decision. Don't delay again. You have all the information and data that you now need to make the right decision and choose the option that will be most suited to the current situation. Take action,

make the decision, and follow the appropriate procedures in order to follow through on that particular decision that you have decided to make.

Following Up on Your Action

This is a step that people usually overlook and, while it is not really a necessity, I highly suggest that you take a moment to reflect on those decisions that you have made. Consider how they have worked out. I personally take 20 minutes once a week in order to follow up on the decisions that I have made during the week. I do this on the weekend when things are calmer. I sit down and take a look at all my notes related to any important decisions that I made. I consider the options I had, and how the one that I ended up choosing affected the particulars and parties involved.

This way, you will be able to learn from your own mistakes and motivate yourself through those decisions that worked out perfectly. Congratulate yourself on successful choices. Don't scold yourself on those that didn't work out great – rather look at why they didn't work out and see what you could have done differently. This way, you can avoid making such mistakes again in the future.

When Is It Better to Delay a Decision?

I know I just gave you the old speech of never delaying a decision and to stop procrastinating, but I do want to touch a quick topic – sometimes, in rare cases, it might be better to delay the process of choosing between different options. It is, however, essential that you understand that this only accounts for special cases and the fact that I am suggesting a possible delay should not give you the opportunity to make excuses when your case does not meet the criteria I am going to discuss here.

First of all, if the decision that you have to make is small and will have no significant impact on your life or in the workplace, then don't delay. No matter how small, the fact that you still need to make that decision will linger in your mind and add to the clutter that may already be present.

For small decisions, consider your options, weigh the pros and cons of each option, and then decide.

When the decision you have to make will have a bigger impact, however, then there are cases where you might want to consider a small delay. At the same time, I want to stress the fact that delaying should not lead to further delaying! One single delay and then, when the time comes, you need to make a choice.

The only time when important decisions should really be delayed is in cases where you feel sick or very tired. For example, if you have caught the flu or you have stayed up all night working on a project. Such scenarios call for rest and healing. ONLY delay the decision up to the time when you have gotten some sleep or when the flu has passed, then immediately start to work on a plan-of-action to ensure you can choose the most appropriate option.

It is usually also advised not to make important decisions when you are upset or angry, as a lot of people find that their emotions get in their way of making informed and realistic decisions. Also, if you feel hungry, try to grab a bite and wait about 20 minutes before you make a final choice.

If you feel especially stressed, try to meditate or do something else that will help you calm down, reduce anxiety, and eliminate stress, then work on making the perfect decision to ensure your project will surely succeed.

Chapter Ten: Learn How to Prioritize

Prioritization is an area where many people can learn a thing or two. We often prioritize activities, events, and tasks that are not as important as others that are also on our daily to-do list. I also covered the importance of prioritizing tasks earlier, but this is such an important matter that it really deserves its own chapter.

When it comes to prioritizing, one particular aspect is vitally important. This is to ensure that important tasks are added to your daily calendar at times when you are most productive and that less important tasks are left until times when productivity does not matter as much. When you cover crucial tasks that stress you out first and then handle assignments that are less stressful and takes up less time, later on, it means your mind cluttering will be less significant, and you'll be able to continue your day with a clear mind. This will allow you to continue working on tasks that are still left on your to-do list, without necessarily having to concern yourself about the things that are causing you stress.

The issue here is that quite a lot of people are not sure how they can start prioritizing the right tasks at the right times. This can quickly lead to chaos during the day when the person is faced with challenges that they cannot overcome because they did not deal with important and time-consuming tasks earlier in the day when they were more productive.

If these are problems that you have experienced in the past, then I want you to take a moment and observe – really take in what I am sharing in this chapter. With effective prioritization strategies, your mind will be less cluttered, as you won't have to stress about those tasks that still need to get done before the end of the day.

Prioritizing with a Step-By-Step System

There are various techniques that may be able to help you better prioritize what's on your to-do list for the day and understand what should be delayed until the next day if things do not turn out as scheduled or planned during any particular day. Taking things step-by-step and thoroughly planning for the day is vital. This really goes hand-in-hand with setting up a schedule and creating a routine for yourself. I have already covered the topic of just how important it is to plan ahead in order to avoid complications, as well as to plan for the unexpected.

Here is a step-by-step system that I personally follow in order to make an appropriate structure to my day and to ensure I prioritize the right tasks, assignments, and events, over those that are not as urgent or important as the others. This system is useful when it comes to decluttering the mind and boosting productivity in the workplace, as well as at home.

1. The first step is to get out your list of daily tasks. We have already covered the fact that you should plan your day and set up a list of activities and tasks that you need to tackle the next day. With this list already compiled, you will continue on from work in order to prioritize what you have set up already. This makes the task of prioritization much easier and faster.
2. When you have the list of tasks for the next day, divide the tasks into three different categories: urgent, important, and standard. Understand what each of these categories means and be accurate when you divide the tasks. Urgent tasks are those that really need to be done first as you are drawing close to their deadline. Standard tasks are the ones that can be delayed another day as they are still important, but there is still some time left to do them, and they do not stress you out as much. Important is those that fall in the middle, between urgent and standard.
3. In addition to determining the urgency of each task, consider the value of the task, along with the estimated effort that needs to be exerted in order to accomplish the task or activity. It would be useful to divide these tasks into categories like high value, medium value,

and low value. The value refers to the amount of profit or commission you and your business could make once that assignment is done. Furthermore, with effort, divide the activities into categories like maximum effort, standard effort, and minimum effort.

These three steps will give you the ability to see clearly which tasks should come first and which ones should come last. Try to make sure that the tasks that are urgent and require more effort, as well as those with greater value, are at the top of your list. The ones that are less valuable require less effort and are not as urgent should be at the bottom of the list. Now that you have re-arranged your to-do list, you can start adding it to the schedule and routine for the next day.

Understand When A Task Does Not Fit

We all have many tasks to complete each day. This can quickly become overwhelming. There are only 24 hours in a single day, and some of that needs to account for sleeping. You also need to eat and have some time for yourself and your family. Otherwise, you will end up burning yourself out. This can lead to serious problems!

With all of this in mind, I want you to note that understanding when a task will not fit on your to-do list for a specific day is important. When you have listed all tasks for a day according to their priority, and you know how much effort each will take, you will be able to estimate approximately how much time is required to complete each of these particular tasks.

This data should then be used to fit these tasks into your schedule. When you are reaching the end of the day, and there are still some tasks on the list that need to be added to your schedule, see which of these can be cut from the daily schedule and then added to your schedule for the next day.

When you need to cut some tasks from one day's schedule, be sure to reconsider the importance of the task for the following day's schedule and fit it into your to-do list and ensure the task gets done before its deadline.

Allow Some Flexibility While Prioritizing

While you are prioritizing your tasks, it is important to understand that things don't always go according to plan, no matter how hard you might try. For this reason, understand that you will need to add some flexibility to your schedule and your task list when you have prioritized what needs to be done. When something comes up, you also need to be able to adapt quickly in order to avoid delays in your assignments and still deliver on the projects that are urgent.

Let's consider an example to help you understand better what I mean here.

You have eight tasks that you need to complete in a single day. The most urgent of these is a report that needs to go out to a client early in the morning, so it naturally comes at the top of your to-do list for the day. While working on that report, you get a call that you have to prepare and offer a presentation in just two hours, a task that was scheduled for the end of the day.

In such a case, you would have to adjust to the situation and ensure that you can make appropriate changes and re-prioritize that list. Arrangements will need to be made to ensure you can deliver both projects on time if possible, or the one that now needs to be moved down the list of priorities needs to be scheduled appropriately with the client.

Chapter Eleven: Practice Meditation

Now we get to the action – an actual activity that you can do at any time of the day, no matter where you are, to clear that mind of yours that is so cluttered with thoughts and information. Meditation is an ancient practice. It has been used by the Monks for centuries, and today, millions of people are practicing meditation on a daily basis to ensure they are able to clear their minds, be productive, and avoid mind cluttering from getting in the way during the day when they need to focus on their work, being there for their family, or performing any other type of task.



What Exactly Is Meditation?

Even though meditation has become very popular throughout the world, and most people have at least heard of this technique, a lot of people are still not sure exactly what it means to meditate. For those individuals who have not yet practiced the art of mediation, individuals practicing the technique might seem like they are just sitting up sleeping or just closing their eyes.

The truth is, everyone really views mediation as something else. Some do mediation in order to find peace in life, to clear out their minds, or perhaps to help them better cope with a day that is excessively stressful. For others, this technique holds the power to help them focus on something very specific.

The idea behind meditation is to achieve a higher level of awareness, whilst also shutting down the mind and stopping the constant flow of thoughts that are causing our minds to become so cluttered in the modern day. It is important to note that, in truth, meditation is usually not thought of as an activity or something that a person is actively “doing.” Instead, the practice of meditation is rather considered a state of being – being aware, in particular.

Meditation does not include intensive concentration, as this is an activity, but it also does not impose a sense of reduced control. It is not an exercise, and it does not require mental effort. It is a calming state of being aware of surroundings, one’s inner self, and discovering what spirituality means to you in particular.

It is not completely possible to practice meditation without first understanding it. Without a thorough understanding of how meditation works and what it really is, a person would be prone to try and concentrate too much on the instructions, instead of letting their thoughts go and reaching deeper inside their own soul.

The Benefits of Practicing Meditation

Meditation has become so popular that many scientists have even begun conducting research on the benefits that this technique has to offer a person. Many of the scientific studies that have already been conducted have offered evidence that meditation is beneficial for a large number of areas related to both physical and mental health.

Helps to Reduce Stress

The stress reduction benefits of meditation are really the most researched topic when it comes to this technique. Many scientific studies have proven meditation as a highly effective method for relieving stress.

A study¹¹ that was led by the Department of Medicine at the Johns Hopkins University in Maryland is one excellent example of how science has proven the stress-relieving benefits of meditation. The study was conducted by a group of scientists and ended up analyzing the results of 47 different clinical trials that were previously conducted on the effects of meditation on psychological stress. The clinical trials had a total of 3515 participants. All the studies included daily meditation sessions, and all participants had experienced stressful situations at the time of the study.

The review that was conducted found that meditation is, in fact, a very effective option and can yield improvements in psychological stress that ranges from mild to moderate levels.

The scientists leading this study advised clinicians in the published paper to discuss the potential benefits of meditation with their patients who were experiencing psychological stress. This can be an effective option for reducing stress without necessarily relying on medication.

Stress is an important contributor to mind cluttering that needs to be considered here. When we stress, we constantly think about aspects of the past, present, and future – often aspects that are really not in our control. This causes the mind to quickly become cluttered with irrelevant thoughts, reducing the ability to focus

on a specific assignment or task and greatly interfering with your productivity.

Chronically suffering from high-stress levels also increases your risk of depression and anxiety, as well as making you more likely to develop a personality disorder. Furthermore, individuals who constantly find themselves under stress have a higher likelihood of developing heart-related diseases, having a heart attack, high blood pressure, and other conditions that may have serious implications for general well-being.

Improve Mental Health

Mental health plays a significant role in your general performance at work, no matter your occupation. Your mental health also contributes to how you handle personal situations – when you and your partner see things differently, when your children disobey you, and when you have to do something important that will have a significant impact on your entire family.

Meditation is a scientifically-proven method that can assist with improving several aspects relating to a person's mental health. Studies have confirmed that frequently participating in sessions of meditation produces an enhancement in a person's depression symptoms and reduces anxiety, as I already explained before. In addition to this, it has also been found that people who practice meditation tend to have a more positive outlook on their life and usually experience a better self-image compared to those who do not practice this particular technique.

When self-image, body-image, self-esteem and confidence levels are improved, a person will feel better about themselves. They will feel confident that they can accomplish things in life, which means they will worry less about a task and rather tackle it head-on, overcoming whatever challenges the task may throw their way. In this sense, a reduction of cluttering in their mind is to be expected.

Enhances Your Attention Span

When the mind is cluttered, one of the first things that people notice is their attention span flies out of the window. Focusing on something specific becomes a task that is seemingly impossible. This is a major problem for many people and is often what leads to distractions, ultimately causing projects to be delayed or

never be completed in the first place.

This is yet another area where meditation comes in handy. A major part of mindfulness and meditation is to pay attention to what is going on in the present, within a person's soul and mind, as well as within their surroundings. This greatly improves their ability to pay attention and to focus.

A study¹² published in the Journal of Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience looked at how meditation and mindfulness training practices affected the attention-span of individuals after the sessions had been completed. During the study, three particular attentional subsystems were monitored, including conflict monitoring, orienting, and alerting. The standard Attention Network Test was utilized in order to determine the effectiveness of the proposed techniques amongst the participants of the study.

Test results were collected before the participants were trained and asked to participate in mindfulness meditation sessions, as well as after the study period concluded. Training was provided to participants at a mindfulness retreat.

At the end of the study, significant improvements were observed in relation to attention-specific areas in all participants who were part of the study. The study concluded that mindfulness meditation was able to assist with improving not only attention span, but also the individual's ability to pay attention to a specific subject.

Another study¹³ led by the Department of Neurobiology and Anatomy at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine also tested the effects of meditation on attention-specific areas of mental performance amongst a group of participants. This particular study noted that even when individuals participated in brief training sessions of meditations, they were still able to greatly benefit from this technique regarding their focus and attention abilities.

The ability to pay better attention will also assist with mind cluttering. When a person is unable to focus on a task that they need to complete, it will cause them psychological distress. In turn, this will fill their head with thoughts of stress about the fact that they might be late and miss the deadline for the task at hand. With improved attention, they will continue to focus on the task that they need to complete without having to worry about not finishing the task due to the inability to concentrate.

Other Benefits Associated with Meditation

These are not the only proven benefits that you can expect to experience when you decide to start practicing meditation. There is a large list of benefits that have already been associated with this mindfulness technique. Further research is also constantly being implemented in order to uncover further how these techniques can help people live healthier, longer, and stress-free lives.

In addition to the benefits I discussed above, research has also found that meditation tends to generate kindness amongst those who practice the technique. It may also be beneficial as an anti-aging therapy for the brain since scientists discovered that age-related memory loss is far more uncommon among individuals who have frequent meditation sessions.

Meditation can also be useful in fighting certain types of addiction, as well as improving sleep.

Chapter Twelve: Get Some Sleep

“A ruffled mind makes a restless pillow.” – Charlotte Bronte

For me, nothing can stop me from hitting my head to my pillow at night, closing my eyes and getting some sleep. Sleep plays an important part in my daily schedule – it is part of my life and part of my health plan that I follow to stay healthy and productive. This really is how everyone should be thinking about sleep, yet a large percentage of the population fails to get enough sleep to ensure both their physical and mental well-being is adequately supported and maintained.

I'll be honest – it wasn't always like this for me. I used to work late nights. I would sit in front of my laptop preparing reports and making sure I could ace the next day's meetings until three or four in the morning. I'd sleep for two hours, get up, and hit the road to work.

I found myself tired and weak all the time. My life felt dreadful. I had depressive thoughts all the time. I did not have a life that I could say I was proud of – I didn't have time for my family or to concentrate on myself. I thought that those nights up working would make me more productive, help me get more work done, ensure I could land more projects, and ultimately give me a bigger paycheck. I was wrong to think that way, as I was really living in a delusional world where I convinced myself I didn't need sleep if I wanted to be successful in life.

I eventually burnt out. I couldn't take it anymore. Everything was too much. I passed out one night from tiredness and slept so long that I missed an important meeting the next day. Even though I missed that meeting, I felt so good. I was able to reschedule and then ace that meeting the very same day. No problem at all. I felt better than I had in a very long time, and that was when I started to realize that what my life was really missing was actually some sleep.

After working a little on my schedule and changing some things around in my routine, I decided to try to go to bed early for just a week and see how things went. One week later, my life felt changed. I got up in the morning feeling refreshed. There were no more dark circles around my eyes. I felt healthy, physically and emotionally. I didn't feel drained, tired, and weak anymore.

I'll get to my point – sleep should be important to you, no matter how busy you are!



Why Is Sleep Such an Important Issue

I'm not the only one who has felt the dreadful side-effects of poor sleep. Millions of people continue to struggle on with a life where sleep does not get a priority, which, in turn, causes them to go through their daily lives feeling miserable.

This really is one of the very first factors that I want to note when it comes to why you need to sleep. You'll feel better, trust me.

Additionally, you will find that you feel less stressed when you sleep better and when you ensure you get enough sleep. You will also be in a better mood, as sleep deficiency is known to cause irritability and other emotional problems.

While I'm on the subject, did you know that sleep deficiency increased your chances of becoming obese? Yup, its true – and there are many scientific papers on this matter. If you become obese, it increases your risk of many other diseases and health ailments.

In addition to obesity, sleep deficiency has also been linked to many other health problems¹⁴. When a person fails to sleep enough, they are more likely to develop hypertension (high blood pressure), heart disease, and you are also at a higher risk of diabetes. All these conditions can make life more miserable and add additional stress to your life.

Thus, when you start to sleep better, your risk of being diagnosed with these diseases is reduced, compared to the time where you did not attend to your sleep schedule.

A review paper¹⁵ published by the Seep Research United at the University of Turku in Finland explains that sleep deprivation also affects working memory and attention. It interferes with long-term memories, and it causes problems with your decision-making skills. You find it more difficult to concentrate on tasks, and you will experience a drastic reduction in your overall productivity.

How Much Should You Sleep to Experience Benefits

It is important to understand that each person is different and, while there are certain recommendations, you will have to find a specific timespan of sleep that works best for you. At the same time, research has shown that adults who sleep between specific timeframes tend to be healthier, more alert, and generally happier with their sleep habits compared to others who do not follow these standards in sleep time recommendations.

The minimum time spent sleeping each night for an adult person is recommended to be no less than seven hours. This provides the body and the brain an adequate period of time to replenish, restore, and to become prepared for the next day. There are many processes that occur during sleep, which is why adequate time is required in order to ensure all of these processes can complete without disruptions getting in your way.

In addition to ensuring you sleep for a minimum of seven hours, you should ensure that you do not sleep for more than nine hours per day. Even though sleep deprivation has been linked to numerous health issues, you should understand that sleeping too much is also very bad for your health. A good balance in the amount of time you spend sleeping is needed for maximum benefits and ensuring your body is ready for the next day.

How to Attend to Your Sleeping Schedule

Most people accept sleep as something that is naturally part of their life. It is something that they will get to when they get to it – at the end of the day when everything else has been done, and after they have checked off all the tasks on their to-do list for the day. I find that this is one of the main reasons why people neglect sleep and end up only sleeping a few hours, which really harms their health, their productivity, and their cognitive performance.

To ensure you attend to your sleep as much as you do to the other parts of your life, I recommend adding sleep to your daily schedule. This will ensure that you do not become too occupied with other activities that you end up forgetting that you need and deserve some sleep to help your mind unwind and get your brain ready for what the next day holds for you.

If you are currently stuck in a trap where you find yourself working until after midnight and only allowing yourself an hour or two worth of sleep each night, then it might be a little difficult to get things back on track.

All you really need to get things going and to start following a better sleeping routine is that first night of good sleep. After this, things gradually start to improve. You do, however, need to take action and make the first move from your own side. You need to assert the effort in order to gain the rewards of healthier, better sleeping habits.

There are, however, a few tricks that I want to share with you that I have adopted over time in order to make my nights more pleasant and peaceful and to ensure that I get the best possible sleep every night. It is not only the duration of sleep that counts; you should also concentrate on doing your best to improve your overall sleep quality as well.

A Bedtime Ritual

If you have followed through my book thus far, you should remember that we already tackled the fact that you need to create a routine for yourself – this included a morning and a night routine. Now, I want you to take things a step

further in order to ensure that you sleep better at night. When it comes to going to bed and falling asleep, and staying asleep, a good way to ensure that you are able to do all of these things to the best of your ability is to set a bedtime ritual for yourself.

It is a really good idea to try to go to bed every night at about the same time. I know this really isn't 100% possible, as we have different things that fill up our schedules each day but set a specific time and then maybe allow about an hour for flexibility. Let's say that you decide to go to bed at 9.30pm – allow yourself to go to bed between 9.00pm and 10.00pm. This also does not mean you have to go to sleep right away. Maybe get out a book and read a little bit – reading is really good for you, and it is a great way of relaxing before you sleep.

In addition to going to bed, your ritual should also include a few steps before you actually get into your bed. Maybe you want to take a shower before going to bed, and you probably have specific night time clothes that you wear while you sleep (PJ's).

Limit Your Exposure to Electronic Devices

If you are like most people today, you probably get into bed and immediately launch Facebook or another app on your phone. People have gotten so used to getting their phones or tablets out in bed, and then browsing through their social media streams or playing games before they sleep. For others, sleep is not on the table before they watch that one last episode of the Big Bang Theory or Game of Thrones.

While these are all great ways to let the time pass, they will not do you any good just before bedtime. The truth is, the screens fitted on these devices emit a light that is going to keep your brain active, even when you decide to put the device down. That's why you often find yourself lying awake at night without being able to sleep after you spent an hour on Facebook before putting your phone down. Thoughts are racing through your head, unable to turn off.

Your phone is one of the biggest distractions of sleep. Gaming consoles, movies, television shows – try to limit your exposure to any electronic devices that emit light (so anything with a screen) when you get into bed.

If you do decide to use such a device, then limit the amount of time you spend

on the device. What feels like 10 minutes on Facebook is often an hour in reality. Keep an eye on the time. Additionally, see if the device you are using has a “Night Mode” feature. This usually dims the light and reduces your exposure to specific colors that are known to trigger brain activity.

Keep Your Room Free of Distractions

When you are woken at night, it can quickly ruin a good night’s sleep and make falling asleep again very difficult. For this reason, I highly recommend laying your room out in such a setup that you can sleep without any distractions at night. Try to hang thick curtains in front of your windows to ensure you keep light out of your room. When your room is dark, and there are no lights frequently shining into your room, you will sleep more peacefully. If you live near a railroad or a busy road, then try to get some earplugs that you can use while sleeping. This will keep the noise out and ensure you are not woken up by a train or car moving close to your house.

It might also be a good idea to take a quick trip to the bathroom before you sleep. The urge to urinate at night is another distraction that can wake you up, and many people find it hard to go back to sleep if they wake up at night, especially when it is close to the time that they need to get up. If you go to the bathroom before you sleep, there is a good chance that you will not need to wake up in the middle of the night to go again.

Have Some Chamomile Tea Before You Sleep

Many different kinds of sleep aids have been suggested to help people fall asleep faster and to help boost their sleep quality. Some people who have insomnia opt for medication that helps them sleep, but the problem with taking a sleeping drug is that they often cause side-effects that are very unpleasant. These side-effects usually include day-time drowsiness and tiredness, which can greatly interfere with your ability to be productive – this is not something you want.

There are also a lot of natural remedies that have been suggested to be used as sleeping aids. I personally prefer chamomile tea over the other options that are often recommended to people. I use chamomile tea on a regular basis, and it really helps to calm me down just before I get into bed. I also find that I sleep

faster and better with a cup of chamomile tea.

There are also a couple of studies that support the effectiveness of chamomile as a natural sleeping aid. For example, a clinical trial¹⁶ led by the Trauma Nursing Research Center at the Kashan University of Medical Sciences in the Republic of Iran tested the effects of a chamomile supplement amongst a group of participants suffering from insomnia.

There were 60 individuals who took part in the clinical trial. Each of the participants was provided a capsule that contained 200mg of chamomile extract. The participants were asked to take one tablet two times every day for a period of 28 days.

A control group was also part of the study. Participants of the control group received a capsule that contained 200mg of wheat flour instead of chamomile extracts.

At the end of the study, no significant results were observed in the control group. The participants who were provided with a chamomile capsule, however, experienced improvements in their sleep quality, duration, and the time it took them to fall asleep after they got into bed at night.

With this in mind, if you are not a person who enjoys tea, you can opt for a chamomile supplement. They are readily available at supplement stores and even some local supermarkets that stock a variety of supplements.

There are, of course, a couple of other natural supplements that you can opt for if you wish. Natural supplements that contain melatonin, valerian root, passion flower, and lavender may also work wonders in helping you shut down at night and sleep better.

Chapter Thirteen: Slow Down

We are living in a rat race and life never really seems to slow down, ever. Things just keep getting busier and busier. New York and Hong Kong are only two examples of cities that never sleep. Many shops in busy cities are now open 24/7, which means jobs are becoming more demanding. It can be hard to keep up with the rate at which things are moving today. This is causing people to become more stressed, to feel depressed, and to experience a mind that is full of clutter.

You don't know where to touch, where to let go, what to do next – your ultimate goal is to ensure everyone in your life is happy. This includes your family, your employer, your clients, and so many other people.

No matter how well you think you are coping with the rat race and a life that is just increasing in pace, if you never take a moment to slow down and appreciate the smaller things in life, a moment to relax and unwind, and to clear your mind, then you are not truly operating at your best.

When you are always busy running from one task to another, going from work to dinner to shower to bed, only to wake up and follow the same routine that imprisons you in a life of just running around again, then you can never really appreciate any “moment” for what it is, and you'll never be able to truly know what it is that you need to do to improve in life.

Slowing down is important. It helps. Unfortunately, most people who are part of the ever-continuing rat race think that slowing down is something they cannot do – they either think they do not have the time to slow down or they think that they do not need to slow down.

Once you decide that you want to slow down, you will be able to start enjoying life more. Even the little things in life will become more appreciable to you. You'll start to notice things that you never even gave a thought to in the past. This is calming and reassuring. It will set your mind to peace. In turn, you'll be able to experience a reduction in the cluttering that is happening in your mind, and things will start to feel a little more organized.



How to Slow Down

For people who are always busy, slowing down might not be as easy as it sounds. When they try to slow down a little, their minds start to work overtime. To appreciate life for what it is and to really slow down, you need to be present in the moment, be mindful, be completely aware of everything that surrounds you, and be aware of yourself.

I appoint one day each week as my slow day. It's usually Fridays. During this day, I aim to do as little as possible in terms of productivity and work, whilst still ensuring that anything that is urgent or important gets done on time. So, I urge you to try and do the same, just for a month. See what happens.

First, decide on which day of the week will be your slow day. Then, when you prepare your schedule and routine for the day, and you have prioritized all your tasks, see if there are any tasks you can re-schedule for the next day. Only include what is really important and needs to be done urgently on your slow day schedule.

Don't just take things slow on that day. Be present. Think about what is happening. Take some time off from work. Since you will be doing less, try to leave the office earlier. Maybe spend some time with your loved ones or treat yourself for a change. Plan something special. Appreciate yourself and your family.

I also try to become disconnected as much as possible to technology on my dedicated slow days. In the rat race, we are part of today, and it is quite easy to become lost in communication devices. I have two phones – one for personal use and one for business use. I have a laptop at the office and at home. We have a television in the living room, as well as in each of the bedrooms. These are all devices that distract you from what is going on in life. It prevents you from appreciating a lot of things.

Try to put away your phones and laptops and keep the television off for the day. Once you are finished with work, and there are no more important phone calls to make, switch off your phone. Ask your family to do the same. Then spend some quality time together.

On your slow day, you should really try to find pleasure in life's smaller things. When you drive home from work, drive slower than usual. Look at your surroundings and appreciate nature for a moment. Look at all the people rushing to their next meeting and appreciate the fact that you have taken a big step toward not allowing the rat race to overpower you.

When you eat, try to eat a little slower than usual. You'll not only feel fuller after your meal, but you'll also be able to appreciate how the food taste. When we have to follow a busy schedule, we usually try to gulp our food as fast as possible just to ensure our tummies are full. We never really stop for a moment to appreciate the tastes and aromas of the food.

During a slow day, life is unpredictable, and stressors may come your way. When the day seems to be going back to its regular pace, when life becomes stressful, I urge you to take a moment and breathe deeply. Concentrate on your breathing. Bring yourself back to this specific moment in time. Relax, unwind, and then, after a few deep breaths, look at the situation and try to find a way to overcome it and solve any problems without any interference with your ability to take things slow for just that one day.

Chapter Fourteen: Talk to Someone

I have heard too many people say that talking to someone about their problems and asking for help is a sign of weakness. This is not true, and it really is something that you need to understand if you truly wish to unwind and unclutter your mind.

We all have people in our lives that deeply care for us. No matter how alone you might feel, chances are there are people in your life that would be willing to sit you with and listen to anything that is bothering you, without judging you, because they care about you and they love you. This might be a partner, a friend, or a family member.

When life gets tough, and we get stressed, when we feel depressed, it is quite easy to overlook these facts. You might feel that when you talk about your problems, you are going to make them someone else's problems. Perhaps you feel that going through a tough time on your own is a sign of strength. The reality of the situation is, if you are stressed, your mind is cluttered, and you don't know how to get through a tough situation, opening up might rather be a sign of you admitting that things are tough. It takes courage and strength for most people to do something like that.

If you feel that friends and family should not be made aware of things that you are going through, then there are many professionals throughout the entire world who are ready to listen to what you have to say. There is nothing wrong or to be embarrassed about when you decide to see a therapist.

The fact of the matter is when you talk to someone – you get an opportunity to speak out loud about things that might be bothering you, thoughts that are cluttering your mind. Regardless of how serious they are, or how irrelevant they are to a specific situation when you talk to someone else, you are able to sort through the thoughts and feelings in your head.

By doing this, you will start to get a new perspective on things in life. In many cases where I talk to someone, I often find that a situation that seems dramatic and unsolvable in my head quickly starts to make more sense and look less intense once I start explaining it and talking about it out loud. I start to see things from a different perspective – and this is something that is sure to benefit you in

both the short term and the long term.

Furthermore, when there are many thoughts racing through your head, you are building up the tension. You are causing yourself to become more stressed. You start to feel anxious. By talking to someone about these thoughts – whether they are simply stressors or actual problems in your life – you will really start to feel that the tension becomes less. This helps to reduce your stress.

As you can see, there really are many benefits to this particular strategy that I am suggesting. If you are not sure about whether or not to talk to someone, I encourage you to at least try it – if only once. Find someone that you can talk to, explain to them a situation you are in, talk to them about thoughts that are cluttering your mind. See if it helps. If it does, then I urge you to continue to do so. Have a weekly session where you can unload your clogging thoughts onto someone else, gain a new perspective on challenges you are facing, and reduce your stress.

Who Should You Talk To

For many people, the question that arises here is who they should talk to. A lot of people find it hard to trust others. This is quite normal, especially for someone who has been betrayed in their past. For this reason, it is important that you take a moment in order to determine who would really be the best person to talk to.

Even though I am suggesting that you talk to someone in order to gain a variety of benefits that such an action may hold for you, you cannot simply unload what is cluttering your mind on just about anyone or everyone. You need to be realistic about the people who are present in your life.

I suggest making a list of those people you consider close to you. Add family members and friends. Maybe you get along really well with some of your colleagues – add them to the list if this is the case.

When you have a list, look closely at all of the names you have added. Determine who you would be comfortable talking to. A lot of people would prefer not to talk about such personal matters with family members, while others would rather prefer to share their feelings with a family member. A family member might be your partner, your brother or sister, a niece or nephew, or even a parent.

If you feel that you'd be more comfortable sharing with a friend that you have had since high school, then so be it.

The goal is to find someone that you truly trust. Someone you can share personal information with, without being at risk of them exposing what you told them to someone else. Someone who is a great listener and also a very understanding person.

When you find that particular individual, get in touch with them. Ask them how it's going and tell them you want to see them sometime. There is no need to ask them to be your therapist – just tell them that you need a good friend. When you hang out, talk to them. Tell them how you are feeling. Tell them about things that are racing through your mind. Tell them about problems that you might be facing right now.

When they are understanding, they will show compassion. You'll be able to get

your feelings out there, get a new perspective on things, and maybe even find solutions to problems that have been lingering in your mind for quite some time.

A therapist might be a good idea too. What many people do not realize is that therapists can be great stress relievers too. There is no need to go through a divorce or another serious problem in your life before deciding to see a therapist. You can talk to them about anything that is causing you distress. They will listen to you and acknowledge what you are telling them. They might sometimes be able to give you some useful advice, but most of the time, they will allow you to get your feelings out there so that you can start the process of solving your problems and clearing your mind.

Ultimately, it is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to see a therapist. You are the only one who can decide who you would feel comfortable talking to. It is crucial that you do feel comfortable, as being uncomfortable in a situation where you need to talk about stressors, feelings, emotions, and cluttering in your mind may not be as effective.

Final Words

The mind is not only fascinating but also extremely complicated. We have thoughts going through our heads the entire time, but once we take control, we have power over how these thoughts affect us. Too many people find themselves with a cluttered mind because they have too many thoughts in their mind, worrying about things that happened yesterday, stressing about what will happen tomorrow, and trying to get as much as possible done at the same time.

A cluttered mind really is an unproductive mind, one that will cause you to experience difficulty concentrating, being alert and staying focused. No matter how good you think you are at multitasking and keeping up with the demands of working on too many things at one time, you need to start taking it slow, and you need to start focusing on one thing at a time. Prioritize the activities in your daily routine, and set up your schedule to avoid overloading your brain.

If you find your mind cluttered, there are many techniques that you can implement to unclutter your mind, produce a calmer train of thoughts, and claim control.

I was once a victim of a mind that was so cluttered I didn't know where to touch and where to let go. It eventually starts to eat at you, without you realizing just how much of an impact everything has on you.

The techniques I shared in this book are effective, as I have relied on them myself, and still do, to reduce cluttering in my mind, and to become a calmer person that is able to be productive, focus on singular tasks, and thrive in everyday situations. Once you start implementing these techniques, you'll find that you also become more productive, you will start sleeping better, and you'll experience improvements with your mental health.