

How to get more done by working less

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Would you believe me if I said the secret to my success was working less?

Our society is addicted to doing more, becoming hyper-productive, and getting an insane amount of stuff done.

Many CEOs wake up at dawn and work 16-hour days. Just look at the productivity industry. We hire consultants and buy timesaving software and gadgets. We research life hacks and read one productivity book after another. If we could find a way to function optimally on two hours of sleep every night, we would do it.

But in my case, working less — not more — helped me to build a second business that ended up being more successful than my first.

Why Successful People Need Essentialism

There's an increasingly popular philosophy called "essentialism". According to author and researcher Greg McKeown, [essentialism](#) is the disciplined pursuit of doing fewer things better.

It's giving up the trivial many for the vital few.

You can also think of the Pareto principle or the "80-20 rule," which is the observation that [80 percent of outcomes come from 20 percent of inputs](#). The key is figuring out *which* 20 percent is actually effective and getting rid of the rest.

This is especially relevant to entrepreneurs who are already successful. Believe it or not, success gets in the way of greater success.

When you're just starting out, distractions are few. Focus is relatively easy because you don't have a lot going on. Opportunities aren't knocking down your door.

As you become successful, more opportunities come, but only a few of those actually move the needle.

This is when you need to free up your time again and focus on what *really* matters so you can jump to the next level of success. Stumbling upon this lesson when I was running my first business enabled me to grow a more successful *second* business.

How I Achieved More by Doing Less

My first business was an e-commerce company selling high-end poker chips. I worked more than 40 hours a week, doing everything from shipping to business development.

I wondered what would happen if I decided to only ship orders and respond to customer service requests on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

What I found out shocked me: I could produce the same results in three days that I had in five. I continued to reduce my time working on my poker chip business until I was down to 12 hours a week.

The business grew, and I used my free time to pursue other business ideas.

One day, a friend of mine introduced me to paddle surfing, and I was hooked. I saw an opportunity and started a paddleboard company. Now three years later, we're on pace for \$5 million in revenue in the business' fourth year.

If I hadn't cut back on my working hours, I would still be toiling away at the poker chip business. By minimizing my effort there while getting the same output, I freed up my time and focus. That translated into a second business that's 10 times more valuable — and potentially 100 times more profitable — than my first one.

7 Ways Successful People Can Apply Essentialism

When you decide that it's time to free up more of your time and focus and make the most of new opportunities, remember these seven ways you can apply essentialism to your career:

1. Say no to almost everything.

Teach yourself to say no. Listen to requests for your time and energy, but refuse unless they're no-brainers. You want to leap to the next level of success. Unless this one thing can help you do that, pass.

2. Realize that what you *don't* do is more important than what you do.

Essentialism is a subtractive process. You do less and less until you're down to the bare bones of what you truly need to be doing. Instead of asking what else you can do, ask, "What can I stop doing without things completely falling apart?"

3. Plan one essential task a day, and do it.

Aim to accomplish just one task you can reasonably complete in two or three hours, and get it done. Do it at the beginning of the day before circumstances take you elsewhere.

4. Eliminate the easy stuff.

Don't answer the phone. The caller will leave a message if it's important. Check and answer emails only twice a day, or don't check emails at all on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Refuse to do business meetings. If someone wants to talk to you, he can buy you lunch and meet you near where you are.

5. Don't let social media suck your life away.

Social media is a pleasant distraction — amplified. Americans spent [121 billion minutes on social media](#) in July 2012 alone. But don't let it eat

into your focus time. Socialize when you socialize, and focus when you're trying to achieve something.

6. Replace the fear of missing out with the fun of it.

We try to do everything because we're afraid of missing out on experiences and opportunities. Challenge yourself to miss out on purpose. Create space for something spontaneous and serendipitous to happen. You'll be surprised by how missing out on one thing paves the way for something better.

7. Be critical of how you spend your time.

Set aside time to assess how you're using your time. This is the most important hour of your week. Just as wealthy people spend more time thinking about their finances, highly productive people spend more time thinking about how they spend their time. Use the information to systematically do less of everything except the essentials.

It's easy to think that doing less means you're slacking, but effort doesn't always equal results. You need the discipline to focus on the right things — the vital few — to achieve greater success than you thought possible.

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