

# Reaching Peak Performance for Knowledge Workers

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RICHARD THRIPP

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# Definitions

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“Knowledge workers are workers whose **main capital is knowledge**. Typical examples may include software engineers, doctors, architects, engineers, scientists, public accountants, lawyers, and academics, whose job is to ‘think for a living.’”

## Reference

Davenport, T. H. (2005) as cited on Wikipedia. *Thinking for a living: How to get better performance and results from knowledge workers*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

# Definitions:

Reference: Buckingham-Shum, S. (1998). "Negotiating the construction of organisational memories," in: *Information technology for knowledge management*, edited by U.M. Borghoff & R. Pareschi, pp. 55-78. Berlin: Springer. (Reprinted from: *Journal of Universal Computer Science*, 3 (8), 1997, 899-928)

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## Knowledge work:

- \* Ad-hoc behaviors
- \* Less structure
- \* Fuzzy job titles and duties
- \* Inconsistent methods & output
- \* **Diverse** & variable
- \* Mobility and satisfaction valued

## Procedural work:

- \* Structured behaviors
- \* Inflexible filing system
- \* Well-defined roles
- \* **Consistent** methods & output
- \* Clear information flow
- \* Seniority and compartmentalization valued

# Time vs. Energy

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# Time vs. Energy

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**Free time and free mental energy are *not* the same.**

# Time vs. Energy

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For example, you might have free time in the evening, but be **exhausted** from your day job, and not be able to do any knowledge work.

# Time vs. Energy

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You might have the **energy** to do knowledge work but not the time, due to pressing procedural work such as paperwork, household chores, childcare, driving, cooking, etc.

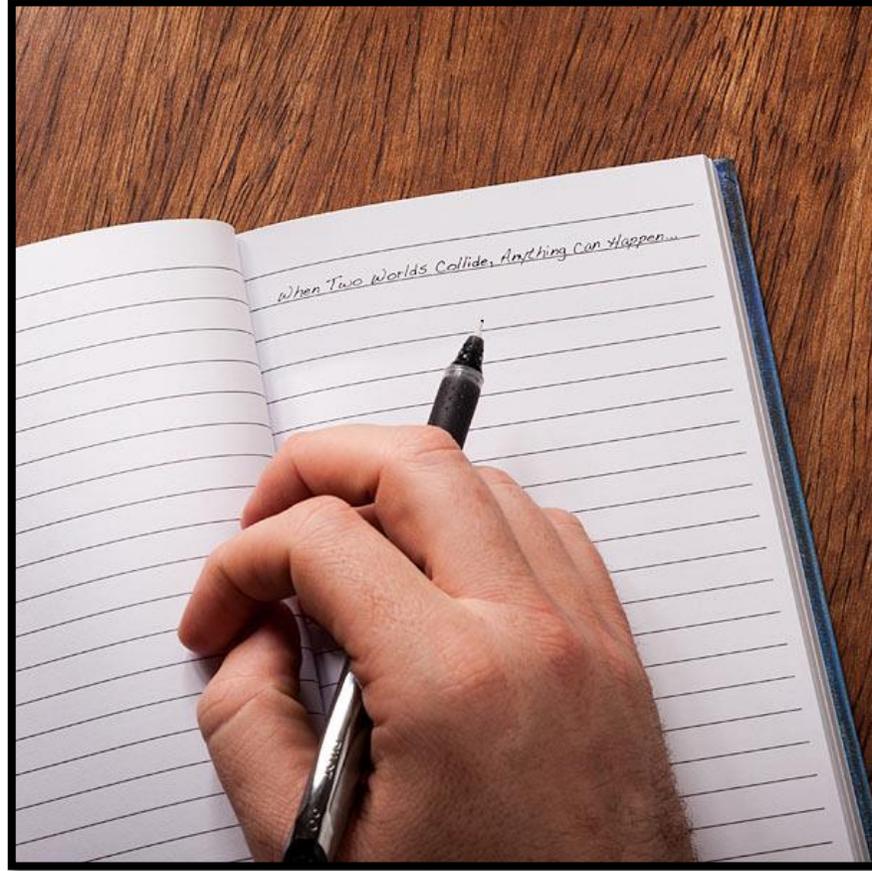
Time vs. Energy

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*Possible Solutions*

# Time vs. Energy

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# Time vs. Energy

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Keep a **journal** of your energy levels throughout the day. Then, schedule menial activities (procedural work) during your downtime and hard mental activities (knowledge work) when you have the most energy.

## Time vs. Energy

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Typically, hard mental work should be done **early** in the day.

# Time vs. Energy

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However, many **creative** artists are more productive late at night or in the wee hours of the morning!

# Distractions

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# Distractions

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**Self-distraction** may be  
your greatest enemy!

# Distractions

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How many of you check/visit/use  
at least one of the following  
websites/apps/services **mindlessly**?

# Distractions

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Email, SMS (text messaging), Facebook, Facebook Messenger, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Yahoo, Wikipedia, Meetup, Pinterest, Google News, local news, Snapchat, Instagram, Candy Crush (puzzle game)

# Distractions

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**You are not alone!**

# Distractions

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*But you will not reach  
**peak performance**  
by following the crowd.*

# Distractions

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- *What if, instead?*

# Distractions

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- *What if, instead?*

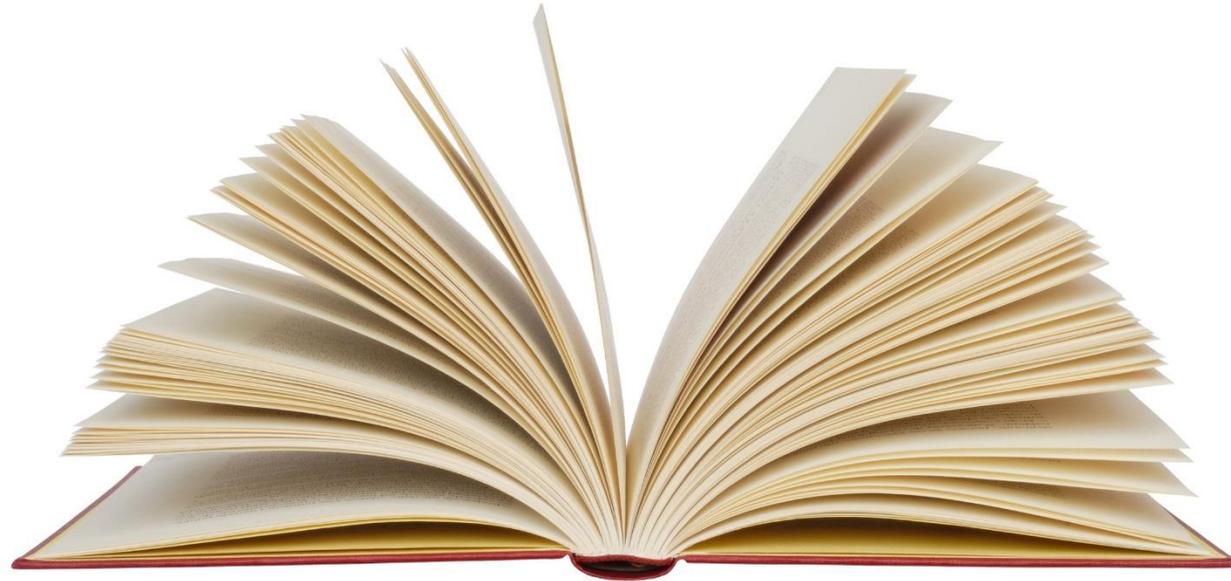
**You re-train yourself to do something useful when your mind wanders?**

# Distractions



# Distractions

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# Distractions

The image shows a screenshot of the MIT OpenCourseWare website. At the top, the MIT OpenCourseWare logo is displayed, along with a navigation menu including 'Courses', 'About', 'Donate', and 'Featured Sites'. A search bar is also present. The main content area features a video player with a hand-drawn diagram illustrating the process of chemical energy being converted into light energy. The diagram shows a transition from a ground state to an excited state, with chemical energy absorbed and light energy emitted. Three beakers containing colored liquids (pink, blue, green) are shown, labeled with  $H_2O_2$  and 'Oxidation'. A hand holding a marker is visible at the bottom right of the video frame. Below the video player, there is a 'Support OCW' section with a quote from Gary Self Learner, Australia, and a 'DONATE NOW' button.

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Chem Demos go Behind the Magic

$A + B \rightarrow C + D^* \rightarrow D + \text{light}$

Excited State

Ground State

Chemical Energy Absorbed

Light Energy Emitted

[» Learn More](#)

$H_2O_2$   $H_2O_2$   $H_2O_2$

Oxidation

Photo credit: MIT OpenCourseWare.

Support OCW

I donate to OCW because I love the idea of sharing knowledge for its own sake and the humanity of freely sharing, rather than for profit.

Gary Self Learner Australia

[DONATE NOW](#)

# Distractions

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- You may find that working on your plans, budget, pleasure or educational reading, or online courses is even more compelling than:

# Distractions

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- You may find that working on your plans, budget, pleasure or educational reading, or online courses is even more compelling than:

~~Email, SMS (text messaging), Facebook, Facebook Messenger, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Yahoo, Wikipedia, Meetup, Pinterest, Google News, local news, Snapchat, Instagram, Candy Crush (puzzle game)~~

# Interruptions

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# Interruptions

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**“Please do not disturb.”**

# Interruptions

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*Are you sure about that?*

# Interruptions

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# Interruptions

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PRESENTING:

# Interruptions

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PRESENTING:

The art of making  
yourself scarce.

# Interruptions

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If possible, silence the phone and don't answer it. Let them leave voicemails.  
Call everyone back in a designated **block of time**, on your terms.

# Interruptions

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**Stop answering emails immediately!**

# Interruptions

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**Schedule** two times a day to check and respond to email and stick to it.

# Interruptions

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Do **intense** mental work early in the morning before anyone is awake. 😊

# Interruptions

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Save time on Facebook by  
“**liking**” replies rather than  
responding to them. 😊

# Delegation

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Not just for elitists—consider that your “underlings” may be gaining **valuable experience** by doing your procedural “grunt work.” They may also enjoy it.

# Delegation

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Delegation can be done via the **Internet**, saving time. For example, you may have others proof-read your writing or manage your website, without ever meeting in-person.

# Delegation

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Balance costs vs. rewards: delegation may require a **large upfront cost** (training) and take a long time to reach the break-even point.

# Priorities

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# Priorities

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Or, I **used** to be a gamer.

# Priorities

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What keeps you busy in the **short term** might not be what your heart wants in the long term.

# Priorities

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Consider focusing on Quadrant II priorities (Stephen Covey): things that are **important** in the long term but not urgently necessary.

# Priorities

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Your priorities and aspirations **can and will** change. You can alter them as time passes and situations change, while still being true to yourself.

# Priorities

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Saying “**no**” and “**yes**” to the right people and things is far easier said than done.

# Priorities

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But ignoring or making **phony excuses**  
is far worse.

# Priorities

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Recently, I have found that people do not take offense when I decline opportunities because they do not “interest” or “motivate” me.

# Priorities

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Perhaps phony excuses are **no longer** needed?

# Priorities

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Respect the value of introspection, **research**, and long-term planning. They are very important to peak performance throughout life.

# Call to Action

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What can you do **tonight** that will set you up for a better Thursday?

# Call to Action

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Plan the **first thing** you will  
work on in the morning.

# Call to Action

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Send an email or text message asking if **someone else** can help, or start doing the work they are supposed to be doing.

# Call to Action

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Tell others you will be  
**indisposed** tomorrow.

# Call to Action

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And do the **great things**  
you are meant to do.

# END

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RICHARD THRIPP