

## A Book Review

*The 4-Hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss

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In his best-selling book, *The 4-Hour Workweek*, Timothy Ferriss encourages those dissatisfied with their job or lifestyle to forget about the old concept of retirement and start living your dream today. With the help of his own experiences and adventures, Ferriss provides a formula, which if followed, he claims, will transform your life into the life of “The New Rich.” The New Rich lead lives that require working few hours while still having the means to travel the world in search of adventure. How do the New Rich accomplish this? By following Ferriss’ simple formula, DEAL. DEAL stands for Definition, Elimination, Automation, and Liberation. In short, this formula provides a way to make one’s work not only efficient, but also effective. Ferriss claims that being efficient is great, but if it’s taking 50+ hours a week to get your work done, that’s not very effective.

### **D is for Definition**

This section focuses on Ferriss’ belief that you don’t have to work yourself to death. The fact that society defines people by how many hours they work doesn’t mean it’s a healthy way to approach life. Working 50+ hours for 40 years in order to then retire and fall into depression due to lack of work is not the right path. Instead of working nonstop without enjoying your job, Ferriss challenges you to end the routine of your current lifestyle and follow your passion. Passion is not merely happiness, passion is excitement. What’s the worst that could happen? It’s not like your JD will disappear if you stop practicing for a certain time. To get more comfortable with the idea of changing your routine, Ferriss provides a helpful exercise. First, define your dream. If it wasn’t for the things you *have* to do, what would you be doing with your life right now? Next, define your nightmare. What’s the worst thing that could happen if you followed that

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dream? If you compare the dream to the nightmare, is the nightmare bad enough to abandon your dream? Most likely not.

### **E is for Elimination**

This section is the most valuable part of Ferriss' book because it provides advice on how to be more effective through proper time management. All of the advice is founded on "Pareto's Distribution" concept (also known as the 80/20 principle). This concept states that 80% of our wealth and income is produced by 20% of our efforts. Ferriss argues that we must determine which 20% is responsible for the 80% of the desired outcomes. Then, we must eliminate the other 80% of work which eats away at our time, while only producing 20% result. This not only makes one's input more efficient and effective, it frees up 80% of your time. Sure, this sounds great, but, how does one actually implement this in practice?

- *Limit tasks to the important to shorten work time (80/20) and shorten work time to limit tasks to the important.*

When we have less time we are more efficient. "Since we have 8 hours to fill, we fill 8 hours. If we have 15, we would fill 15. If we have an emergency and need to suddenly leave work in 2 hours but have pending deadlines, we miraculously complete those assignments in 2 hours" writes Ferriss. Furthermore, setting aggressive start and end times forces one to prioritize and work on the mission-critical tasks.

- *Stop multitasking immediately.*

When trying to write, close your email, instant messenger, and web browser and focus solely on the task at hand. This enables you to complete the task much faster because you're not wasting time on distractions.

- *Limit the amount of time you check your e-mail and voice mails.*

First, turn off the auto alert that informs you when you get new e-mails. Then set up an auto response which informs people that you will be checking e-mail and listening to your messages twice daily. This prevents those you are interacting with from assuming you are ignoring them. This also forces those contacting you to use the content of their message more efficiently. Basically, this eliminates the game of tag, thereby giving you more time to work.

Ferriss suggests a template that says something along the lines of: “Greeting, Friends (or Esteemed Colleagues), due to high workload, I am currently checking and responding to e-mail/voice mail twice daily at 12:00 pm and 4pm. If you require urgent assistance that cannot wait until either 12:00 or 4:00pm, please contact me via cell phone at 555-555-5555. Thank you for understanding this move to more efficiency and effectiveness. It helps me accomplish more to serve you better.”

- *Try to eliminate in-person meetings. But if you must have one, never go into it without a clear agenda.*

Usually there is nothing that you have to meet about in person, which can't be taken care of through e-mail. Ferriss recommends doing away with in-person meetings. In fact, he argues that everything should be accomplished through e-mail. If someone leaves you a voicemail, respond with an e-mail. If you cannot and must speak on the phone, get right to the point. Instead of starting with Hi Joe, how are you doing? Start with, Hi Joe, how may I help you? This eliminates the time spent on unnecessary conversation. If you *must* have an in-person meeting, never go into it without an agenda. Having an agenda makes meetings more productive. If there is no set agenda, there is no need for a meeting in the first place.

- *Don't be afraid to put up a “Do Not Disturb” Sign*

People popping their heads in and out of your office with “urgent” questions are very distracting. They disrupt your concentration and force you to get back into that zone all over again after an interruption. You'd be surprised how many less “urgent” questions arise after you put up a “Do Not Disturb Sign.” Somehow urgent questions seem to answer themselves.

### **A is for Automation**

This section is a bit idealistic. It focuses on becoming an entrepreneur and starting your own company. Ferriss is a huge advocate of outsourcing everything you can imagine to virtual assistants in India or China. Since you can pay them \$4-\$15 per hour, you free up your hours and can earn more for the time you have. The advantage of a virtual assistant, aside from the fact that they are inexpensive, is they can work at night because of the time difference, and have your assignment completed by the morning. Ferriss provides warnings when getting a virtual assistant: First, always give a time frame since

you're usually paying by the hour, and second, describe the task in detail answering any possible question in advanced. He even goes so far as to ask the virtual assistant to repeat the task back in a responsive e-mail to make sure there is no miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Next, Ferriss goes into detail explaining how to start your own company. This requires working in a field you are interested and educated in. Furthermore, a prospective businessperson must determine what the public would purchase, the highest price they would pay, and what the least amount of costs invested can be. Ferriss gives many examples of businesses that can be profitable with a minimum time commitment. He then explains every step from creating an idea, to advertising, to testing it, to actually selling it. If you are thinking of becoming an entrepreneur, this is the chapter to focus on.

The last part of the equation in becoming a business owner while working less hours, is taking yourself out of the equation. Ferriss harps on the idea that you should not be the CEO or the general manager because too much of your time will be invested. Instead, you should have CEOs and managers working for you so that you don't have to make the decisions. A great way to look at this is you are the police officer making sure that everything is done correctly, but not telling people what to do. Ferriss provides a detailed explanation on how to accomplish this and even includes a flow chart for those of us who work visually. The main point is to have a successful business that you are the owner of but not the manager of. This way you make the money without having to put in nearly as much time.

### **L is for Liberation**

Ferriss' last chapter is mainly for employees as opposed to entrepreneurs. It provides employees with a how-to explanation of moving your office to your house. This involves showing your boss that you are capable of producing better results at home since there are fewer distractions. The first step is to make yourself an employee that the company cannot afford to lose. This gives you room to negotiate. Once this is accomplished, you have to gain the courage to go to your boss and ask for a two week trial where you work 2 days a week from home. Be persuasive with your boss reminding her that this is only a trial. During the two weeks, log everything that you do making sure to show more productivity while at home. As time goes on try to get more and more days

a week to be remote, constantly asking for a two week trial and showing, rather than telling, your boss how much more efficient you are from home. The goal is to have more free time away from the office.

What do you do with this free time then? That gets to the core of this book. Ferriss' whole point is that time is the most valuable thing we have in our lives and we don't have to wait until we are old and grey in order to enjoy it. By reducing our hours without compromising effectiveness, we can travel or live our lives the way we dream. Life is not about working 40 plus years, saving for retirement, and attempting to enjoy life once we are old and can't really enjoy it much the same way. Ferriss says do away with the whole retirement plan idea and have mini retirements throughout your life. This can be accomplished by no longer being trapped in an office and managing one's time wisely.

Much of Ferriss' book is idealistic and may seem poorly suited to those who work in professions. That said, his lessons on time management are invaluable. If most attorneys were to take an honest "inventory" of their use to time, they would find that a majority of time is spent on the "unimportant" leaving little time for those few critical items that lead to financial and personal success. Even if you have no intention of ever leaving your job and spending your days traveling the world, I highly recommend Ferriss' book as a starting point of taking back some control over your life.