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"Our life is what our thoughts make it" Marcus Aurelius

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TOPIC THIS ISSUE: RETHINKING ROUTINES & HABITS



## HOW TO BEAT YOUR BRAIN AND SUCCEED

3 Insights for Overcoming Your Biggest Obstacles

By: Michael Hyatt

*The surprising power of daily rituals is found in optimizing our basic routines.*

Michael Hyatt

**Millions of people all over the world struggle to get things done at the office.**

A massive international study commissioned by the office equipment firm Steelcase found 37 percent of employees are disengaged from their work

A similar poll by the Gallup organization found **barely one in ten workers worldwide** is really engaged on the job. Most people are just checked out. This kind of disengagement is a constant source of frustration for those of us who need to find the focus and drive necessary to accomplish what matters most. The good news is that the solution is closer than you might think.

I recently spoke with discipline strategist Rory Vaden, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Take the Stairs* and his new book *Procrastinate on Purpose*.

In his job, Vaden has coached hundreds of incredibly successful people one-on-one about increasing their self-discipline, or, as he says, *“doing the things we know we should be doing even we don’t feel like doing them.”*

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“It’s not that they’re smarter than other people, it’s not that they’re more educated,” or any number of other variables, he says. What really matters is that **successful people have made a habit of doing what needs to be done.**

So how do they muster the motivation to stay engaged when they feel like dropping out? They don’t rely on the joy of the task alone, which can be fleeting. Instead, they understand that engaged, hard work now will lead to the results that they want later.

### 3 Ways to Overcome Your Biggest Obstacles

Vaden knows this not just through observation but also experience. He used to be fifty pounds heavier. He dropped that weight through a combination of exercise and diet with “no cheat days.” It took him two-and-a-half years to land an agent for his book, and then he landed on all of the bestseller lists.

One of the biggest obstacles to engagement comes not from outside annoyances or distractions, says Vaden, but from inside our own heads. He shared three insights for how we might turn that around.

**1. Get behind me, brain.** “Our brain is not programmed for success. It’s programmed for survival,” Vaden explains. That means our brains are not always going to want to stretch to succeed or to banish distractions. They might even tempt us toward laziness. As long as we understand that, we can overcome it and succeed. But how best to do that?

**2. Reprogram your gray matter.** Vaden compares the human brain to a computer in that it “*does not believe what is true or what is false*” but rather believes “*whatever you tell it most often.*” In other words, we **become the stories we tell ourselves.** You have to intentionally change that programming through repetition of what you think should matter most to you. One form of self-persuasion, which I use, is affirmations. But affirmations alone are not enough. We need to set exciting goals and identify our key motivations for reaching them. I detail that process [here](#).

**3. Fire at will.** How do you find the discipline or willpower to do what it takes to succeed? Phrasing the question like

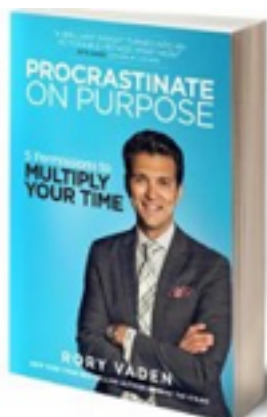
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that is a mental trap, Vaden warns. Don't concentrate on the willpower. Instead, he says, concentrate on what you're trying to will. In other words, keep your eye on the prize. The lack of discipline is really a lack of vision.

What we need to do is **understand that our patterns of thinking are an obstacle to full engagement.** But **we can reprogram our brain** and stay focused on the steps to achieve our goals. If we do that, the will to keep going will be a natural outgrowth of our having the end in sight.

## WHY YOU SHOULD IGNORE TIME MANAGEMENT ADVICE

BY: COREY VADEN



Many people start off the New Year with a new calendar, gadget or app they believe will finally help them become more focused and productive. But according to Rory Vaden, those tools may be a waste of time. **He says he knows a better way to finally make the most of your time.**

Rory Vaden wants you to forget everything you know about time management, because it's probably wrong. He wants you to ignore the advice on doing the most difficult tasks first every day, or the rule about answering emails during certain time periods. Those kinds of activities are simply muddying the waters when you're searching for a way to be more productive with the time you have, he contends.

The key to truly focusing on what matters comes from understanding the emotions that get in our way and prevent us from maximizing our time, he says.



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**“There is no such thing as time management, there is only self-management,”** he says. “Time continues on regardless of what we do, so all we can do is decide what we will be spending our time doing or not doing for that day.” For example, guilt or fear may prompt us to tackle certain tasks or projects that really don’t help us be more productive. Even chronic overachievers can make poor decisions about how they use their time, participating in what Vaden calls **“priority dilution.”**

*“While priority dilution has nothing to do with laziness, apathy or being disengaged (like traditional procrastination) it nets the same result: a delay of the day’s most important activities because your attention shifts to less important, but perhaps seemingly more urgent, tasks,”* he explains. “You are trading your to-do list for emergencies.”

Vaden, author of *Procrastinate on Purpose* says that the most successful people, who he calls **“multipliers,”** have learned to manage the emotions often tied to how we use our time. The key, he explains, is that multipliers ask themselves: “What are the things that I could do today that would free up more time tomorrow?”

*“They get outside of their to-do list of short-term priorities and they realize that the real key to creating more margin in their life isn’t about working faster, or somehow ‘prioritizing’ better; it’s about learning to think differently,”* he says.

In his book, Vaden provides **five “permissions”** that he says will help you make better use of your time and become a multiplier:

**1. Eliminate.** Vaden notes that those wanting to achieve success will always look at what they need to *add* to their lives, but they actually need to ask themselves: “What are all the things that I can eliminate?” Start considering the significance of what you do, instead of the volume of tasks you complete. He notes that many people avoid eliminating anything because they’re emotionally unable to say “no.” But when you’re able to say “no,” then you will be able to spend more time with your family or working toward your dreams, he says.

**2. Automate.** Those who balk at automation of certain tasks do so because they’re worried they don’t have the time

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or money to change a system. “Every moment that passes that you don’t automate something that could be, you are exponentially losing future time,” he says. “Anything that wastes your time is a waste of your money.”

**3. Delegate.** Vaden suggests asking this question at the beginning of every day: “Does what I’m doing right now require my unique skill set, or is it possible that there are other people capable of doing this?” Many people don’t delegate because they’re afraid of the job not being done right or a deadline being missed. “Whether it’s in your professional life or your personal life, the size of your success is usually determined by the strength of your team,” he says. If you properly train the right people, delegation can help you make better use of your time.

**4. Procrastinate.** “There is a big difference between inaction that results from indulgence, and inaction that results from intention,” he says. “One is procrastination and the other is patience.” Vaden’s company, Southwestern Consulting, found in a survey that 91% of respondents believe that things will work out for the best “and yet we rush around frantically so often to try and satisfy our fear that things will fall apart if we don’t,” he adds. He stresses that “timing matters” and that delaying action because you don’t feel it’s the right time can be freeing and help you make a better decision.

**5. Concentrate.** Vaden explains that there is an “emotional fear” of letting other people down, which “causes us to sacrifice our own priorities.” But if you concentrate on the significant activities that will create more opportunity for those around you, then you will find yourself focusing more completely on important items.

Finally, Vaden advocates looking at time as not something you *spend*, but something you *invest*. **“Multiply your time by giving yourself the emotional permission to invest time into things today that will create more time and more results for tomorrow,”** he says.

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# WHY WE'D GET A LOT MORE DONE IF WE SWITCHED TO A 12 WEEK YEAR

BY: Brian Moran & Michael Lennington



Most of us view the 365-day year as a natural execution cycle. There's a fatal flaw in **annualized thinking** and here is six reasons why we'd be more motivated and productive if we redefined our year to just 12 weeks.

Think back to the last significant goal you set for yourself, personal or professional. How long did you give yourself to reach it? Chances are you said something like this: "I'm going to lose 30 pounds this year," or "I'm going to increase my sales by 15 percent this year," or "Our company is going to open five more branch locations this year." We love to use the 365-day year as a natural execution cycle because it's comfortable. It gives us 12 long months to make things happen, which makes us feel like we have plenty of time to accomplish our goals.

*"And that's the problem, says Brian P. Moran: 12 months is too much time—12 weeks is far better." When you believe you have 12 months to complete a task, it's all too easy to waste one, or two, or three, or more of them telling yourself you still have plenty of time to catch up,"* says Moran, coauthor along with Michael Lennington of the New York Times best seller **The 12 Week Year: Get More Done in 12 Weeks Than Others Do in 12 Months**. "Annualized thinking kills urgency. But when you're trying to reach important goals, whether personal or professional, every week counts, every day counts, every moment counts.

*"It's not that we don't have good ideas, good intentions, and the know-how to turn our plans into reality,"* he adds. "We do. The problem is we're slack on execution." Ultimately, says Moran, effective execution happens daily and weekly and on a



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consistent basis. To perform at your best, you will need to get out of “annual mode” and stop thinking in terms of a 365-day year. That’s where the 12 Week Year comes in.

*“When you redefine the concept of a year, your life will change,” promises Moran. “A year is no longer 12 months; it is now only 12 weeks, followed by the next 12 Week Year, ad infinitum. Each 12 week period stands on its own.”*

*“You no longer have the luxury of putting off critical activities, thinking there is ‘plenty of time’ left to meet your goals,” he adds.*

*“When you have only 12 weeks, each week matters, each day matters, each moment matters. And the result is profound.”*

**Moran offers six specific reasons why switching to the 12 Week Year is more effective than staying on the 12 month plan:**

• **It reduces uncertainty and defines actions.**

Most annual plans are objective based, not action based, because it is nearly impossible to predict the action needed four or more months out. They’ll tell you what has to be achieved, but they don’t specify how. That’s problematic, because when the “how” is not clearly defined, you lose a sense of scope and can easily take on more than you can physically execute.

Unfortunately, many annual plans miss steps, lump complicated processes into a single tactic, and have actions out of sequence. Worse yet, some are merely a collection of thoughts and ideas and contain no specific actions at all!

“The daily and weekly ‘how’s’ of a 12 week plan are what make it execution friendly,” he adds. “When you get down to a granular level in terms of the tasks you absolutely must accomplish each day, there aren’t any surprises as you journey toward your goal. And since you’re able to map out the whole trip, you’ll make your wrong turns and mistakes on paper where they can be easily corrected—not in reality.”

• **It sparks a vital sense of urgency.**

Have you ever worked in an organization that relied on a year-end push? During the last few months of the calendar or fiscal year, everyone in the company works like gangbusters, completing important projects and tying up loose ends. The difference between success and failure for the whole year can



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hang in the balance during the last 60 days, and usually, results spike upward as the days left in the year dwindle to zero.

“It’s amazing what happens when people have a goal and a deadline,” comments Moran. “And with the 12 Week Year, every day holds the same kind of energy and commitment typically reserved for the year-end push, because the end of the year is never more than 11 weeks and 6 days away. Suddenly, wasting a few minutes on Facebook and gossiping by the water cooler don’t seem like such good ideas. You’ll find yourself using your time more wisely, pushing aside extraneous distractions, and powering through barriers you might otherwise have avoided. Unproductive downtime and procrastination will become relics of the past as you focus each minute on driving results.”

- **It gets you focused on the most important things.**

A year is a long time, and we tend to feel that we should be able to accomplish a lot in 365 whole days. That’s why everyone from individuals making New Year’s resolutions to corporations laying out yearly goals tends to put too many objectives into their annual plans. And, according to Moran, that’s also why execution fails. As you try to work toward a dozen different goals, you become disillusioned, spread thin, and frustrated: a recipe for mediocrity rather than greatness.

“Because the 12 Week Year causes you to work within the parameters of a shorter, more predictable time period and makes procrastination seem much less attractive, you’ll have a lot more clarity regarding what is important,” Moran explains. “When there isn’t as much time to get things done, you’ll naturally hone in on important objectives and be better equipped to identify the one to three things that will have the greatest impact. When it comes to accomplishing great things, being involved in less is actually more.”

- **It makes keeping commitments easier, which leads to consistent results.**

At the beginning of the year, it’s all too easy to make promises and commitments. “Sure, honey, we can finish the basement this year.” “Of course our department will reduce its operating costs by 20 percent this year.” Frequently, though, we fall short of our personal and professional commitments. And the time frame for which they are made is often at fault. Over the course of 12 months, we may encounter unforeseen obstacles,



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other priorities may crop up, or our interest may wane. “It’s much easier to say you’re going to do something—and then do it—within a 12 week time frame,” Moran asserts.

• **It makes you proactive instead of reactive.**

The popular advice that urges us to “live in the moment” is generally sound, because this moment is where the future is created. However, living your life in the moment can be done in two very different ways: reactively or proactively. If you are reactive in the moment, you risk taking suboptimal actions because the primary drivers of your actions are input triggers—the phone rings, the email dings, a new task appears, someone knocks on your door, and off you go to solve the problem du jour. When you live reactively, it’s difficult, if not impossible, to stay focused on high-value activities.

“That’s why 12 week planning is so beneficial,” explains Moran. “With an action-based plan, you don’t have to rely on input triggers to initiate your actions; instead, your plan triggers your actions. Your action choices are made proactively at the beginning of the 12 weeks when you create your plan. In short, a 12 week plan helps you to get more of the right things done each day, and ultimately it helps you reach your goals faster and with greater impact.”

• **Finally, the 12 Week Year makes your life more meaningful.**

Too many people (and even entire companies!) live their lives by default, not by design. Stuck in a reactive rut, they allow their priorities and goals to be determined by outside forces. You know how it goes: You spend your evenings doing housework and home improvement projects because you feel your house should look a certain way...even though you’d rather be spending the time with your spouse and kids. Or you spend time and money getting a professional certification because your boss recommends it...despite the fact that you don’t feel drawn to that particular area within your field.

*“Too often, people build their plans around goals that someone else thinks are important,” Moran confirms. “That’s a problem. If your personal or professional plan is not meaningful to you, then you will struggle to execute it. Fortunately, because of the focus and proactivity that the 12 Week Year fosters, you’re much more likely to think about what matters most to you and then purposefully choose to do it. On top of being more productive, you’ll be more fulfilled, content, and engaged.”*

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*“Yes, the 12 Week Year is a system that helps you perform better through effective execution—but it isn’t a magic bullet that will miraculously improve your results,” Moran concludes. “Making the 12 Week Year work for you takes effort, engagement, and a willingness to dramatically change how you approach all aspects of your life. But when you make the commitment, you’ll be astounded by all of the positive changes in your thinking, actions, and results.”*

