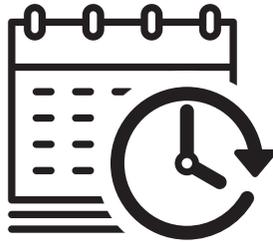


THE MENTAL EDGE

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Sample Chapter

Chapter 1



TIME MANAGEMENT

1.1 THE MEANING OF TIME MANAGEMENT

We live in an era of information and enormous possibilities. Without leaving the house we can make money playing poker—something that wasn't possible 20 years ago. We can also sit at home and learn to speak a foreign language, use Photoshop, study economics, invest in markets all around the world, and get to know new people. At the same time, the Information Age has its downsides. Every day we are affected by millions of stimuli—advertisements, news and information—which scatter our attention and make productive work difficult.

If you want to effectively function in this world, you have to consciously organize your time. This is particularly important for poker players. No player functions on a standard nine to five schedule, supervised by a boss. You must take care of everything yourself. Otherwise you are in danger of simply losing most of your day to useless things like surfing the net, watching funny videos and spending too much time reading the news. If you don't consciously focus on what is important to you, today's world can easily provide all sorts of fillers that will take up your time but won't bring any value to your life.

As a poker player you have no boss or manager ensuring your results. Therefore, everything you want to achieve depends on you, on your discipline, consistency, and organization. You have to achieve every single goal by yourself and be your own manager and employee at the same time. Currently, many players not only play poker but also have other sources of income from work, coaching or a business. Some have to reconcile playing poker with studying. With additional non-poker activities, you can devote from two to six hours daily to playing, for about five or six days a week. The organization of time in such cases is particularly important because reconciling studies, work, poker, game improvement, sports, time spent with family and friends, and entertainment is really not easy and requires discipline.

I have been interested in time management for over 10 years. In that time I've read many books on the subject, completed many a training session, analyzed the available research and above all, tried every technique many times. After years of experimenting, I realized that in time management it isn't the quantity that matters, but quality. You don't have to know 30 different marvelous techniques or use complicated planners. All you really need are a few key strategies that you use regularly and reliably!

When you compare poker players with business people or managers, managing the time of professional players is really much simpler. Poker is a difficult way to make money. What's more, from a psychological point of view, poker is a much more difficult activity than most of the known professions. At the same time, from the point of view of time management, the profession of a poker player is much easier than managing a company or a team. There are no countless meetings, no simultaneous work on a dozen or several dozen tasks, you don't have to coordinate teams, change the set schedule several times a day, or live in uncertainty as to what project you'll be working on in two weeks.

I'm therefore going to touch on the seven most important time-management strategies

that I believe to be useful to poker players. In my opinion, these are the most effective methods that bring the biggest changes to the way you organize your time, provided, of course, that you use them—but that depends only on you!

THE MYTH OF TIME MANAGEMENT

Let's start with tossing out a major myth associated with organizing time efficiently. Some people think that time management consists of squeezing in more and more tasks into the calendar and increasing work time. This belief may cause stress and fear of learning valuable time-organization strategies. After all, most of us already work a lot. Many people already feel fatigued, and now we're supposed to work even more? No wonder this kind of thinking can lead to an inner rebellion and an aversion to learning time-management techniques.

But relax, time management is really not about working more. The main goal is to increase your efficiency. The idea is that you learn to do the same thing you do now but in less time, or you spend the same amount of time working and generate better results. In addition, using time efficiently increases our satisfaction, sense of time well-spent, our self-confidence, and gives us more time to rest and spend with our loved ones. Proper time management also has a positive impact on motivation and focus, which are very important aspects of the poker mindset.

1.2 THE BENEFITS OF TIME MANAGEMENT

Effective time management has many benefits. It is worth examining them carefully to know what end result is obtainable. Let's get acquainted with the most important of them:

INCREASED EFFICIENCY

The main benefit is increased efficiency, of course. This means that we can do more in the same amount of time or do the work more accurately, which is rather significant for poker. Additionally, we don't waste time on unimportant things (Facebook, news, YouTube videos) and just focus on the priorities.

ACHIEVING PRIORITIES

By focusing on the priorities, we perform the important tasks—those that have the greatest impact on our lives. For example, we can spend an hour in the morning learning German. After a while, our understanding will increase, and we'll be able to use that foreign language quite well. This will enable us read important books, be open to business opportunities, give us a chance to meet interesting people or get a better job. In addition, learning a foreign language expands our horizons and

increases our vocabulary. On the other hand, we could also spend that hour skimming through all the news available on the Internet, 90% of which completely loses its meaning within 24 hours. In both cases we were busy for an hour, but one of those tasks didn't bring anything of value into our lives. You may think that an hour is not a lot of time, but if you devote one hour a day, 365 days a year, to learning anything, within 3-5 years you'll be a specialist in the field! In poker spending an hour a day playing will give you 200-300 thousand additional hands per year. In this time you can also master a foreign language quite well. One hour may indeed not have too much of an impact on your life day to day, but if you see the consequences of repeating your actions for a year or even for several years, you will realize that this one hour has had a tremendous impact on what you achieve in life and in work.

SATISFACTION AND MOTIVATION

Effective time management also increases our sense of satisfaction with a good day's work. I'm certain you've experienced a day spent reading news, refreshing your email, and watching useless videos. At the end of a day like that, you felt as if the day had been wasted. On the contrary, I'm sure you've also experienced the opposite situation, where you completed many important tasks during the day, were perfectly organized and focused on your priorities, and at the end of the day you felt pride and satisfaction. What's more, the next day you were probably more motivated to continue the good habits. A day spent effectively on priority issues can give you more energy than anything else.

CONCENTRATION

Time management sometimes also boosts your concentration. When you set your priorities, organize your time, and know what you're working on, your focus increases. You understand the importance of completing key tasks, and you don't waste time. You get an email or a message on Facebook, but it doesn't matter. You know what your goal is. You effectively reject all disruptions and work on your priorities until they're completed. That's why proper time management can help you be more focused on your work.

TIME FOR RELATIONSHIPS AND REST

It's worth noting one more important element here. Thanks to good organization, you can have more time for rest, health, and your loved ones. Nowadays many people are notoriously tired and sleep-deprived. This is why time devoted to proper regeneration of one's self is so important. This is particularly crucial for poker players because while playing, you must work at top speed. Unlike many other jobs, you can't just slide through from nine to five. For the average employee, poor concentration at work may result in a loss of a bonus. For you as a poker player, poor work quality can mean an unprofitable game and losses. What's more, good time-management helps you to not transfer the problems from your professional life to your private life. Thanks to this, time spent with your loved ones will have a different quality, and you will have

the opportunity to fully rest and regenerate.

So now we know that time management is extremely important, and it brings us a whole lot of benefits. Now it's time to learn the specific strategies that will help you be better organized.

1.3 THE FOUR QUADRANTS OF TIME MANAGEMENT

One of the most important ideas in time management is the Eisenhower Decision Matrix, which was originally used by American President Dwight D. Eisenhower. This method became popular many years later, largely thanks to Stephen Covey's bestselling book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. According to this system (also known as the four quadrants of time management), all our activities can be divided into important and not important as well as urgent and not urgent.

Understanding this idea will give you a broader look at your time-management system. It will help you distinguish priority activities that bring the most value to your life as well as those that don't have significance.

Below you will find daily activities that make up the individual quadrants:

Fig. 1. Common tasks that make up the time-management quadrants

Quadrant 1. IMPORTANT AND URGENT (Crises and pressing issues)	Quadrant 2. IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT (Priorities and values)
Crises	Taking care of health and relationships
Important topics	Planning
Neglecting health	Training and coaching
Sudden need to improve game or mindset	Working on the game
	Working on the mindset
Quadrant 3. URGENT BUT NOT IMPORTANT (Illusion of being busy)	QUADRANT 4. NOT IMPORTANT AND NOT URGENT (Entertainment and time-wasters)
Emails	Internet
Telephone calls	Funny videos
A focus on unimportant things	Television
"Urgent" meetings	Messages
Other people's plans	Computer Games

The first quadrant is composed of important and urgent actions. It is where we acknowledge we have to handle various crises or urgent deadlines. For example, this is where tomorrow's exam, which you didn't study for earlier, will be listed as well as the article you have to finish writing by the end of the day. Also in this group will be the obvious neglect of health, whereby people don't get regular medical checkups, don't take care of their diet, and don't exercise. Looking at this quadrant from the poker point of view, we also find the urgent need to work on your game or mindset. This

situation usually arises when a player focuses only on the game, downplays education, and when faced with a sudden significant downswing, wants to catch up in only a few days.

Quadrant 2 concerns matters that are important but not urgent. It is the quadrant for priorities or things you should spend the most time on. Among them we find taking care of your health, relationships, planning, or training. Also in this quadrant is regular work on your game and mindset. These are important things but not urgent ones. Activities associated with this quadrant may also include networking or checking new business opportunities.

The third quadrant is the trickiest of all. If you understand it well, your time-management skills will increase dramatically. It consists of urgent but not important actions; it is a quadrant of illusions. Tasks here seem important, but in reality they're not. By carrying out actions from quadrant 3, you will usually complete other people's plans but not yours. Let's face it, you don't have to answer every email, IM, or text message right away. You don't even have to answer your phone (unless that's your job). And so in this quadrant are phone calls, emails, messages, and some meetings. Completing tasks in this quadrant will give you the illusion of being busy, and at the same time mean that you usually don't do anything important.

The last quadrant refers to activities that are neither important nor urgent—meaning typical time-wasters, such as television, the internet, funny videos, most messages, or computer games. Of course there is nothing wrong with watching TV from time to time, but this time should be limited to a minimum. Studies comparing the habits of wealthy and poor people have shown that 67% of the wealthy watch TV for less than one hour a day, and only 6% of the wealthy watch any reality shows².

Now, let us consider what conclusions can be drawn from the presented model. The most important is that we should focus on the tasks in quadrant 2, meaning important tasks that are not urgent yet. If we downplay these actions, in time they can become crises and move to quadrant no. 1 (e.g., health problems, crises in relationships, troubles with mindset, etc.).

EXAMPLES:

- ✓ If you care about your health, eat properly, get some exercise and get regular checkups, you will enjoy good health and minimize the risk of serious diseases. Of course, they can still occur, but the risk is simply much lower.
- ✓ If you care about your partner, spend time with them, talk often and cultivate your relationship, you will minimize the risk of potential crises in the relationship resulting from neglect of the other person. Of course you may find you are not matched when it comes to personalities, but even if you are very well matched and you keep neglecting the needs of your other half while spending time on other matters, sooner or later it will affect your relationship.
- ✓ If you regularly work on your mindset, read mindset books, draw conclusions from them, apply them in practice as well as prepare diligently for each session, you will reduce the risk of a large tilt or other mindset problems.
- ✓ Suppose you start a company. If you care about your company, provide training and team building for your employees and learn to communicate with them properly. You will reduce the risk that one of them will suddenly decide to leave because of a bad boss.

Of course it is impossible to completely avoid the tasks that appear in the first quadrant. We need to manage them properly, and by focusing on the important but not urgent things, we minimize potential crises and sudden problems. It is said that taking care of things at the last minute is like putting out fires. It's worth remembering that life can't consist only of putting out fires because if you fail even one time, your whole house could burn down.

Another conclusion of this model is minimization of time spent on quadrant 3, things that are urgent but unimportant. You will learn how to do that in later sections.

The last and probably fairly obvious conclusion is to clear the unimportant and not urgent tasks from your calendar. This does not mean that you have to keep working and never rest. Rest and regeneration are very important elements in our lives, and we must take care of them properly. In my opinion, they should, however, be found in the second quadrant because they are important but not urgent things. There is, however, a big difference between rest and spending time watching funny videos or pointlessly surfing the net.

Suppose you have three hours and you must write a report that will take you an hour. Of course you could write the report and at the same time surf various pages, watch videos or read and respond to messages. After three hours it will turn out you barely managed to finish the report, which is of average quality, and you feel tired because you were constantly busy and your mind, burdened with writing the report, did not get any rest. You could choose to write the report in an hour and spend the remaining two hours on regeneration. You can go to the swimming pool, the sauna, watch a movie, or go for a walk with your partner. The report will be better, and you will feel better rested, thanks to two hours spent on regeneration. You will feel the satisfaction of time well spent. The next day you can expect increased freshness and efficiency. There is nothing but benefits there, and that's what it's all about!

THE KEY TO PROPER TIME-MANAGEMENT IS FOCUSING ON PRIORITY ACTIVITIES THAT ADD THE MOST VALUE TO YOUR LIFE.

SUMMARY

To effectively organize our time, we have to manage crises and sudden problems in an adequate manner. We should also focus on priorities—things that are important but not urgent, such as planning, education as well as caring for our health and relationships. Next, we should avoid (as much as possible) non-essential tasks, such as phone calls, messages, or emails, which only give us the superficial impression we are doing something important. Ultimately, we must limit time wasters, such as television, the internet, videos, and games.



EXERCISE:

Take a blank piece of paper, divide it into four parts, and create your own time-management quadrants. Write out the most important activities in each of the previously mentioned groups:

- ✓ Important and urgent
- ✓ Important but not urgent
- ✓ Not important but urgent
- ✓ Not important and not urgent

Stop! Didn't do the exercise? If you don't do it now, you will never come back to it. Remember that you will achieve a much better effect working through parts of this book carefully than when reading the whole thing superficially. If you want the results, you have to get involved and use the strategies I'm writing about in practice. Otherwise you will only waste your time and money, and at best you will experience a slight improvement in efficiency, and that's not the point. And so, again, take a piece of paper, divide it into four parts, and do the exercise.

Excellent! Well done! After reading this section and doing the exercise, you should already have a broader view of your time management system. You can distinguish between important things and things that don't add much value to your life. You know what to focus on and what to avoid. You already know WHAT to do. Now it's time to delve into a few key strategies, which you will learn HOW to use.

1.4 CUTTING OUT DISRUPTIONS

One of the most important principles of time management is cutting yourself off from any disruptions, such as Facebook, YouTube, messages, a ringing phone, Skype, or Messenger. The implementation of just this one principle will dramatically increase the quality of your work. The average office employee loses about three hours a day due to various disruptions.³ Of course for us poker players, the number would certainly be lower. Nevertheless, if you want to manage your time more effectively, you must address the issue of disruptions. Otherwise you will not only lose a lot of time, but your work will also be less effective. This may result in carelessly watched videos, superficial analyses and, of course, a lower quality of the game session itself.

It really is very important you do not let other people interrupt your work. Every disruption, such as an email or a phone call, usually takes up 5-10 minutes of your time. But that's not all because, after completing a conversation or replying to an email, you usually need a bit of time to get back into the right rhythm. You have to check where you left off, what the priority

was, and spend some time on reaching the same level of concentration as before. This return to work costs us, depending on the task, another 5 to 10 minutes. The more complex the task (e.g., a complex analysis of a hand using software like Poker Juice or PioSOLVER), the higher the cost of every disruption and the longer the return to the previous work rhythm.

DISRUPTION 1 – FACEBOOK

Facebook is the biggest disruption of our time. Many people check their wall while at work dozens of times. Each such disruption throws us off our rhythm, lowers our efficiency, and increases the time required to complete a task. Most of us really don't need to check Facebook that many times; one or two times a day is more than sufficient to keep up with the most important news from our friends. One possible solution to the problem of frequent visits to Facebook are special browser add-ons, such as StayFocusd, which helps limit the time wasted on the internet.

DISRUPTION 2 – YOUTUBE

The second greatest disruption is YouTube, and specifically the continuous watching of worthless videos. I think every reader knows the difference between watching YouTube for educational purposes, occasional entertainment use, and spending several hours a day watching things that add nothing to our lives. The separation of what is interesting from what is worthwhile is very important here.

DISRUPTION 3 – PHONE CALLS AND EMAILS

A ringing phone is another threat to your efficiency. Mute your phone and place it screen down so you can't see when someone is calling. Always do this when you play, when you learn, when you work on an important project, work on your game or mindset, or when you're watching educational videos. Of course if your job involves answering phone calls from customers, you can't do this, but most of us can safely mute our phones while we work. For example, my phone is muted about 90% of the day, and then I call back when I have free time. And you know what? I've never had a problem because of this.

Incoming emails are the last major disturbance that effectively takes us away from work. It is highly important for office workers but less so for professional players. Remember that you really don't have to check your email five times a day or reply to every message right away. If you're not running a business that must stay in touch with customers, you can safely check messages once a day or even every other day and nothing will happen.

As we saw above, disruptions are incredibly costly and take away many valuable resources from our work. This is why it's good practice to mute your phone and set it screen down on the desk, shut off Messenger and Skype or turn on the "do not disturb" mode. Do this every time you're doing something important. And what is most

important in the work of a poker player?

- ✓ Session
- ✓ Working on the game
- ✓ Working on mindset
- ✓ Training/education
- ✓ Other important tasks

Of course this advice is not accidental, and we will talk more about it in the chapter on the formation of habits. A flashing phone, an SMS or a phone number popping up automatically triggers the desire to answer and check who is messaging us. This is a deeply ingrained habit that is quite difficult to change. In order to prevent this, it's best to place your phone on the table with screen facing down because then you can't see who's calling or writing. The problem disappears, and we can answer important phone calls after completing the important task.

Let's look at wasting time from a financial perspective. Suppose you play four hours a day, and your hourly take is \$90. That means you make an average of \$360 a day, which is a fairly standard amount for quite a good mid-stakes player. Also suppose you spend an additional two hours on poker education: watching videos, hand analysis, mindset issues, etc. This means that you actually spend six hours a day on poker, and you make \$60/hour (\$360/6 hours). This in turn gives us one dollar per minute. Assuming that every disruption costs us only five minutes, that means that one disruption costs you \$5. If there are four such disruptions in a day, that costs you \$100 in a week. I shouldn't have to add up how much that means in a year or five years' time. This is why it's also important to mute your phone and turn off all kinds of messaging apps that can interrupt you when you're doing work that requires concentration, analytical thinking and creativity. These tools may be very important and helpful, but used at the wrong time, they affect the quality of your concentration, the efficiency of your work, and simply steal your money.



EXERCISE:

Find the three main disruptions around you. This could be your phone, your email application, Skype, Messenger, Facebook, etc. Write down the three that most frequently pull you away from work. Take a minute to think about the important tasks awaiting you in the next three days: game, working on the game, learning a language, studying for an exam, writing your master's thesis, preparing a presentation for a client. For the next three days, during each of these tasks, turn off the three biggest disruptions (phone, Skype, internet, etc.). Start today! If you have something important waiting, like studying for an exam or a session, test the method today. Don't delay! Don't just read the book, put it on a shelf and not achieve any results. Start implementing the strategy, and you will gain a truly significant increase in efficiency and satisfaction.

1.5 THE MYTH OF MULTITASKING

One of the biggest thieves of our efficiency is multitasking. Why is it called that? Multitasking was a term originally used in relation to computers, which can perform more than one task at a time. Studies show that there is no such thing as multitasking in humans, and in reality when we do several things at once, we simply switch quickly between different activities. This gives us the illusion that we're performing several tasks at the same time, but it is not true.⁴

This kind of work is very aggravating for our minds and causes a decrease in efficiency. Studies show that people who engage in multitasking are less effective than those who focus on a single task. The more complex the tasks are, the greater the decrease in efficiency because we lose more time switching between different activities. Our minds also need a bit of time to stop thinking about the previous task. What's more, multitasking not only slows us down but also increases the number of errors made.⁵

Studies also show that multitasking significantly impedes the absorption of new information.⁶ Moreover, while there are plenty of studies showing the negative impact of multitasking on our efficiency and cognitive processes, there are currently no available studies that would prove the positive or even neutral impact of multitasking on the quality of our work.⁷ Studies by the University of Michigan have shown that multitasking reduces efficiency by 20-40% in comparison to working on each project individually. The studies have also confirmed that the more complex the task, the greater the loss of efficiency when multitasking.⁸

MULTITASKING IS TRULY VERY COSTLY!

This may all sound a bit complicated, but in my opinion, the key thesis must be supported by reliable scientific research.

THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ Multitasking is the very fast switching between different activities.
- ✓ Multitasking reduces our efficiency, slows us down, and increases the number of errors.
- ✓ The more complex the tasks we try to combine, the more negative the impact of multitasking.
- ✓ With a task as mentally complex as playing poker online, the decline in the quality of the game caused by multitasking will be very high.

**TIP:**

To minimize the harmful effects of multitasking, take the following actions:

- ✓ As much as possible, focus on one task at a time. Finish it and move on to the next one.
- ✓ When performing complex tasks, such as a game session or complex hand analysis, cut out all distractions and don't take on additional activities, such as engaging in conversations, watching videos, or browsing the net.

1.6 GROUPING TASKS

Another strategy that can help you increase your efficiency is grouping tasks. Before we explain what that is about, however, it is worth introducing the concept of learning theory.

LEARNING THEORY

Learning theory tells us what common sense and experience probably tell us all.

EVERY TASK TAKES THE MOST TIME WHEN WE DO IT FOR THE FIRST TIME. WITH EVERY REPETITION, IT WILL TAKE LESS AND LESS TIME!⁵⁸

A natural conclusion that we can draw from this knowledge is to organize our day in such a way that at any moment, we are focusing on one particular task, and we group similar activities in time blocks.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE METHOD

- ✓ When you pay bills, pay all of them at the same time, for example, on the 5th of the month, and it will take you less time altogether than paying each bill on a different day.
- ✓ When you answer emails, answer them all at the same time, for example, at 5:00 p.m. every day, and it will definitely take you less time than answering each one of them separately.
- ✓ When you have several phone calls to make, do it one after another in a time block.
- ✓ Designate blocks of time where you do only one specific activity, e.g., studying a foreign language, watching educational videos, deal analysis, etc.

These conclusions are fairly obvious, but few people use them. Consider emails and messages. If we want to take care of them all in one go, we just have to open the email application and start replying. Considering the learning effect, with each successive email sent, things will go faster. We will be “in the flow” of writing. We’ll remember various phrases used in previous emails. It’ll be easier to create sentences and precisely formulate our thoughts. As a result, emails of similar length will take us less and less time. At some point, let’s say, after writing the seventh email in a row, the learning effect has been absorbed and any improvements are so small as to go unnoticed; therefore, each subsequent email will take as much time as the previous one. This example clearly shows that, thanks to grouping tasks, our efficiency increases, and the time required to perform an activity is shortened.

Let’s look at the issue of grouping tasks from the other perspective—the most frequent mistake in the organization of time. The worst thing you can do is a little bit of everything:

- ✓ 10.00 – sending one email
- ✓ 10.05 – watching 10 minutes of a training video
- ✓ 10.15 – paying one bill
- ✓ 10.18 – watching a motivational video
- ✓ 10.25 – making one phone call
- ✓ 10.40 – 15 minutes of a training video
- ✓ 10.55 – replying to a message on Skype

If you work this way, you will experience absolutely no benefits associated with the learning effect. Every email or phone call will interrupt another activity, such as training. As a result, you will lose more minutes on returning to the previous task, switching your brain to a different work mode, remembering where you left off, and picking up the appropriate work rhythm. Every task will take you the maximum amount of time, and the constant switching from one task to another will also affect the quality of your concentration, efficiency, and, of course, the time it takes you to complete the task. You will have the impression of being busy, but this will not translate into tangible results.

And now some statistics. The average office employee sends and receives about 190 messages and emails every day, checks their email 50 times a day, and uses various messaging apps 77 times a day.⁹ In light of the information you read previously, you will probably not be surprised that the average office employee loses 40% of their time every day doing these tasks only because they have not been taught proper time-management skills [Wall Street Journal report].¹⁰ Of course for poker players, these losses are certainly not as great because of the different nature of the work. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that ignoring disruptions, monotasking, and grouping tasks are strategies that will significantly increase our efficiency right from the start.

CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ At any time, carry out only one specific task. Start another only when finished with the first.
- ✓ Group similar activities into time blocks, where you can focus on one particular task. Thanks to this, you will experience numerous benefits of monotasking and the learning effect.
- ✓ Always remember to absolutely reduce distractions in your work.
- ✓ When you play a session or work on your game, focus only on those tasks and utterly reject anything that might disturb you.



EXERCISE:

Find three examples of the application of monotasking and the learning effect in your life. Implement them over the next week.

1.7 DESIGNATING TIME BLOCKS

Designating time blocks is another important strategy that should greatly increase your efficiency. Before we describe the advantages of this method, it is worth getting to know Parkinson's Law, which is very important. Parkinson's Law states that work expands to fill the time available for its completion.

THIS LAW HAS ITS CONSEQUENCES

- ✓ Suppose we have to perform a task that requires two hours. If we designate exactly two hours to it, we will finish in two hours.
- ✓ If in turn we designate three hours to it, we will not finish it earlier, and the task will take exactly three hours; if we make it four hours, it will take four hours, etc.
- ✓ The second consequence is that as a rule people complete tasks at the latest possible time, for example, students usually study for exams just before the examination period.¹¹

Why does this principle work so well? Because our entire society functions on rigid deadlines. Take tax returns, for example. In the US, the deadline for filing them is April 15th. Every year most returns are filed in the second week of April. If the tax office set the deadline for July 31st, taxpayers wouldn't submit their returns earlier at all. Again, most of them would do it in the last week of July. A similar mechanism can be observed in college. During their studies students must complete projects or

papers as well as pass exams. Most students don't study systematically all semester and start to do so only when faced with the inevitable deadline that is the exam. Most employees and managers also work like this. By nature most people complete their set tasks at the latest possible date.

On the other hand, every one of you has probably experienced a situation where Parkinson's Law worked in your favor. This often happens before trips. For example, we must leave the house at 2:00 p.m. to catch a train. Keeping in mind that the train will not wait for us, we are aware that we have to complete all planned tasks before 2:00 p.m. And suddenly it turns out that we can manage our time, choose priorities and reject all kinds of disruptions. It turns out that we use the available time as efficiently as possible and are able to complete all scheduled tasks.

Given that you don't have a boss, you have to learn to use this principle to your advantage. You can do this by designating very specific blocks of time for each task, like reading a book, learning German, or working on your game.

IMPORTANT! THIS RULE DOES NOT APPLY TO POKER SESSIONS, WHICH SHOULD USUALLY HAVE A FLEXIBLE DURATION AND DEPEND ON OUR WELLBEING, THE QUALITY OF THE GAME, THE NUMBER OF WEAK PLAYERS AT THE TABLES, ETC.

This is where doubts surface. This kind of "artificially" designated block of time is not real! In the real world if I don't file my tax return by April 15th, there will be consequences. If I don't follow my block of time, nothing much will happen. This is why some people worry that their work will not be more efficient.

This is a very reasonable doubt, which we must cleverly get around. Therefore, your strategy is that you set out a very specific block of time, say from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., and no matter what happens, you finish at 2:00 p.m.

If you're working on your game, when the clock strikes 2:00 p.m., you finish. Not at 2.01, but 2.00, and that's it! Immediately shut down all apps, finish the analyses, move on to the next task, or take a break. You can save open files and analyses, but don't do anything else. Even if you're almost at the end of the task, shut everything down anyway. This is very important!

After a few times, your mind will learn that when you set yourself a block of time, you have exactly that much time and not one minute more, that our blocks are the same as taking a train. We have to catch it, so we have to leave the house at 2:00 p.m. Thanks to this, we start to treat the designated blocks of time differently, more seriously. We start to make better use of them. We focus more and reject all sorts of temptations or disruptions, such as the internet, email or a ringing phone. We simply start to use our time more efficiently and focus on the priorities.

This principle works very well in the case of education, learning a language,

preparing for exams, administrative tasks, working on the game, the mindset, or various projects. The main benefit of this method is better focus and ignoring disruptions, and as a result, higher efficiency and satisfaction with the achieved results.

Generally, the most effective blocks of time are 60-120 minutes each. Usually when we want to do a decent bit of work, it takes at least an hour. On the other hand, we can't overdo it because overly long blocks of time may result in a decrease in efficiency and concentration. As a rule, after 90 minutes of work, our mind needs a 20-minute break.¹² In contrast, in the morning when we are rested and regenerated after sleep, the time for efficient work can be extended to 120 minutes. In the latter part of the day, I recommend setting blocks for a maximum of 90 minutes.

**EXERCISE:**

Over the next five days, designate five blocks of time of 60-120 minutes. Ideally such a block will be devoted to working on your game or mindset, reading books, learning a language, administrative tasks, or work on a project. During these blocks, remember to disconnect from all disruptions. Don't use your phone, internet, or email. Focus only on the designated task and no matter what happens, finish it at the set time.

1.8 USING PRIME TIME

In the world of television, "prime time" refers to the time of day when the biggest TV audiences are recorded. During the week, this is usually Thursday at around 8:00-9:00 p.m. In this time slot, networks roll out their biggest guns, preparing the best they have to offer their viewers.

Typically, this is a talent show of some kind or new episodes of the most popular TV series. Of course high viewer numbers also mean higher revenue from advertising, which is the most expensive during this time. Why am I writing about this? Because I have never seen a network air a show about growing potatoes or a high school basketball game on Thursday night. TV networks want to make the most of prime time because it is when they can earn their highest profits. You should do the same.

Think about when you work best during the day and plan the most important tasks for this time. If you work best in the morning when the games are tough, use this time in a different way. Work on your game or take care of other important tasks, but don't waste this time on pointlessly surfing the net or watching funny videos. This kind of wasted time can be compared to airing a show about growing potatoes at 8:00 p.m. on Thursday.

For cash games, the best tables are usually (although there are exceptions) between 2:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. EST (between 8:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. CET), so try to organize your time to play at least part of your session when there will be the most amateurs at the tables. Also pay attention to the time immediately before the session. If you start your game at 8:00 p.m., plan your day so that the time before the session—6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.—isn't filled with exhausting activities that simply make you tired.

If you are an MTT player, organize your week so you're at full strength on those days (especially Sundays) when the most lucrative tournaments take place.



EXERCISE:

Take the next five minutes to think about how you can use the prime-time rule in your time-management systems. Think about:

- ✓ When you work best
- ✓ When you have the best tables
- ✓ How you can arrange your day taking the previous two points into account

1.9 PLANNING YOUR DAY

We are approaching the end of the chapter on time management. If you have been reading carefully and doing the exercises, you should have a pretty good idea on how to organize your time. Let's summarize what you've learned:

- ✓ You know what to do and what not to do (the 4 quadrants of time management)
- ✓ You know how to do it (limit disruptions, designate blocks of time, group similar tasks, use your prime time and "practice" monotasking)

Now it's time to put this all together into a sensible plan to help you achieve it.

Planning your day is a particularly important strategy at a time when you have a larger number of tasks to complete. If, on a given day, you go to work or school, have an important meeting, need to run some errands, reply to important messages, pay bills, go shopping, finish a project, etc., then making a to-do list is really helpful.

This kind of daily plan is best done in the evening before you go to sleep. If you write all your tasks down, your mind will automatically be relieved of the obligation to remember them and can rest better. I know a few players who use this solution to help them fall asleep.

Below are various methods for making a to-do list:

LIST

The easiest form is to simply write down all the things you have to do on a given day, and then tick off each completed task one after another. The advantage of this method is its simplicity and it is the perfect way to start. If you are a professional player, play hours-long sessions at fixed times, work on your game every day, and have only a few additional tasks to take care of, this form of planning should suffice. The disadvantage of this method is the lack of specific timeframes for each task and the lack of prioritization. This is a sample daily schedule in list form. Note that the tasks are not ranked by priority and that there is no timeframe for carrying out individual tasks.

TO DO
✓ Reply to messages
✓ Work on game
✓ Go for a run
✓ Pick up package from post office
✓ Go shopping
✓ Buy plane tickets

Fig. 2. Daily plan in the form of a list

LIST SORTED BY PRIORITY

Another form is to mark priority items on the list and start working on them in the order of most important to least important. For players, this method has one limitation because for us, the most important item of the day will most often be the session we play in the evening or at night, just before going to bed. However, we usually play at a similar time each day. This is why one interesting idea is to separate the session as an independent task and divide the remaining ones according to their importance. We can even number them, starting with the most important. Our daily plan then would look like the list in Figure 3:

TO DO
✓ 1. Work on the game
✓ 2. Study Spanish
✓ 3. Read a book
✓ 4. Pay bills
✓ 5. Answer emails
✓ 6. Watch funny videos

Fig. 3. Daily plan in the form of a list, sorted by priority

We assume that every day we get up at 9:00 a.m. and that at 8:00 p.m. we will start a session that usually runs until 1:00 a.m. The session is a fixed point in our plan, but what we manage to take care of between getting up and 8:00 p.m. depends largely on our time-management skills. Of course we may not always take care of everything, but the key is to start work with the priorities. In the absence of established priorities, most people start with the easy, light, and pleasant things. We start by watching a 20-minute video that a friend sent us yesterday. Then, for the next hour, we watch other funny videos and get started on answering emails. In the middle of a reply, we remember that we were going to study Spanish. We sit down to study, but it's not effective. Every 10 minutes, we check our email or the internet, which effectively weakens our focus. At 1:00 p.m. we feel like we've done very little, so we try to finish something and complete the simplest tasks—bills and email replies. Then we eat dinner, and suddenly it's 8:00 p.m., and we haven't done anything important that day.

Therefore, this system is really effective. First, you write down all your tasks and then order them from the most to the least important. You take care of the tasks in the same order, of course, starting with the most important. Additionally, you can specify the duration of individual tasks, for example:

- ✓ 2 hours working on the game
- ✓ break
- ✓ 1 hour of Spanish
- ✓ break and lunch
- ✓ 1.5 hours reading a book
- ✓ dinner

Soon enough, it's 3:00 p.m., and you already have all the most important tasks behind you. After dinner, you may want to relax or go for a walk. Even if something comes up and you don't manage to complete your daily plan, only the least important things that don't bring as much value into your life will be left, and you can safely leave them until the next day or even a few days from now.

Just remember not to put off things like paying bills indefinitely because you may find that your electric company and cell phone provider have a different idea of what is important. This method is another step forward in time management, and for many people it is sufficient to achieve very high efficiency. Its only drawback is the lack of a specific time frame for each task.

SCHEDULE DIVIDED INTO TIME BLOCKS

Another possibility is a detailed daily schedule, one that takes into account specific time intervals. This method has many advantages resulting from Parkinson's Law and the principle of designating blocks of time. The problem with it is that planning the whole day this way frequently doesn't work. First, unexpected things often pop up and the plan for the day changes. Second, such a rigid plan causes unnecessary pressure on some people. It is much better to plan for several groups of activities we will carry out in a given time block.

TO DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Working on the game 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.✓ Eat breakfast, go to gym, eat dinner 12:00 p.m. – 2.30 p.m.✓ Rest, organizational matters 2.30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.✓ Study finance 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.✓ Rest 6 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.✓ Eat supper, relax, prepare for session 8 p.m. – ...

Fig. 4. Daily plan in the form of a schedule divided into time blocks

After breakfast, we sit down to work on the game. Then we have lunch, go to the gym, exercise, shower, and eat dinner after coming back. From experience we know this takes about 2.5 hours. We can safely group these tasks into one block because it would be nonsense to allocate 15 minutes for lunch and another 10 for a shower. Such a detailed plan is redundant for most people and only brings about unnecessary stress. The same applies to the evening. We know that we start “Operation: Session” at 8:00 p.m. It begins with supper, then we go for a walk, prepare for the session, and then sit down to play. We don’t have to write out in detail what time we go for a walk and what time we come back because we may feel like getting a bit more fresh air on some days. Of course if you’re very thorough, meticulous and like to have everything planned down to the minute, you can use this more stringent method. Most people don’t function in such a rigid time frame, however.

The method of a schedule divided into time blocks is definitely the most effective. It has the benefits of all the strategies discussed in this chapter—monotasking, designating blocks of time, using prime time, and ignoring disruptions—and at the same time requires us to have a lot of discipline and self-control, so it may be a bit too hard for some people at the start.

THE HYBRID METHOD

The practical side of my time-management system while I was writing this book is what I like to call the “hybrid method,” where part of the daily plan is firmly established, and the rest is flexible and done depending on the priority of the task. Here is an example:

TO DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Work on the book 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. ✓ Running, shower, lunch 11:00 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. ✓ Company call on Skype 12.30 p.m. – ... ✓ Take care of organizational matters ... – 3:00 p.m. ✓ Eat dinner and work on the book 3:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. ✓ Spend time with my wife, eat supper, and work on the book 7:00 p.m. – ...

Fig. 5. My example daily plan: the “hybrid” method

My priority at the time I am writing this sentence is working on the book. Because of this, I use my prime time for this task—in my case, the morning hours. Next, I have a business call at 12.30 p.m., so I have organized my schedule so I have time to go for a run, shower, and eat lunch before then. Unfortunately, I don’t know how long the call will take, so I have to be flexible. I assume that it’ll probably run an hour to an hour and a half, which is 1.30-2:00 p.m. I set the time after the call until 3:00 p.m. for organizational matters. Because I do not know the duration of the call, I don’t know what time I’ll start on the organizational things, but I know what time I’ll finish with them. If I don’t complete something, it’s all right if I do it the next day. Next, I will eat dinner and

assume that after that I'll be working on the book until 7:00 p.m. Of course in that time there may be short breaks, an afternoon snack, or a short walk, but I don't set a strict time frame. I mute my phone and turn off Skype, but I take a break only when I feel tired. Next, I plan to rest, spend time with my wife—usually around two hours—eat supper, and then sit down to work on the book some more. Again, there is no rigid time frame. Given such a plan, I'll probably sit down to the book around 9.30 p.m., but I don't want to make a strict assumption, so there is no pressure when spending time with my wife. And here is an example of my plan for the next day:

TO DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Work on the book 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.✓ Lunch, gym, shower 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.✓ Company call on Skype 2:00 p.m. – ...✓ Take care of organizational matters ... – 5:00 p.m.✓ Spend time with my wife, go for a walk, eat supper, work on the book 5:00 p.m. – ...

Fig. 6. My example daily plan: the "hybrid" method, next day

It's easy to notice very similar elements here. Again, the rhythm of the day is largely dependent on the fixed time that is the business call at 2:00 p.m. Therefore, just after breakfast, I sit down to work on the book. Next, we have a sports-related block, which I'll easily be done with by 2:00 p.m. I don't know how long the call will take, but from experience I know it'll be a minimum of an hour and a half. After the call, I take care of organizational matters, but until no later than 5:00 p.m. This rigid time frame is necessary to prevent getting lost in unimportant things. Next, I know that I'll work on the book, go for a walk with my wife, and we'll probably watch a movie. I don't want to set a strict time frame because time pressure is the last thing I need while I'm resting. Next is supper and then I will come back to the book.

With this day planning method, we've managed to achieve several important things:

- ✓ Spending most of the day on things important to the professional side (work on the book, business call)
- ✓ Found time for health, rest, and relationships
- ✓ Used our prime time (9:00-11:00 a.m.) for the very important tasks
- ✓ Avoided wasting time on unimportant things, such as email messages, etc.

For most of the tasks, we've carried out those from quadrant 2, matters that are important but not urgent:

- ✓ We have minimized time spent on urgent but not important things to 1.5 hours (organizational matters), which usually fill most of the day of the average office employee.
- ✓ At the end of these two days, I felt great satisfaction with the plan I carried out, and at the same time, I did not feel any undue pressure.

You can find many books on the market that will tell you which method of time management is the “best.” In fact, each of us is a little different, works a bit differently under pressure and has a different level of discipline and self-control. Because of this, I think it’s best to test several different strategies and find out what works best for you. For me, the third method—planning the whole day divided into specific blocks of time—didn’t work. I felt too much tension, pressure, and dissatisfaction when something didn’t go according to plan. That’s why, over time, I developed the “hybrid” method, which is a kind of a compromise between discipline and a bit of slack and spontaneity.

Don’t be too lenient with yourself, but also don’t be too severe. Try to find the balance between discipline that helps you focus on your priorities and a kind of looseness and freedom that gives you peace of mind.



EXERCISE:

For the next six working days, test the three basic methods of planning your day (list, list sorted by priority, day schedule). Assign two working days for each method. On the seventh day think about what you liked and did not like in each of them. Choose your way of planning the day and start using it. Here is your planning schedule for the next few days:

DAY	YOUR TASK
Days 1-2	Plan your day using a simple to-do list
Days 3-4	Plan your day using a to-do list sorted by priority
Days 5-6	Plan your day using a schedule divided into blocks of time
Day 7	Analyze the pros and cons of each method. Draw conclusions and determine your own method of planning your day.
Days 8-9	Plan your day using your own method

Of course if, after a while something doesn’t work for you, modify your method so it serves you best. I purposefully don’t want to impose any technique here because each of us has slightly different needs. However, if you have never planned your day in this way, I suggest not judging these methods before you try them. Check out the different planning methods first; the time for drawing conclusions will come later.

Remember the need for rest and regeneration. You can’t work at top speed all the time. If you had a heavy Monday and Tuesday, have a more relaxed day on Wednesday. In poker, rest, freshness, and concentration are incredibly important. If you sit down for a session when you’re overworked, it can impact the quality of your game.

Keep in mind that these strategies are intended to help you accomplish your goals, be more disciplined, and not restrict you or cause excessive pressure. These methods are intended to increase not only your efficiency, but also your satisfaction. Remember this

when planning your day. Many people make the beginner mistake of setting up an overly ambitious and busy schedule. After a few days, it may turn out it’s not bringing the expected results. An overly ambitious plan is impossible to achieve, and we think it’s the fault of bad strategy. The strategies are effective, but if you have never used any time-management method before, don’t count on becoming an organization expert in one day. Everything comes with time. Nobody goes from NL2 straight to NL200. Nobody lifts 100 kg (220 lbs.) at the gym the first time. Our discipline and organization “muscle” needs time to become strong. Don’t make this mistake, and when you’re implementing time-management strategies, try to do it in small steps.

For convenience, below is a summary of all the exercises described in this chapter, framed in a 30-day study plan for effective time-management habits.

If you don’t have a lot of experience in time management, just stick to the plan. It will allow you to gradually and practically test all six time-management strategies presented in this chapter.

YOUR TASK	
DAY 1	Create your own time-management quadrants. Write down the most important actions in your daily calendar that belong to each quadrant
DAYS 2-4	Carry out important tasks after eliminating the three biggest disruptions from your work
DAY 5	Find three applications of the principle of monotasking and the learning effect in your work
DAYS 6-7	Take a break
DAYS 8-14	Use the principle of monotasking and the learning effect in your work three times during this week
DAY 15	Set aside a 60-120-minute block of time. Remember to finish it punctually and cut yourself off from all disruptions
DAYS 16-19	Set aside a 60-120-minute block of time
DAY 20	Think about how you can use the prime-time principle in your work
DAY 21	Start using the prime-time principle
DAYS 22-23	Plan your day using a simple to-do list
DAYS 24-25	Plan your day using a to-do list sorted by priorities
DAYS 26-27	Plan your day using a schedule divided into blocks of time
DAY 28	Analyze the pros and cons of each method. Draw conclusions and determine your own method of planning your day.
DAYS 29-30	Plan your day using your own method

SUMMARY

In the table below you will find a list of the seven strategies you have learned in this chapter and the key areas in which they can be of help.

Grouping tasks	Organizing time and grouping similar tasks. Using learning theory.
Strategy	What it helps with
4 quadrants of time management	Specifying your tasks, deciding which tasks to focus on, and which tasks to eliminate.
Eliminating disruptions	Finding a way to work. The negative impact of disruptions and how to eliminate them.
Monotasking	Finding a way to work. The negative impact of multitasking on efficiency. Using the advantages of monotasking and the learning effect.
Designating blocks of time	Organizing time. Benefits of designating blocks of time. Putting them into practice.
The prime-time principle	Organizing time. Taking advantage of the most productive working hours.
Planning the day	Planning the day. Using the above-mentioned principles to create a daily plan.

In summary, when it comes to time management, everything starts with a focus on priorities. These days we are bombarded by a huge amount of information and all kinds of disruptions. In order to function efficiently in this environment and move forward, we need to stick to priorities and eliminate disruptions and unimportant tasks. The idea of the 4 quadrants of time management can sometimes help you choose the tasks on which you should focus. The key element is focusing on the most important tasks that bring the most value into our lives, such as education, training, planning, taking care of our health and rest, cultivating relationships with our loved ones as well as testing and analyzing new opportunities.

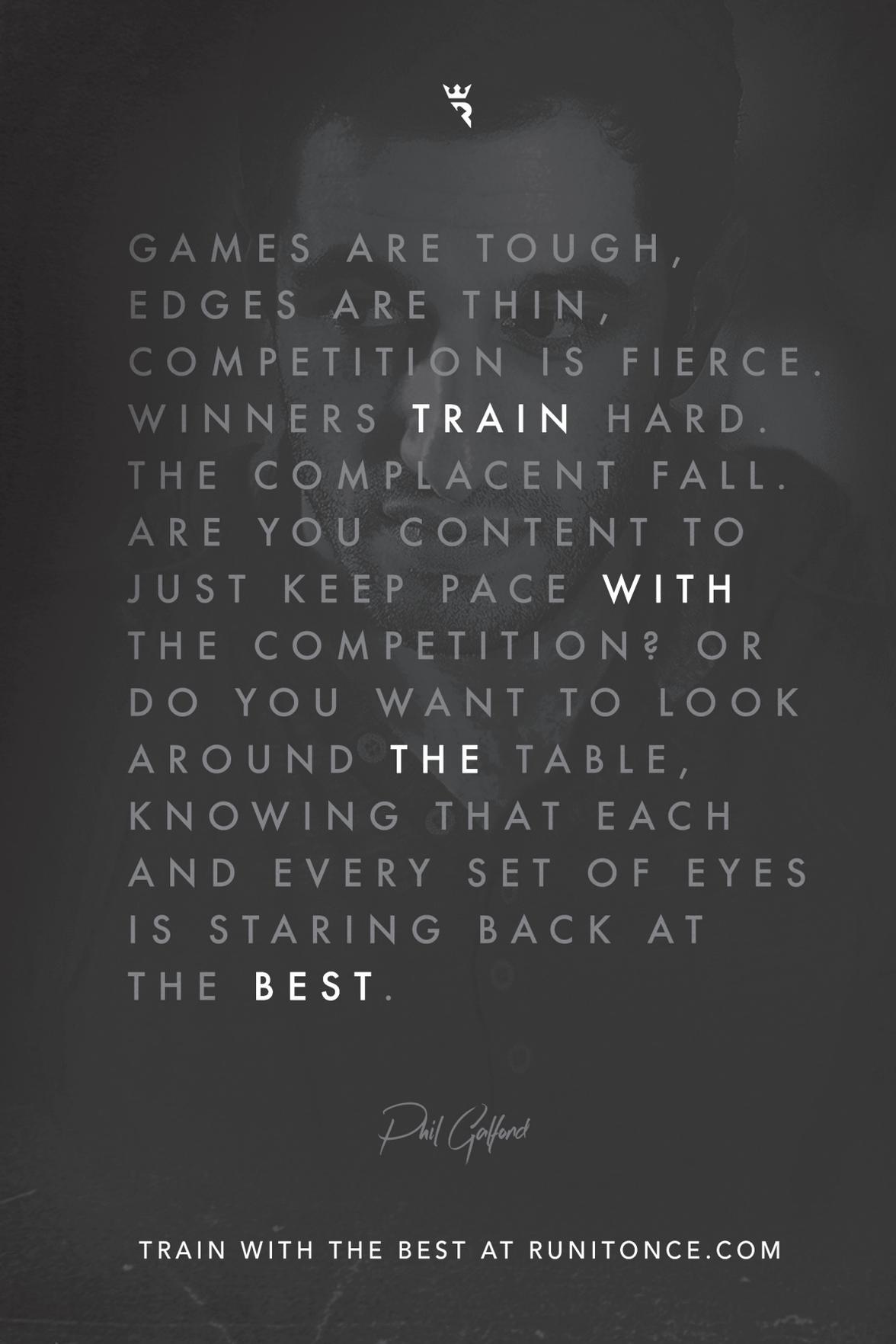
According to Parkinson's Law, work expands to fill the time available for its completion, so to avoid wasting time on tasks that can be done more quickly, consider dividing your work into specific blocks of time.

Whenever you play a session, work on your game, or do other work that requires focus and creativity, make sure you work only on that one task and don't let others disrupt your work. Mute your phone, turn off all messaging apps, focus on the one task you must do, and then finish it and move on to the next one. Forget about multitasking, which looks good in theory but in practice weakens your efficiency and

increases the number of mistakes you make. In exchange, group together similar tasks to maximize the learning effect.

Next, make a plan for the day and apply the strategies you learned in practice. When planning your day, remember the smart use of your "prime time."

If you do not have a lot of experience with planning, don't try to implement everything at once. Stick with systematic work and consistent implementation of further habits. Good luck!



THE

GAMES ARE TOUGH,
EDGES ARE THIN,
COMPETITION IS FIERCE.
WINNERS TRAIN HARD.
THE COMPLACENT FALL.
ARE YOU CONTENT TO
JUST KEEP PACE WITH
THE COMPETITION? OR
DO YOU WANT TO LOOK
AROUND THE TABLE,
KNOWING THAT EACH
AND EVERY SET OF EYES
IS STARING BACK AT
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