

What The Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast

Laura Vanderkam (2012, 177 pgs)

What the Most Successful People Do on Weekends

1. Learning to create restorative weekends – those that don't disappear between chores, errands, inefficient email checkings, unconscious tv marathons or a flurry of children's activities – requires thinking about weekends differently than we're used to and in many cases, than we think we want to. We need to be strategic with those hours.
2. If you live to be 80 yrs old, you will have only about 4,160 weekends. Weekend time is too precious to be entirely leisurely about leisure. You can't spend the weekend thinking about what you have to do it. You have to enter the weekend with a plan for it. This is the paradox of weekends – *“You have to set an appointment to go off the grid as surely as to go on to it.”* (Mike Huckabee).
3. We have 60 hours between 6pm Fri and 6am Mon. This is a large chunk of a 168-hr week. Even if we spend 24 of those hours sleeping, the rest of the 36 hours are akin to a working week. This is a helpful mindset to have. You would not take a 36-hr per week job without asking what you intended to do with it and what you expect the outcome to be.
4. The answer to how you should approach your weekend lies in the twifold approach
 - a. Choose labours of a different sort – as Anatole France said “Man is so made that he can only find relaxation from one kind of labour by taking up another.” Hence, other kinds of work – be it exercise, a creative hobby, hands-on parenting or volunteering – will do more to preserve your zest for Monday's challenges than complete vegetation or working through the weekend.
 - b. Embrace anticipation – Each of the tasks that you embrace to get off the grid will require planning, such as to make sure that your kids are occupied / being minded during these hours or even to make sure that your partners on these tasks know where to come / meet you. Thus a good weekend needs a plan. Not a spreadsheet full of details, but a few fun anchor events sketched in ahead of time.

5. Plan for 5 anchor events, between Fri evening and Mon morning. An anchor event is something you look forward to doing, and you anticipate with pleasure.
 - a. A good way to fix those anchor events is to use a template called List of 100 Dreams. These are everyday founts of joy, more along the lines of a bucket list of activities within a 2-hr radius from your house – such as visiting a museum, attending a concert etc.
 - b. Link each of these 100 activities to the major weekend anchor spots.
 - i. Friday evening / night
 - ii. Saturday morning / noon
 - iii. Saturday evening / night
 - iv. Sunday morning / noon
 - v. Sunday evening
 - c. Try and plan for between 3 to 5 of these anchor events. Some rules to follow
 - i. Don't just schedule your kids' lives. Schedule your own as well.
 - ii. A good time to schedule time for your personal pursuits is to schedule it early morning weekend. To get up early you'll probably have to avoid staying up the night before, but this is a good idea in general.
 - iii. Create traditions. Happy families have some special weekend activity that everyone loves but no one has to plan each time. Make a ritual of it. Comforting rituals boost happiness and over time become a tradition.
 - iv. Plan something for Sunday evenings. This way you combat Sunday-night blues. And also, everyone is free Sunday evenings.
6. Some rules for handling the three most irritating parts of the weekend – those that have to do with chores, children's activities, and work that follows you home.
 - a. Chores – designate a small chore time. See if you can shift these chores to weekdays. And never sacrifice prime weekend anchor events to chores.
 - b. Children's activities – Pare down multiple activities to the ones you and they enjoy most. Try and schedule your activities along with theirs. Try and get a small workout whenever you take your kids to theirs. Or try reading your

- books when you have to spend an hour outside their gymnastics class.
 - c. Office work - Keep a tech sabbath. See if you want to compress professional work into a small time-frame on weekends such as Saturday mid-morning or noon. The rest of the time can be sabbath mode.
7. Even if you have planned for all 5 anchor events on the weekend and have dealt with chores and office work, there is still 1 more activity required to ensure that your weekend is complete. This is to carve out some time to plan for the week ahead. Schedule not just what you have to do, but what you want to do.
- a. A good way to determine these is to see your tasks under the 3 major categories
 - i. Career
 - ii. Relationships
 - iii. Self – includes exercise, hobbies etc
 - b. Try to have weekly goals that make progress towards annual goals, under each of the key categories. Determine these by fixing your annual to-do goals and then working backwards to determine smaller steps that will enable progress towards the larger goal, and incorporating at least one of these steps into your weekly plan.

What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast

1. Willpower, like a muscle gets tired from overuse. Hence tasks that require self-discipline are easier to while the day is young. This is the argument for scheduling the most important priorities first.
2. Paradoxically it has been found that people who score high on self-discipline tend not to employ this discipline when they do regular activities that would seem to require it, such as homework or getting to class or work on time. Successful people convert choices around high-value tasks such as morning rituals, exercise, prayer etc to habits.
3. Getting things down to routines and habits at first takes a lot of willpower but in the long run conserves willpower. Through these daily habits you make slow, steady progress.
4. So what are the best morning habits or rituals? These are tasks that don't have to happen, and certainly don't have to happen at

a specific hour. They require internal motivation, and the payoff isn't as immediate. The best morning rituals are activities that when practiced regularly, result in long-term benefits. These are usually, either

- a. Nurturing your career
 - i. Early-morning hours are best-used for focused work around a top priority (not replying to emails) given lack of interruptions
 - ii. A good example is that of a University Prof who uses time between 6-9am to write a book. She says "Everyday I have a job, but in the morning, I think I have a career."
 - iii. Explore networking opportunities such as breakfast meetings.
 - b. Nurturing relationships
 - i. Using mornings for extended breakfast, cuddling time, driving together with spouse etc
 - c. Nurturing oneself – either exercise, prayer or hobbies
5. How do you make time for mornings / ensure that you wake up early consistently?
- a. Set a deadline for going to bed, not just for waking up
 - b. Think through the logistics of your early morning – plan well in advance for anything that you need to do to make sure it goes off well. This could even mean such things as laying out your workout clothes ready in the night so that you don't have to search for it in the dark early morning, or disturb your family while doing so.
6. Do not try to build multiple habits at one go. Start with one and only after the practice becomes a habit, should you move to the other one. How do you know when something is a habit? Simple, when you feel uneasy on skipping it!

What the Most Successful People Do At Work

1. Track your hours. Keep a time log. This will give you a good understanding of how you spend your week as well how much time each activity takes. If you know that each blog post takes 90 mins, you can fill a free 90-min slot with posting on your blog.

- a. Create open swathes of time when you can. If you need to schedule two meetings on one day, schedule them back to back in order to minimize the small chunks of time between events that are hard to do well.
 - b. However, if you do wind up with small bits of time in your schedule frequently, see if you can use these bits of time for “bits of joy” – small non-work related tasks that give you joy (reading a poem, sending a tweet, reading an article, calling mum). Ideally create two “bits of joy” list, one for activities that take 30-60mins and the other for activities than can finish in 10mins.
2. You don’t have to log your minutes forever, but even doing it for a few days, gives you a mindfulness about time. That mindfulness can lead to more productive choices by itself as you understand how you can better use time.
3. Plan your week. Take time out, ideally on Sunday or towards the end of the week (not Monday morning ideally) to take stock of where you are on the to-do list, and to determine what you need to do / prioritize in the coming week. And don’t put everything on your to-do list for Monday.
4. Limit your must-achieve tasks for the day to 3-4 things at most. There is no point chasing unachievable targets.
5. When you plan your week, it may be wise to build in step goals (or push goals) that take you one-step closer to an annual goal. A step goal is essentially the annual goal broken down into weekly goals. You could further break this weekly goal into a daily goal. This way, by achieving your daily / weekly step (push) goal, you make sure you are taking one step every day / week closer to your annual goal.
6. There are many ways to plan your week. But the important thing is not the format. It is getting into the habit of scheduling a planning period.
7. The most dangerous time-wasters are things that look like work, but aren’t. Meetings are a good example. Always remember to ask yourself “What else could I do with this hour?” before you call for a meeting. Before you go to attend another meeting, ask yourself is there is a colleague who can go instead.
 - a. Always offer to be the person initiating a call. That way it will start on time.
8. Sometimes what doesn’t look like work, such as looking at cat videos / taking a walk, may actually be as good as work too. If it

helps you take a break and helps you be more productive with your remaining hours, then you should build more of these into your schedule.

9. It is no longer sufficient to be employed. One must remain employable. The only way to do this is to monitor your stock of Career Capital. This is the sum total of one's experience, knowledge, network and personality characteristics. When your career capital levels are high, you can take a break without hurting your career or be able to get a job in quick stead if you have lost your present one.
 - a. Successful people develop the habit of paying into this account every day. Paying in is about figuring out what skills, knowledge and contacts you will need in the future.
 - b. These deposits can take the form of creating a visible portfolio, such as a blog or a book. The good thing about writing is that these are out there in the market, speaking for you and your ideas even when you're not around.
 - c. Writing isn't the only way to create a portfolio – any sort of tangible evidence will do, and such a bias towards visible outcomes is not a bad mindset to have. Think through your projects with the goal of having a measurable or tangible result, and communicate the result out to the world, or at least internally.
 - d. Another great way to pay in is to build a network of people who are loyal to you, and not just to your job or position.
 - e. Ask yourself at the end of each week, what have I done to enhance my exposure and to broaden my scope?