

Success Morning Routine

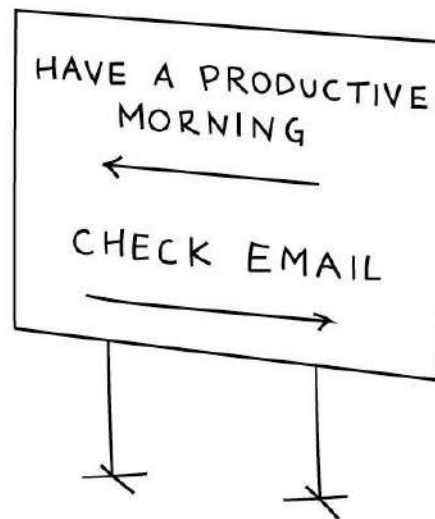
INTERVIEW WITH THE
TOP 50 SUCCESSFUL INDIVIDUALS



MANIFESTATION CODE

FOCUS AND PRODUCTIVITY

How to Be More Productive in the Morning



There is enormous power in putting your first few morning hours to use on your most creative and fulfilling projects, making large strides on goals that would

otherwise have sat on the back burner, and feeling a sense of early morning productivity that you can then take with you into the rest of the day.

We encourage you to create a to-do list the day before and place your most important work at the top—and aside from urgent events that genuinely can't be helped, to stick to it. Be proactive in the morning instead of reacting to events that are outside of your control.

In this chapter we'll speak with (among others) Gregg Carey on the four essential components of his morning; author and contributing writer for the *New Yorker* Maria Konnikova, on why the morning is her time to say "I got stuff done" before moving into the rest of the day; and senior editor of *Fortune* magazine Geoff Colvin, who forces himself to do the most important items on his to-do list every morning, but who confesses that, despite his best efforts, he does not bat 1.000.

RYAN HOLIDAY

Author of *The Obstacle Is the Way*

When you get so much done in the A.M. that the P.M. serves as extra credit.

What is your morning routine?

One of the best pieces of advice I've gotten comes from Shane Parrish.* It's simple: If you want to be more productive, get up early.

So I get up around 8:00 A.M.* and I have one other simple rule: Do one thing in the morning before checking email. It could be showering, it could be going for a long run, it could be jotting some thoughts down in my journal. It's usually writing. Most mornings I try to write for one to two hours before I start the rest of the day (and the to-do list I made the day before).

I shower, get ready, and head downstairs to my office/library to sit and write. The way I see it, after a productive morning in which I accomplish my big things, the rest of the day can be played by ear. It's all extra from there.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

Routines are an iterative process. You add and adapt them over time. I have been doing some version of this specific routine for nearly eight years.

I'm about four years into my current routine—each routine is slightly different depending on where I live. I think where routines get tested is as you get busier, as more opportunities come up, can you stick to it, can you resist the temptation to descend into chaos—and also, when you travel, how quickly can you come back to it. I think I'm pretty good at this. I can always be better, but I'm addicted to routine, so it is easier.

Nothing disrupts a routine like having a kid, so when my wife and I became parents I was prepared for some major shifts. It's still roughly the same—I take the baby for an hour in the morning to let my wife catch up on sleep, and in that time I sit with him and play. He sits in my lap while I write in my journal. I'll hold him while I go let the chickens out. Sometimes I will read to him. It's just a nice, slow, and peaceful addition to the routine.

The “no email in the mornings” rule has also had a big impact in recent years. It means I'm not starting the morning behind the ball. Instead, I start with wins. Specifically with writing, it allows me to approach it fresh and clearheaded. The last thing you want when you're writing is the specter of *46 UNREAD EMAILS* looming over you. That doesn't lend itself well to existing in the moment.

Do you use an alarm to wake up?

Yes, but I'm not a big snooze-button guy. I wake up at a time that works for me and if it didn't I would change it. I also try not to pointlessly stay up late.

How soon after waking up do you have breakfast?

It depends on if I go out or cook with my wife. When we lived in New York, we would go out and work together most mornings at a restaurant. Sometimes I do that when I'm in Austin, but here we have chickens so we usually check the coop for eggs and cook something up. My office is right next to the kitchen so I am in and out of it anyway.

Do you have a morning workout routine?

I tend to work out in the afternoon. I'll run on the lake in Austin, or swim in Barton Springs. If it's a CrossFit day, I'll go to the early evening class. When I travel, my schedule is not as much in my control, so I go for a long run in the morning, then start the day knowing that however it turns out, at least I got a run in.

Do you also follow this routine on weekends?

Weekends to me are great examples of what life should be if we were better able to ignore distraction and obligations.

Saturdays and Sundays are productive and fun and relaxing. Why? Because there are fewer calls, and fewer demands on time. My fantasy is to someday get my Tuesdays to look like my Saturdays. Do what I want, stick to the routine I want, be indifferent to and insulated from all the noise. I try to treat Saturdays as a chance to catch up on stuff that I want to catch up on. I try not to let bullshit from the week creep in. I spend a considerable amount of time on the weekend working around my ranch. But it's fun work, the kind of work where I forget to check my phone for hours. It's also unpaid . . . or really, I'm paying to do it, but it's fun.

GEOFF COLVIN

Senior editor of *Fortune* magazine

When you shudder to imagine breakfasts without your Japanese rice cooker.

What is your morning routine?

When I'm not traveling, I generally get up between 6:00 and 6:30 A.M. I drink three glasses of water, usually within sixty seconds of getting up. It's amazingly effective at waking up the body and the brain. I do a brief stretching routine, then run five miles (six days a week). I'll then have breakfast, shower, shave, dress, then get to work. Most of my work is writing, which I do from home, so there's no commute.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

I've been following this basic routine for ten or fifteen years. The only changes have been minor tweaks to my insanely regimented breakfasts.

What time do you go to sleep?

Generally between 9:00 and 9:30 P.M., so I get about nine hours of sleep. That's a lot of sleep. I'm a huge advocate of abundant sleep. Don't get me started.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

I always read something having absolutely nothing to do with work, which makes going to sleep easier. Also, I don't drink. I was never a big drinker (two glasses of wine with dinner), but about eight years ago I realized that I felt better when I had no alcohol at all. I didn't quit in order to make my mornings easier, but it does make a difference.

How soon after waking up do you have breakfast?

Six days a week, breakfast is some combination of oats, plain nonfat milk, fresh fruit, dried fruit, walnuts, and some tea. On Sundays I make buckwheat-and-cornmeal pancakes, which I top with fresh fruit and plain nonfat Greek yogurt.

On my six-oat breakfast days I generally follow a rotation of four variations, all cooked with skim milk (not water): steel-cut oats, coarse ground oatmeal, rolled oats, and a combination of oat bran and Wheatena (a high-fiber, toasted-wheat cereal). Each of these variations cooks in the Japanese rice cooker while I'm running. I shudder to contemplate life without my Japanese rice cooker.

What are your most important tasks in the morning?

I'm a great believer in to-do lists, so every morning I make the list, then identify the most important items, and then force myself to do those first, which is usually hard.

What happens if you fail?

I just carry on, and if I miss the routine for only one day, it's no problem. Two days, and I feel a little sluggish. On the rare occasions when I've missed it for three consecutive days, I feel heavy, slow, and miserable.

SHEENA BRADY

CEO of Tease Tea, merchant success lead at Shopify

When you're working two jobs at once and you're trying very, very hard not to multitask.

What is your morning routine?

I *try* to be up at 6:00 A.M. every day, as it takes about an hour until I'm mentally and physically ready to get to work. I run my company, Tease Tea, from 7:00 to 11:00, and lead my team at Shopify from 11:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. My morning usually looks something like:

6:00 A.M.—Wake up, let the dogs out, and make coffee. While the coffee is brewing, I stretch for a few minutes. I'll then brush my teeth, shower, and change, then meditate for ten to twenty minutes.

7:00 A.M.—Review my calendar for the day, schedule and time-block all actionables and tasks for the day. I'll then begin working, trying hard not to multitask and instead to stick to the time blocking.

9:30 A.M.—I commute to the Tease Tea office and fulfillment center. I chat with my sister, who works part time for the company. I ensure she has everything she needs to be successful for that day. I'll then meet with my digital marketing/community manager remotely, as well as our fulfillment/operations manager, who works out of the office. We talk about our goals for the day, roadblocks, and challenges, then we ask each other if there is anything we can do to support each other or remove any barriers to accomplishing anything.

Multitasking versus Context Switching

When we describe multitasking we're often describing context switching, the act of opening up our email and looking through it for "just" two minutes before returning to our original task. Context switching is inherently bad for us—every time we switch between doing our work and reading an article online,

or reading an article online and checking our phones, we experience a “transaction cost” that drains our energy and slows us down.

Multitasking is the act of doing two or more tasks at the same time, with varying levels of success. While most attempts at multitasking tend to fail (as anyone who has ever attempted to order groceries online while feigning an all-ears presence on a conference call will attest), certain activities can be worked in alongside each other, such as cycling to work (you get to where you’re going while getting a workout in), or, if you can do it safely, listening to an audiobook in the car.

10:30 A.M.—I wrap up whatever I haven’t already accomplished on my to-do list. Usually it’s emails by this point. Whatever I don’t finish by 11:00 I will pick up where I left off that evening, or the following morning.

11:00 A.M.—I start my day at Shopify. I’ll see if there is anything urgent or pressing that requires my attention, then I’ll go through my inbox and hash out any actionables. I lead a team of eight remotely from British Columbia to New Zealand, so they pop online at various times. I then attend any impactful meetings on my calendar for that day, including one-on-ones with each team member.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

Almost a year now, though some areas can vary. I’ve learned to be realistic and give myself time in the morning, even if I work the first few hours at home. Giving myself that full hour to actually wake up in the morning and do what I personally want to do before any work has been incredibly impactful for my productivity.

GREGG CAREY

Entrepreneur, *Survivor* contestant

When weathering a cyclone on a desert island makes you thankful for the basics.

What is your morning routine?

My morning routine is holistic and has four essential components. The details will vary, but the components are constant and critical to my happiness. They are:

- Energy: Eat something, drink something.
- Body: Work out (usually high intensity).
- Mind: Play piano, meditate.
- Soul: Connect to purpose, be grateful, feed cats, kiss wife.

Ideally, I wake up around 6:30 A.M. Special shout-out to Rufus, my cat, who is remarkable about waking me up at the same time daily. My routine can take anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours. My general goal is to always answer yes to the following question: If the day were to end after my routine, would it have been a successful and fulfilling day?

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

Adding piano was the biggest change. I've always loved music, but never played an instrument. I had assumed it would be the "one regret" that I'd take with me. Then, nearly two years ago, I began taking lessons from a jazz pianist.

The daily benefits piano provides me with are 1) meditation: you cannot learn without being completely present; and 2) skill development: every day I can say "I can do something that I couldn't do yesterday."

What time do you go to sleep?

Typically, I go to bed around 11:00 P.M. to midnight. Lately, I've been prioritizing my sleep in favor of my routine. I've realized that sleeping longer will always be the most beneficial thing I can do for myself. On those days, I will adjust my routine proportionally. I keep the components, but reduce the time.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

I'll typically share a small cup of tea with my wife before bed. Her evening routine

is as thoughtful as my morning routine, so I try to support her even though I can fall asleep anywhere at any time with absurd ease.

When I'm at my best, I'm evaluating the progress of my day and preparing in detail my goals for the upcoming day. When I'm at my all-time best, I'm implementing Benjamin Franklin's thirteen virtues.

Do you have a morning workout routine?

I'm a fan of high-intensity workouts. I've done stints at CrossFit, which I've loved. I've gone for long runs while training for a marathon. A ten-mile run in the summer followed by a cold shower is ten times as good as any cup of coffee.

What are your most important tasks in the morning?

Telling my wife that I love her. It's not a task, but it's important.

Do you also follow this routine on weekends?

I follow this routine on Saturdays, but usually take a day off on Sunday and let the day start and evolve more organically. I find it extremely important to go off script and switch off.

For me, the weekend always benefits from a strong Saturday morning routine. If I can put a good dent in my plan for the upcoming week, and have a good workout, then I feel much more free to truly enjoy the one-and-a-half weekend days ahead of me. A strong Saturday is key to a relaxed weekend, and it also helps to reduce any Sunday blues!

Benjamin Franklin's Thirteen Virtues

In a quest to achieve "moral perfection" as a young man, Benjamin Franklin made a list of thirteen virtues that he thought desirable, and attempted to train himself in each of them. (Franklin's biographer Walter Isaacson notes that the original list contained just twelve virtues. After seeing the list, a Quaker friend informed Franklin that he had left off something that Franklin was often guilty of: pride. Franklin added his thirteenth virtue, "humility," to the list, in a move consistent with the word itself.)

Primarily working on one virtue at a time, while always keeping the others in the back of his mind, Franklin kept a chart in which each virtue was listed alongside the days of the week. Every time he violated a virtue, he would place a dot in the appropriate place in his chart, with the goal of having placed as few marks as possible by the end of a week. Though Franklin is thought never to have recorded a clean sheet, the very act of attempting to do so was as beneficial to him in the late 1720s as it can be to you today.

Franklin's thirteen virtues are:

1. Temperance: Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. Silence: Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. Order: Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. Resolution: Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. Frugality: Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6. Industry: Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. Sincerity: Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. Justice: Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. Moderation: Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. Cleanliness: Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths or habitation.
11. Tranquillity: Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
12. Chastity: Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
13. Humility: Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

You were on *Survivor: Palau*. Can you tell us about your morning routine on the island?

Survivor was a humbling experience that made me grateful for a lot we all take for granted. It was the real deal out there. I lost thirty pounds in thirty-three days. I weathered an overnight cyclone with barely any shelter. It makes you truly appreciate the bare necessities of life while recognizing we're capable of more than we think.

We began and ended our day with the sun. Each sunset or sunrise would paint the sky in such a way that you couldn't help but quiet your mind and admire the beauty. This provided an opportunity to be grateful and find peace amidst the chaos. All strategy and "game play" would inevitably stop and we would appreciate life.

And we'd just be so thankful for the basics: our family, our food, and our shelter.

MARIA KONNIKOVA

Writer for the *New Yorker*, author of *The Confidence Game*

When your day is so all over the place that your morning hours are your only chance for a little structure.

What is your morning routine?

I used to not be a morning person at all until I moved in with my husband almost ten years ago. I've since had to become one, as his work starts very early.

I normally get up around 6:00 A.M., and the first thing I do is make tea (because I need the caffeine), and then I have a morning yoga salutation practice to wake myself up. After that I'll have breakfast, shower, and then I'll get to the rest of the morning, which usually starts with checking email to make sure that there are no fires to put out before I start writing.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

In the context of ten years, I recently upped the meditation component. I used to not meditate very seriously at all, and I still don't do it seriously compared to people who really do. Meditation is a great way to organize your thoughts; I recommend it to anyone who wants to help bring themselves greater clarity and concentration. At the end of my yoga practice I'll sit for twenty to thirty minutes (more if I can afford it, but I usually can't) and really try to engage with the practice. I'll sometimes mix it up by going for a run afterward.

I'm someone who's generally not structured at all; my desk is a mess, my writing is a mess. When people ask me, "What's your approach to writing?" my answer is nearly always, "Throw up on the screen and see what happens," and that's really how I write. My brain is not an organized place, and the rest of my day is not at all organized either. The morning is my time to say "I got stuff done," and then I can go into the day thinking that at least I've taken care of something; at least I've had this little structure.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

One thing I do, and it's hilarious that I'm bringing it up because I never follow it, is I have a planner and I write notes in it because I don't want my brain to have to actually remember that I have to do certain tasks the next day. I write everything down to get it out of my head, and then oftentimes I'll never look at it again.

How soon after waking up do you have breakfast?

I normally have breakfast a little over an hour after waking up. I always have the exact same thing, even when I'm traveling. I'm one of those people who, when you do radio interviews and they ask you what you had for breakfast, I always have the same answer: oatmeal with honey and blueberries.

Do you use any apps or products to enhance your morning routine?

No. I think some of these can be helpful for some people, but a lot of them, to be completely honest, are really bullshit. We need fewer things to be stressed about in our lives, not more. I don't want to be worried that "Oh my god, I didn't get up correctly," because an app told me so.

What are your most important tasks in the morning?

I'm someone who's always working on multiple projects, and I'll often go from one to the other, so I try to figure out what I'm going to prioritize today, what I want to get done, and I try to kind of get into the mind-set for that. But I'm not very organized throughout the day, so I don't punish myself if, for instance, I wanted to get this done, but instead I got that done, because I realize you can't really predict how your mind is going to work on any given day, and you have to kind of embrace that.

Anything else you would like to add?

I don't think there's one perfect routine that's right for everyone. I think that everybody should find out what works for them. I hate when people write lists, like "These are the habits of creative people, and if you follow them you're going to be creative." It's interesting to know what other people do, but ultimately it's not a one-size-fits-all thing.

SHANE PARRISH

Founder of *Farnam Street*

When you take a stand against to-do apps and stick to basic, old-school planning and discipline instead.

What is your morning routine?

Mornings are my most productive time of day. Over the years, I've adapted my schedule accordingly so I can do my most important work in the morning.

Energy levels and our ability to concentrate fluctuate throughout the day. For most people, our ability to focus peaks earlier in the day—prior to distractions, noise, and weakened mental willpower. I dictate my morning routine before I go to bed the night before. That's when I write down two to three important projects that I want to concentrate on the next day.

I wake up around 6:00 to 6:30 A.M., grab a coffee, and then sit down to work on those projects. I give myself sixty to ninety minutes of uninterrupted time to focus on deep work* and difficult problems. I then take a break, grab another coffee and breakfast, make note of any ideas that came to mind that I want to revisit or research, and then work for another sixty to ninety minutes on difficult problems or projects.

Do you answer email first thing in the morning?

No. This was a habit that I consciously had to break. If I got up in the morning and the first thing I did was check email, I'd be allowing others to dictate my priorities for the day. The important projects I want to focus on would get pushed back to later in the day, and I would be spending my most valuable mental-energy time answering emails that could easily wait for a few hours.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

I write out my schedule for the next day. Scheduling keeps me on track and allows me to be conscious of how I spend my time.

How soon after waking up do you have breakfast?

My mind is typically awake before my stomach. Only after drinking coffee and completing a good chunk of work will I sit down to have breakfast. This usually consists of high protein and fat. I love bacon.

Do you use any apps or products to enhance your morning routine?

I'm not a fan of trying to solve common life problems with apps and software programs. Some basic, old-school planning and discipline do the job fine. And if you don't have discipline, an app won't help.

That's just my take. There's a certain amount of technology fetishism that creeps in. How the heck did Isaac Asimov write five hundred books without an app? He created a routine and stuck to it. Your habits become comfortable and customary.

What happens if you fail?

I try again tomorrow. Don't get into the habit of thinking it's all or nothing. Just get back on track immediately.

TODD HENRY

Author of *The Accidental Creative*

When you do your most creative work first thing, and silence is your preferred soundtrack.

What is your morning routine?

On weekdays I wake up at 6:00 A.M. on the dot. I pour coffee (which I set to brew the night before) and then eat the same breakfast (oatmeal with frozen blueberries and a handful of cashews) every day in my home office while I study.

I spend the first hour of my morning studying and writing. I sit at my desk (or on the sofa in my office) and read a book with a pen in hand, taking notes and writing observations in my notebook for later review. At the close of the session, I spend fifteen to twenty minutes in silence—meditating or considering what I just read and how it applies to my life and work. Sometimes I also journal during this time.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

Fourteen years. I used to try to cram everything into my morning routine, but I found that I do much better when I simply have an hour or so of study and thought

first thing. It gets my brain moving, and it helps me get perspective on my day. Now, I have a list of “dailies” that I accomplish each day, but some of them I complete later in the morning or over lunch so that my morning doesn’t feel so rushed.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

I have a worksheet that I use to plan and execute my days. It has space to record my studying, my key tasks, and to track my dailies. It also has space for my daily “high,” “low,” and “learning.” Each night I sit and plan the next day so I know exactly what I will do when I begin my work.

What are your most important tasks in the morning?

I write every morning. Every. Single. Morning. I am a firm believer in doing your most important creative work first thing.

What happens if you’re traveling?

When I travel, my morning routine varies. I’m typically speaking at an event, so I do whatever I need to do to ensure the event is successful. That often means

allowing my body some extra time to recover or taking a walk to get my blood pumping.

BILL McNABB

Chairman of the Vanguard Group

When you'll sacrifice everything to get enough sleep.

What is your morning routine?

I'm up between 5:00 and 5:15 A.M. I grab a coffee on the way to work and I'm at my desk between 5:45 and 6:15. Most days, I use this desk time to scan the news before responding to emails, particularly from colleagues in Europe and Asia. Meetings start at 8:00, and my schedule is pretty full for the rest of the morning.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

My routine has varied about thirty minutes over thirty years. When I became Vanguard's CEO in 2008 (a position I held until early 2018), I started coming in a little earlier so I could have some additional preparation time in the morning. Other than that, not much has changed since I joined the company in 1986.

What time do you go to sleep?

Between 9:00 and 10:00 P.M. most nights.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

I try to make sure I'm all caught up on email so I have a running start in the morning. I also read something non-work-related to relax my mind.

Do you have a morning workout routine?

Exercise is a key part of my daily schedule, and I try to fit in a midday workout three or four times a week. When meetings or travel make that difficult, I'll opt for a morning workout session instead. When I'm on the road, I always carry a TRX and a jump rope with me so I can exercise before the day begins. If there's a gym with full cardio equipment, I may jump on the rowing machine.

What are your most important tasks in the morning?

The quiet time between 6:00 and 7:30 A.M. is when some of my best work gets done. It's my time to read, think, and prepare for the day ahead. I try really hard to preserve that time.

What happens if you fail?

Quite simply, it stinks. If I fail to follow my morning routine it's usually due to

lack of sleep. A late night means I'll often sleep in and go right to meetings in the office. That starts a domino effect, where my morning quiet time is bumped to lunch and my workout time gets bumped altogether.

The truth is, I'll sacrifice everything for the appropriate amount of sleep, even my morning routine.

MATTHEW WEATHERLEY-WHITE

Cofounder and managing director of the CAPROCK Group

When you realize you're way more productive when you're not in fight-or-flight mode.

What is your morning routine?

I'm fortunate enough in my life to wake without an alarm, so my mornings don't always start at the same time. If I could wave a magic wand to give everyone in the world one gift, it would be the ability to wake without that annoying, incessant beeping. There is nothing like simply opening one's eyes when they naturally want to open to make the world seem pretty much completely okay.

I'm *definitely* a morning person. Left to my own devices, I rarely sleep past 6:30 A.M., and I'm frequently up well before that. I wake quickly. Long, slow mornings are not part of my life; once I'm up, I'm engaged.

While I wait for water to boil, I usually run a mental preview of the day, check my calendar, and scan my email and texts to make sure nothing urgent has surfaced since I went to bed. Then I make tea or coffee, eat, and plug into a four-hour block of what I call "white space," from 8:00 A.M. to noon, which is blocked off on my calendar every workday and which only I have the authority to fill. Writing, business development, board meetings, exercise—whatever. It is how I bring a sense of intent and control to what is otherwise a primarily reactive work environment, and how I can structure a morning without imposing too much "structure."

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

The only thing I do before going to sleep (and not every night) is jot down a brief list of what needs to be accomplished at some point in the future. I frequently don't even look at the list when I wake up the next morning.

Do you have a morning workout routine?

My morning routine almost always involves exercise, and I'm an omnivore when it comes to activity. Running, riding some form of bicycle, skiing, yoga, rock climbing, resistance training, rowing, or surfing—just about anything will do, really, depending on the environment.

Exercise is my meditation, my grounding. I don't think of it as "working out." Rather, I think of it as "working in," a way to bring calm, focus, and energy to all that awaits.

Do you use any apps or products to enhance your sleep or morning routine?

No. In fact, I do what I can to *reduce* the intrusion of technology into my morning. The last thing I want is to add more technology, even as I live with the benefits of technology elsewhere in my life.

What are your most important tasks in the morning?

Funny, I've never thought of it as a task, but the most important thing I do each morning is steady myself by not allowing a sense of urgency to penetrate. Every once in a while I find myself in a spin cycle of urgency—a sense of internal panic that the list of things to do is lengthening no matter how hard I try to control it. But I learned long ago (even though I occasionally forget!) that this sense of urgency is nearly always illusory. I am more productive when I am *not* operating with urgency.

I remember years ago reading a passage in a book about Thomas Keller in which the author marvels at the pervasive sense of calm in Keller's famous restaurant, the French Laundry. How could such incredible food, the author wondered, prepared at such exacting standards, be produced in such a calm environment? The irony is, of course, that the calm environment was the reason for the productivity, as it revealed total mastery of the task at hand. I strive for that same sense of calm mastery, and I occasionally even achieve it.

Stephen Covey's Time Management Matrix

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey describes his time management matrix, which highlights, as Matthew puts it, the power of *not* operating with urgency.

I Important Urgent	II Important Not Urgent
III "Urgent" Not Important	IV Not Urgent Not Important

In Covey's own words: "The only way to make Quadrant I manageable is to give considerable attention to Quadrant II . . . [and] the only place to get time for Quadrant II in the beginning is from Quadrants III and IV. You can't ignore the urgent and important activities of Quadrant I, although it will shrink in size as you spend more time with prevention and preparation in Quadrant

II." Thus, when you choose to *not* operate with urgency you can, over time, become more productive.

OVER TO YOU

“Whether the day is for writing, designing, or painting, the consistent practice of a morning routine is the doorway into it all.”

—ELLE LUNA, ARTIST AND AUTHOR

Mornings are often when we're at our freshest, so it's no surprise that many successful people start their day by taking advantage of their first few morning hours to get as much focused and productive time in as possible.

This only gets more important with time. Illustrator and writer Mars Dorian notes that: “Over recent years my morning routine has become more tight and focused. The older I get, the less time I want to waste.” Neuroscience PhD Darya Rose says: “Mornings prime your brain for how it will function the rest of the day. Are you going to be distracted and bounce around from project to project? Or are you going to be focused and choose your activities consciously and with intention? I much prefer to be in the latter state. I get more work done and it turns out better.

I'm less stressed and less reactive. So I do what I can to keep my mornings simple and uncluttered.”

Of course, this focused and productive time is not meant to come at the expense of your family, and it's important to find the right balance for you. Having a calm morning connecting with your family, whether they're at home with you or halfway around the world, will give you the fuel you need to work more effectively later in the day. In the words of the attorney general of Washington State, Bob Ferguson: “I like the kids to have a good start to the day It's easy for meetings to go late at work, or for other events to come up, and I'm not always guaranteed much time with them later in the day, so I like to lock in that morning time.”

Start following the five points below, and see if your day starts to become more focused and productive:

WRITE A TO-DO LIST, THEN STICK TO IT

Having a to-do list and sticking to it is the number one thing you can do to increase your overall focus and productivity, period. We advocate writing out (whether on paper or digitally) your to-do list for the next day at the end of your workday (more on this in the Evening Routines chapter), so the moment you sit down to work you have it right in front of you.

You'll find your decision fatigue* is reduced, as you'll know exactly what you

have to do that day, making it harder for you to jump around working on tasks that aren't important. Creating a to-do list liberates your mind from worrying about important tasks, as writing them down guarantees that you'll remember (and get to) them the next day. Judge Jeremy Fogel told us that every morning he “reflect[s] on what actually needs to be done (as opposed to the multitude of things that make demands on my time) and how best to accomplish that.”

While we encourage this list to be aspirational and to represent a full day of work, don't overload the list and overwhelm yourself to the point that you feel paralyzed and, in turn, do nothing. We recommend keeping your list to approximately five to six items. Feel free to slip a couple of easy tasks in there to get some quick wins—the feeling of crossing out a completed task cannot be understated. If you find you can only complete three tasks per day, then lower your number. Even one major task on your to-do list is not too few.

When you think of new tasks throughout your workday, unless they're urgent and must be completed that minute—and there's a good chance that this will not be the case—add them to a separate list (or task “inbox,” as it were). Then, when you go to write your next day's to-do list, you can move over some of the tasks that didn't get completed that day, as well as some tasks on your inbox list.

If you didn't write a to-do list the day before, that's okay. Write one in the morning just before you begin your work, but in general try to fit it in at the end of your workday so you can jump right into it the next morning.

DO YOUR MOST IMPORTANT WORK FIRST

Unless you're a shockingly disciplined person of your own accord, a to-do list isn't very helpful if you don't prioritize the items on it and, once prioritized, do your most important work first.

We've all been in a situation where we know the one or two tasks we should be working on, but instead choose to work on easier things. We like to refer to this as “positive procrastination,” and while there's certainly some merit to it if it happens infrequently, for your to-do list to function correctly you must do your most important work first.

You already know what work this is for you. It may be unpleasant, but it can just as easily be highly enjoyable, something you desperately want to do but keep putting off, such as a personal project that benefits from your full attention.

In his 2016 book *Deep Work*, associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University Cal Newport describes “deep work” as: “Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your

cognitive capacities to their limit. Their efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate.” This is counter to shallow work, described by Newport as “Noncognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value and are easy to replicate.”

This is your most important work. Or, to put it more succinctly, keep your mornings for thinking work, and your afternoons for minutiae.

DON'T CHECK YOUR EMAIL FIRST THING IN THE MORNING

For most of us, checking our email or social media accounts first thing in the morning spells disaster for our early morning productivity.

When you check your email first thing upon waking you're stressing your brain by jolting yourself awake to the realities of the day ahead. It makes you reactive instead of proactive, as you're jumping at the needs of others instead of addressing your own. As entrepreneur and author Julien Smith notes: “If I do email [first thing in the morning and] that's all I do, I hate my life.”

Not checking email and social media makes it easier to stay in control of your thoughts. Remove push notifications and social media apps from your phone if you need the added discipline, or at least move these (and any other work apps) off the front screen of your phone, so you have to work harder to get to them. If all else fails, leave your phone in another room during the most productive part of your morning.

“It turns out that the worst thing you can do with an email is answer it, because you get more back.”

—SCOTT ADAMS, CREATOR OF THE *DILBERT* COMIC STRIP

The moment you open your email you enter reactive mode, and you begin working on someone else's agenda rather than your own. This is true whether you're employed or self-employed. Do not let anyone (except your boss) get between you and your tasks for the day. The rest is just other people's problems.

Depending on how strict your workplace is, you can make modifications to this approach to ensure you're checking email less often in the morning while still not missing anything important as it comes in (and you never know, the longer you wait to reply to something, the greater chance the problem will resolve itself). In the words of software engineer and diversity advocate Tracy Chou: “I check email first thing in the morning, but I only respond to the ones where I can dash off one- or two-sentence replies.” This is the perfect approach in this situation.

Be proactive in the morning, not reactive. You'll still be getting email when you're dead.

CUT OUT MORNING MEETINGS AND CALLS

If you find that your workday is frequently eaten up by meetings, try to get permission to sit out as many as you can. If you convince your boss of your willingness to work hard outside of these meetings, they'll likely allow it for the less crucial ones. (Make it a long-term goal to be able to sit out more and more.)

The potential to carry this out depends on your job, and indeed your level of seniority within it. With that said, we recommend trying to keep your morning meetings and calls to a minimum.

“When I was running Paramount I had 8:30 A.M. breakfast meetings almost every single day. Two years after leaving Paramount, [I eliminated] daily breakfast meetings.”

—SHERRY LANSING, FIRST WOMAN TO HEAD A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE STUDIO

If your most productive hours are in the morning, it doesn't make sense to waste these on meetings and calls that, if we're totally honest, don't usually require you to bring your A game. Try to schedule meetings and calls for the afternoon instead. In the words of the author Laura Vanderkam: “When I'm scheduling my days well, I leave big open chunks of time in the morning so I can concentrate, and then I start phone calls after 10:30 A.M. I don't always stick to this, but I try.”

If you're in a position where you can set boundaries on other people's requests, make it clear that your first available “slot” for meetings or calls each day is at midday before lunch, or from 1:00 to 2:00 P.M. after lunch. Then make sure these boundaries are respected (if you use a shared calendar, consider creating “unavailable” blocks for these morning hours), only giving exceptions, as the word suggests, in the most exceptional of circumstances.

BREAK DOWN BIG GOALS INTO SMALL PIECES

You've probably heard the expression “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” While we personally advocate for a lighter breakfast, the expression rings true if you want to make the most of your morning to get your most important work done.

Nobody can dive headfirst into a big, scary project and expect to come out the other end having accomplished everything they set out to do. Work of this size needs to be reined in; it needs to be broken down into small pieces—or rather, eaten one bite at a time. If you want to get your most important work done in the morning, before the responsibilities of the day start to creep up on you, make sure this work is broken down into small, actionable pieces before you attempt to

tackle them. These small pieces are far easier to get started on and work through to completion.

REVERSAL

The reversal here is clear. What if, despite your best efforts, mornings just aren't your most productive time of day?

In the words of author Chris Guillebeau: "The best routine is your own. I check email in the morning and don't exercise until later. If everyone else advocates the opposite, good for them. But you should always find what works for you, not for anyone else." In finding what works for you, be sure to go in with your eyes wide open and with the dedication to experiment with often polar opposite ways of working. Give everything you experiment with a week or two of your time before moving on to an opposing path, and equally giving this new path the time it deserves.

If you produce your best work later in the afternoon, or even well into the night, reverse the above points so you can deal with email, minutiae, and administrative tasks in the morning when you're least productive, leaving your most productive hours free for your most important work.

Do you have to check email first thing in the morning for your job? That's understandable, and we don't want to propose anything that would get you fired. In that case you can stick to a middle ground, choosing to filter your email inbox the moment you arrive at work so you can get a sense of what you'll have to deal with throughout the day, then immersing yourself in your most important work, dipping into your inbox every hour or so (or whatever feels appropriate) so you can still reply to any urgent or important messages as they come in.

As a coach and expert in workplace psychology Melody Wilding notes: "Most of us realize we're more productive at certain times of the day, but a key to benefiting from this information is being able to identify those times and adapt our schedule accordingly. Pay attention to the times when you're at peak productivity."

MORNING MEDITATION

Can Meditating in the Morning Help You Focus Throughout the Day?



I'M SO JEALOUS OF JOHN, HE'S REALLY
GOT NOTHING GOING ON UPSTAIRS

Meditation can take many forms, and some of the examples you're about to read are on the advanced end of the meditation practice spectrum. But please don't dismiss this chapter for that reason alone. Even if the idea of sitting down to meditate for twenty minutes every morning doesn't appeal to you, you can learn to find meditative moments in the mundane and generally build in moments of mindfulness throughout your day for greater energy, focus, and calm.

Meditation can include everything from heaving yourself into the lotus position (often against your best judgment) at a weekend retreat, to waiting patiently while your teakettle boils, to playing with your kids in the morning. Here are some of the most common types of meditation:

- **Guided:** Nowadays, the typical guided meditation involves an app or audio program talking you through your practice. Another option is going to a meditation class or retreat where someone in the room leads you (or a group) through a succession of mental prompts.
- **Mindfulness:** In this discipline, it's just you and your breath. When you imagine meditation, this style is likely what you're thinking of. When your mind starts to wander during mindfulness meditation, gently bring it back and return to focusing on your breath.
- **Zen (Zazen):** Unique to Zen Buddhism, zazen is a form of meditation typically performed in the lotus position (or simply with your legs crossed). Posture is important, and it's not uncommon for Zen Buddhist priests to sit zazen for more than twelve hours at retreats.
- **Transcendental:** Also called TM, this is a form of silent mantra meditation whereby you close your eyes and repeat a mantra in your mind for fifteen to twenty minutes in a row, twice a day.

The list goes on to include Vipassanā, Mettā, qigong, self-hypnosis, prayer, and more modern ideas on what meditation can include, such as journaling, running, and walking in nature. If you come at this habit with a genuine curiosity and openness to new experiences—without taking it too seriously (at least in the beginning)—you'll crack open a whole new mental frequency.

“On days I don't have time to do anything else, I just pray and meditate, as I find those to be the most important components of a good start to my day.”

—LISA NICOLE BELL, ENTREPRENEUR

In this chapter we'll speak with (among others) the president of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios, Ed Catmull, on why he chooses to focus on his breath in the morning (he hasn't missed a day in years); author, filmmaker, and Zen Buddhist priest Ruth Ozeki, on her sixteen-hour meditation retreat sessions; and writer and meditation teacher Susan Piver, on how she works to make her mind remain dreamy in the morning.

RUTH OZEKI

Novelist, filmmaker, Zen Buddhist priest

When your morning routine depends on the role you're playing that day.

What is your morning routine?

I love the idea of a single, perfect, infallible morning routine, and I'm always searching for it, but unfortunately I have yet to find it. Meanwhile, I have several routines, which I'm always changing and which vary depending on where I am, who I am, and what I'm doing.

So, for example, during the school year, when I'm being a professor and going to school and teaching classes, I usually wake up at about 7:00 A.M., brush my teeth, wash my face, sit zazen, make coffee, and then I try to get a couple of hours of writing in, at which point I turn my attention to schoolwork, planning classes, reading student work, meeting with students, and teaching.

When I'm being a novelist, living on a remote Canadian island in Desolation Sound, I wake up around 8:00 to 9:00, brush my teeth, wash my face, sit zazen, and then write more or less for the rest of the day. Sometimes my husband, Oliver, brings me coffee in bed, in which case I noodle around, writing in my journal first, and watching the deer nibbling the heads off the yellow flowers outside the bedroom window, before I move on to zazen and fiction writing.

When I'm being a Zen priest at a meditation retreat, I wake up at 4:30 A.M., brush my teeth, wash my face, and then sit zazen from 5:00 A.M. until 9:00 P.M., and then go to bed. (Sometimes I sneak a little writing in, too.)

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

I started teaching at Smith College two years ago, so that professor routine is still newish and I'm still working out the bugs, but the other routines I've had for quite a while now.

I'm always observing and tweaking my routines. I am a big believer in the Hawthorne effect, which was first identified in 1958 and describes two very interesting sociological phenomena: 1) That research subjects (in this case factory workers at an electric factory) were motivated to improve their performance simply because they were the subjects of a study and their behavior was being observed, and 2) that when a change was made to one of the variables in their working conditions (in this case, the levels of light at the factory workstations), the novelty led to temporary increases in productivity—in other words, the

determining factor was the fact of a change, rather than the specific change itself.

The Hawthorne effect suggests that 1) the novelty value of change in a routine can lead to increased productivity, but 2) the productivity increase is temporary, so 3) it's good to change things up from time to time.

I treat my life as an observation experiment in which I'm both the experimenter and the subject. I establish a routine, change a variable, and observe my performance, and when the novelty wears off, I tweak the variable again. If nothing else, it keeps things interesting.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

Sometimes before I go to bed I'll think of a problem I'm trying to solve in the novel or piece of writing I'm working on, and then in the morning I'll lie in bed and think about it, and often I'll find I've come up with an idea or solution during the night.

Do you use an alarm to wake up?

If I have to wake up at a certain time, I use my phone alarm, and I try very hard not to snooze. But sometimes if I'm woken during a particularly interesting dream, I'll snooze in order to go back and finish it. Of course, this rarely works, but it's fun to try.

Can you teach us more about your morning meditation routine?

I practice zazen. I like to meditate first thing in the morning, except on those mornings when Oliver brings me coffee in bed. I find it's easiest to sit before getting caught up in the busyness of the day. I like to sit for half an hour. Sometimes, when I have a lot to do, I'll only sit for fifteen or twenty minutes, but even ten minutes is better than no minutes. And sometimes I do zazen at night instead of, or in addition to, the morning. Night zazen is nice, too. It has a different feeling, quiet, dark, and settled.

What and when is your first drink in the morning?

Coffee. I used to drink Sencha (Japanese green tea), but switched to coffee a few years ago. Oliver came back from Los Angeles with a Japanese ceramic filter, and insisted that it was better than either a French press or a Melitta. I thought he was being ridiculous, but then we did a blind taste test, and he was absolutely right. He had a long explanation as to why—something involving the physical properties of the pointy design of the conical filter and the shape of the spirals on the interior of the filter holder, but I've forgotten the details. He hand grinds the beans in an antique German burr grinder that we bought on the street in Berlin. It's just a wooden box with a crank on top and a little drawer to collect the ground

coffee. The coffee is excellent and always tastes better when he grinds it.

How does your partner fit into your morning?

Often we make each other coffee, and sometimes we have breakfast together. Back when Oliver and I first started living together, he liked to listen to the radio first thing in the morning, but I don't. When I'm writing, I like to go from the dream state of sleep to zazen and then directly to the page. It takes me a few hours before I can safely let in the world, so Oliver now just reads the news.

What happens if you're traveling?

I'm never really settled in a single physical home, so I'm constantly adapting my routine to fit whatever environment I'm in—sometimes Massachusetts, sometimes New York City, sometimes British Columbia, and oftentimes on the road in hotels in different parts of the world. But zazen helps with this. It's the single constant factor, wherever I go. If I can sit down to meditate, then I feel like I'm home.

And if you fail?

I just pick myself up and try again the next day. As long as you keep on getting out of bed, you never really fail, right?

Anything else you would like to add?

I said at the beginning of this interview that I was looking for a single, perfect, infallible routine, but after answering these questions, I see now that not only is this impossible, but I don't really want it after all. I enjoy the different roles I play in my life, and I enjoy the routines that they require. I enjoy observing all my routines and constantly tweaking them. Change keeps my routines fresh and my mornings interesting. I like it that way.

ED CATMULL

President of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios

When you have to tackle the internal discourse in your head before you can relax.

What is your morning routine?

I wake up, go downstairs, and start making a cup of coffee. I use three shots of espresso, mix in three tablespoons of cocoa powder (not Dutch process), and two sweeteners. I've heard this helps you think better; I have no idea if this is true, but it tastes good.

I drink the coffee while I first check email, then read the news: the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I then check one of the news aggregators, which I didn't use to do, but the train wreck of public discourse nowadays is too hard to ignore.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

I have been doing this for many, many years. The only changes are that my schedule is busier now, so it interferes more with my morning workout schedule.

Do you use an alarm to wake up?

I set the alarm for around 5:45 to 6:15 A.M. I use a progressive alarm that makes a soft sound at first, and then progressively gets louder. But I usually wake on the first sound, so it doesn't disturb my wife. When I used a loud alarm clock, I was more likely to hit it on the head and go back to sleep.

How soon after waking up do you have breakfast?

I usually have a smoothie or some cereal for breakfast. My smoothie is typically some kind of plant protein powder (I am intolerant to milk protein) in almond milk, some frozen berries, and a dollop of almond butter.

Do you have a morning workout routine?

I exercise in the gym about three times a week. I vary the workout every time but I'll always do some type of circuit work with weights. It gets my heart rate up without putting too much stress on my knees, which for some reason seem to be older than the rest of my body.

Since I live in San Francisco, there are plenty of hills. I like to walk down and then run up, landing on the balls of my feet since it is easier on the knees. I eagerly await the day when there is a replacement for the meniscus (the piece of cartilage that provides a cushion between your thighbone and shinbone). It is such a beautiful and simple-looking disk; you would think by now that medical scientists would have a material to match it. Ideally, I would prefer to have this before I need a knee replacement, or die.

How about morning meditation?

I meditate every day (I haven't missed a day in years) for thirty to sixty minutes before working out. It is always some form of Vipassana- meditation, such as focusing on the breath. I have received a great deal of benefit from the simple yet difficult practice of learning to stop the internal voice in my head. I learned that that voice isn't me, and I don't need to keep rethinking events of the past, nor overthink plans for the future. This skill has helped me both to focus and to pause before responding to unexpected events.

I will admit, however, that even though I am focusing on the breath, an idea will sometimes just pop up that's worth keeping. If I hang onto it, it messes up my meditation. So I just jot it down and let it go. There is something a little catchy to this phrase.

What happens if you fail?

I never miss my meditation, although I may shorten the time if I have to leave early. If I don't exercise, I start to feel crummy, but I'm pretty good about holding myself to my schedule.

AISTE GAZDAR

Founder of Wild Food Cafe in London's Covent Garden

When you spend your morning ironing things out in your mind before the hustle and bustle of the day begins.

What is your morning routine?

I get up between 4:00 and 6:00 A.M., usually around 5:00. I use an alarm clock as a backup but I usually get up just before the alarm rings. The moments before fully getting up and jumping out of bed are really important to me. I say to myself “I am awake,” and that goes to all levels of my being, not just the physical, but the mental, emotional, and spiritual as well. I stretch my body from head to toe, take a deep breath, and get out of bed.

In the bathroom I use cold water to make sure that all my senses are fully awake and in tune. Then I start my exercise routine with something called Mayan yoga, an ancient style of native South American exercises designed to consciously stretch, move, and stimulate the heart and mind, to make sure that the energy within us moves harmoniously. It is a combination of gentle stretches and some vigorous movement, followed by a relaxation. Afterward, I do a series of sun salutations, finishing with a short meditation and prayer.

If I'm not in a rush to leave, I'll use the time until 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning to study anything unrelated to business. Subjects that really interest me, but which I would otherwise never find the time to learn. I use this time to learn to play instruments, read nonfiction books, study astrology, or go for a walk in nature.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

It took a long time for me to gather the courage, discipline, and commitment to follow this routine, but I find it to be a game changer.

I used to struggle to get up in the mornings, mostly because my mind associated rising early with duty, school, obligation, conveyor-belt careers, and all the things that didn't excite me in the slightest. I purposely engineered my life so that I didn't have any obligation to get up early, and I loved it, until I got a strong message to change a few months ago. Waking up early in the morning sends a very important message to myself and, without sounding too wacko, to the universe: “Hey, here I am, awake, aware, sharp, and ready with the first morning light.” I find that being conscious and awake early in the morning gives enormous power, strength, clarity, vitality, centered awareness, and focus that the evening

just cannot provide.

Giving myself time, care, and attention in the morning has been crucial to significantly reducing my stress levels and consistently increasing my capacity to perform, have clarity, and take action.

Do you have a morning meditation routine?

My morning meditation is probably the most important aspect of each day. I see it as “making your bed” for the day. Whatever external or internal struggles I might have, meditation is the opportunity to iron things out from the other side of conscious awareness without any thinking or doing—just by becoming super aware of the vastness, depth, and richness of my being. Once I’m in that state, everything falls into place, even if I don’t yet know what those things are.

DARYA ROSE

Neuroscience PhD, author of *Foodist*

When you realize that checking email before you meditate is like downing a double espresso before you go to bed.

What is your morning routine?

I'm very fortunate to have a home office, so I don't have a commute.

I wake up without an alarm on most days, often with the sunrise. I usually have coffee and hot muesli with cinnamon and unsweetened hemp milk for breakfast. If possible I like to meditate for thirty minutes after breakfast, before checking email. I never check email before breakfast. Email is one of those things that can easily seep into your life and add stress to everything. The key realization for me was that there's no point in opening email unless I can actually do something about it in the moment (for example, it is hard to send important documents from my phone, so I wait until I'm at my computer). When I see emails that I can't take care of, my mind starts thinking about them, and I can't let go of them until I take action. I knew this intuitively, but it became incredibly obvious to me when I started meditating.

When you meditate you try to focus on one simple thing, like your breath. When other thoughts come in you just acknowledge them and let them go. I noticed that if I had checked email before meditating it was far harder to focus on my breath, with most of my intruding thoughts coming from obligations that I had seen in my inbox. I've since found that it's much better to get focused and centered first, then tackle email later.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

I've stuck with the meditation part for four or five months. Meditation has had a huge impact on my ability to concentrate and on my general well-being. I feel less frazzled.

Mornings are important as they prime your brain for how it will function for the rest of the day. Are you going to be distracted and bounce around from project to project? Or are you going to be focused and choose your activities consciously and with intention? I much prefer to be in the latter state. I get more work done and it turns out better. I'm less stressed and less reactive. So I do what I can to keep my mornings simple and uncluttered. I have coffee, eat breakfast, and meditate before doing anything else.

Do you use any apps or products to enhance your morning routine?

No. I like to keep my mornings old-fashioned. I carefully construct the habits and routines in my life. One reason for this is that the strength of habits is that they let

you do important things automatically, without much thought or willpower. To this end, the less you are dependent on extraneous products and apps, the more likely you are to succeed in creating a strong habit.

MICHAEL ACTON SMITH

CEO of Calm

When you start your day with a group meditation and end it with a bedtime fairy tale.

What is your morning routine?

I wake up at 7:30 A.M. and usually potter about for a bit in a daze trying to remember who I am and what day of the week it is. If it's a nonfoggy San Francisco morning, I'll make a cup of tea and sit in my living room to watch the sun come up over the bay. I'll usually drink a glass of water and then, if I'm feeling energetic, I'll go to the gym.

After the gym I'll shower, get dressed while listening to a news briefing, then walk to work via a coffee shop. I'll spend about an hour in the coffee shop making calls to the UK, writing to-do lists, reading the news, and answering messages. I'm a big fan of working from coffee shops in the morning as I believe it's valuable to have a space between home and the office. It gives you a chance to plan and think about the day ahead before being thrown into the noise and interruptions of office life. I love getting into a flow state when working, and coffee shops seem to be the perfect environment for me to achieve this.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

About a year and a half—ever since I moved to San Francisco. It's a lot simpler and more organized than it used to be in London. Back then I had a tricky commute from Soho to Shoreditch, which made it difficult to plan much of my morning other than trying to stay sane on the Central line.

Do you do anything before bed to make your morning easier?

I put my phone into airplane mode, then plug it in to charge, face down, on the floor by the bed. I'll read before bed most nights as I find it a great way to relax and unwind. Ninety-five percent of the time I read nonfiction.

Do you have a morning meditation routine?

Unsurprisingly, I use Calm! We start every day at Calm HQ with a group meditation. We do the Daily Calm together (a ten-minute meditation on a different

subject every day). It sounds unusual and very “California” but it really is a great way to start the day with the people you work with.

In the evenings, if I’m stressed at the end of the day and my mind is racing, I’ll take a bath with Olverum oil. On weekends I’ll usually start the day with a meditation at home in my living room, or occasionally I’ll go to Golden Gate Park and meditate in the sunshine. Learning to meditate has definitely improved my sleep by making it easier to switch off when thoughts start swirling around and taking over. At Calm we recently launched Sleep Stories, which are bedtime tales for grown-ups. They are a simple but very effective way to help people relax and drift off.

Do you answer email first thing in the morning?

Unless there’s an emergency or we’re in the midst of a big launch, I try not to open my phone until I’ve left the house and am sitting in a coffee shop.

Most people open up social media and email before they’ve even got out of bed, but I find that’s a rough way to start the day. I think it’s important to let the mind keep wandering and daydreaming first thing in the morning before it gets sucked into the dopamine-frazzled craziness of the online world. I usually have my most creative ideas while I’m in the shower or getting ready for work, but if I have just read something sad or negative online, my mind will be racing away in a very different and less productive direction!

What happens if you fail?

I don’t worry about it. Mornings are important because they set us up for the day, but if we’re too strict and regimented we take the fun out of them, and life can become pretty dull. As with most things in life, it’s a balance that we should be constantly playing with and tweaking.

SUSAN PIVER

Author of *Start Here Now*, meditation teacher

When you try to keep your mornings soft and quiet so your mind can remain dreamy.

What is your morning routine?

I get up between 4:30 and 5:30 A.M. I used to attend solely to what I would call the foreground: thoughts, actions, and habits. However, the Buddhist view, as I have been taught it, is to focus equally on what is relegated to the background: underlying motivations, the physical space I inhabit, feelings and moods, and the moment's textural quality.

To do this, I try to keep my mornings soft and quiet so my mind can remain dreamy for as long as possible. Before I get out of bed, I think of my teachers. I rouse an image of their faces or a sense of their presence. I thank them and experience the goodness of my relationship to them. I request their companionship, whatever that might mean. Then I get up, put on my robe, and walk outside to my office, which is in the apartment across the courtyard from where we live. I don't say hello to my husband, pet the cat, or stop for anything. (Since it's so early, no one has to see me out and about in my jammies.) I turn on the kettle and make a huge mug of Irish breakfast tea that I get from a tea shop on Sullivan Street in New York City. Only that tea. Period. While it's steeping, I take a very short, cold shower and then "open" my shrine by lighting a candle and making a tea offering to my lineage (which simply means putting a small cup of tea on the altar). I make sure my workspace is basically tidy. Then I sit down on the couch to write in my journal, which results in some meandering and blathering followed by the daily writing out of three instructions, which are:

1. Take no shortcuts. (In work, love, and especially when it comes to my meditation practice, which is not a life hack or a self-improvement device.)
2. Shame is the enemy. (When it rears its puny head, remember gentleness, I tell myself.)

3. Protect and nourish your body. (Think about what I'm going to eat and when I'm going to move.)

Finally, I write down something that one of my idols said to me about my work. It's way too flattering and nice and I would be very embarrassed to share it here, but I like to remind myself that he said this. Every day. It makes me feel so happy.

Then I practice sitting meditation for a period, followed by a particular Vajrayana Buddhist liturgy I have been working with for fifteen years. After this, on really good days, I write something. Anything. Five hundred words. At this point, the routine ends. It's maybe 9:00 A.M. I manage to do this entire routine about 60 percent of the time. I'd really like to up that to 80 percent.

And then I really never know what to do next. Sometimes I eat breakfast, sometimes I don't. Sometimes I exercise, sometimes I don't. It's infuriating. I have tried to become more routinized by reading books, hiring experts, consulting oracles, and setting my alarm clock ever earlier. But linear methods pie me in the face every time. Over the years, I've learned that instead of pushing myself to create something, it is more useful to see what I can allow to arise. My commitment is to remain seated and wait. This is how it works best for me.

I have a lot of sadness. This has turned out to be fruitful in its own strange way. Sadness is actually a very soft, open, and workable state. I find that when I stay with it, I have easier access to what qualifies as success for me: greater wisdom, insight, meaning, creativity, and love. These qualities all have one thing in common. They arise from the space just beyond conventional thought. One cannot command them. So sadness is a sort of gateway to success beyond Susan, which is my true aim.

How long have you stuck with this routine? What has changed?

Over a decade. My morning routine changes by degrees with the seasons of New England. I sleep less in the warmer months and spend more time outside. I also feel less sad. Or sad about different things.

Do you have a morning meditation routine?

I am a Buddhist teacher with an online meditation community. Our core practice is Shamatha-Vipashyana or mindfulness-awareness practice. I make guided instructional videos every week for nearly twenty thousand people. Each video is preceded by a short talk. This is my work. So much of my day revolves around meditation. (This is not necessarily a good thing, by the way.)

How does your partner fit into your morning?

My husband is so kind to me about my morning routine. This has taken some adjustment because he is the sort of person who enjoys life more when we are together, and I enjoy life more when I am alone. Over the past twenty years we've grown to accommodate each other thanks to his big heart. For my birthday last year, he bought me a painting of a small house in a big, open field. Over the canvas, the artist wrote, "Leave me alone, leave me alone, leave me alone" dozens of times. It meant so much to me that he recognized my nature even though it is antithetical to his. That was really romantic.

What happens if you fail?

I try not to beat myself up, and find something delightful about falling through the cracks. I remember the words of the Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche: "The bad news is you're falling through the air, nothing to hold on to, no parachute. The good news is there's no ground." If I can remember this, I relax.

OVER TO YOU

“Meditation is the greatest life hack that most people don’t use.”

—RAVI RAMAN, EXECUTIVE CAREER COACH

While this chapter is not designed to be an expansive study of the benefits of meditation or the different practices of meditation available to us, we will take some time to look at some simple ways in which you can work a mindfulness practice into your morning routine, no matter how busy you may be.

If you’ve never meditated in your life, please don’t skip over this section. Here we’re going to show you that meditation can take many forms, and that to dismiss it because you’re picturing the over-the-top legs crossed on a mountain peak version of meditation is a mistake. Meditation has found a resurgence in popularity in recent years for an unsurprising reason: it can have a profound positive impact on your life, especially if you stick to it over the long term. Meditation can help improve your concentration, helping you to see clearly when looking at a problem; it can help bring you out of a rut, opening your eyes to the world that you always knew was there, but had somehow forgotten; and it can help reduce stress and improve your sleep. In the words of news correspondent and meditation advocate Dan Harris, meditation “won’t fix everything in your life, [it won’t] make you taller, or (most likely) land you in a state of bliss on a park bench. But it can make you 10 percent happier, or maybe much more.”

Maria Konnikova adds: “Meditation is a great way to organize your thoughts. I recommend it for anyone who wants to help bring themselves clarity and concentration.” While David Moore says: “Meditation is easily my favorite part of the morning because I’m deliberately setting the tone for what I’d like to accomplish.”

Meditation takes many forms, and it’s up to you to find what type of meditation works best for you. We’re not talking about the relative benefits of Transcendental Meditation versus zazen, or Vipassanā versus Mettā, but rather that of simply practicing mindfulness (the act of clearing your thoughts and focusing on the present) on your daily commute or during your morning run or, if you can find the time, for five to ten minutes of sit-down practice. As Darya Rose put it in her routine: “Meditation has had a huge impact on my ability to concentrate and on my well-being in general. I feel less frazzled.” This section is designed to show you just how easy it can be to bring mindfulness into your morning routine, if only you’ll allow it.

Here’s to feeling less frazzled.

FIND MEDITATIVE MOMENTS IN THE MUNDANE

If you're not yet ready to call a full meditation practice your own, start looking for meditative moments during otherwise mundane events.

“I hand grind tea leaves and wait while they steep. This is the closest thing to meditation that I do. The manual process of clipping, crushing, and steeping the leaves wakes up all of my senses.”

—VANESSA VAN EDWARDS, BEHAVIORAL INVESTIGATOR

You can find a meditative practice in making breakfast every morning, or while grinding your coffee beans or steeping your tea. Former aerospace engineer Amit Sonawane told us that for him: “Meditating is an act of simply being aware. I tend to do that when I am making a fresh pot of coffee (the smell, the feel of cold water as I wash the pot, the gentle warm steam on my face as I bring the cup closer for a sip).” If you wanted to turn this into a full meditation practice later on, you could use one of these mundane processes to help time your practice. Computer programmer Manuel Loigeret notes: “While the water is boiling, I sit and meditate for ten minutes.” If you have a timer set for one of these tasks already, all the better.

MEDITATE ON YOUR MORNING RUN OR COMMUTE

It's been said that running is something of a moving meditation, and this appears to be backed up time and again when we speak with people about it. Over the years of interviewing hundreds of people for our website we've found that we consistently speak with people who consider their morning run or commute to work on public transportation a form of meditation. Facebook product designer Daniel Eden told us that: “People gripe or wonder about [my] commute, but I like the forced headspace it can foster.”

Morning workouts of all kinds can be meditative, but there's something about running in the morning that seems to lend itself particularly well to meditative thoughts. And though commuting to work on public transportation may sound like the least calming practice in the world, there's a lot to be said for sticking on a pair of headphones and, whether you let a prerecorded meditation guide you or you just listen to something to block out the noise, letting yourself escape the world around you for just a little bit.

CHOOSE WHAT COMES AFTER YOUR MEDITATION PRACTICE WISELY

You'll recall that one of the pillars of being able to form a new morning routine is being able to use each element (or habit) within your routine as a trigger for the element that comes after it.

If you choose to create your own morning meditation practice, you will be wise to follow it with something that can benefit from any insights you picked up during your meditation. Yoga teacher and cofounder of Bad Yogi, Erin Motz, notes: "I meditate for ten minutes and then immediately put pen to paper and write . . . It's usually stream-of-consciousness stuff or my thoughts about any random topic I think of." Similarly, singer-songwriter Sonia Rao told us: "I meditate for thirty minutes each morning and free-write for another thirty minutes. I'm not sure what type of meditation this is, but I just sit up against my headboard on my bed and focus on my breath."

BUILD IN MOMENTS OF MINDFULNESS THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY

Whether you build a designated morning meditation practice for yourself or not, be sure to scatter small spells of mindfulness throughout the rest of your morning, and your day generally, to help you stay present and focused.

"Journaling is my meditation. Writing in my notebook clears my mind and helps me stay rooted in gratitude. Without my daily journaling practice, I'd be less grateful and full of joy."

—TAMMY STROBEL, AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER

To everyone who's more aware of small spells of irritation throughout the day, here's what Melody Wilding had to say: "There are so many benefits to mindfulness, so I make a point to search for reflective time throughout my day, even if it's in small ways. If I'm stuck on a long line or delayed on the subway, rather than be annoyed, I see it as an opportunity to reflect and practice being present and in the now."

DON'T TAKE YOUR PRACTICE TOO SERIOUSLY

A disciplined practice will build with time if you want it to, but for now don't allow any performance anxiety to creep into your meditation practice. Yoga teacher Gracy Obuchowicz notes: "I've studied a few kinds of meditation but none of them too seriously. Mostly, I just sit and notice and feel. I do alternate nostril breathing. My mind wanders and I bring it back. My practice isn't fancy but [it] seems to do the trick of keeping me centered."

Don't feel that your meditation practice should be one type or another, or that you have to stick to someone else's rules. You know better than anyone what is calming and meditative for you.

REVERSAL

There is no reversal to finding meditative moments throughout your day. While you may not have the time or inclination to build a meditation practice into your mornings, it is beneficial to build moments of mindfulness and reflection into other parts of your day. Engineer Andrew Caldwell puts this perfectly: "When the river is calm and the sun's coming up, taking a bit of time out to be quiet and breathe properly . . . that might count for something."