



18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction, and Get the Right Things Done

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Based upon his weekly *Harvard Business Review* columns (which is one of the most popular columns on HBR.com, receiving hundreds of thousands of unique page views a month), **18 MINUTES** clearly shows how busy people can cut through all the daily clutter and distractions and find a way to focus on those key items which are truly the top priorities in our lives.

Bregman works from the premise that the best way to combat constant and distracting interruptions is to create productive distractions of one's own. Based upon a series of short bite-sized chapters, his approach allows us to safely navigate through the constant chatter of emails, text messages, phone calls, and endless meetings that prevent us from focusing our time on those things that are truly important to us.

Mixing first-person insights along with unique case studies, Bregman sprinkles his charming book with pathways which help guide us -- pathways that can get us on the right trail in 18 minutes or less.

18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction, and Get the Right Things Done Details

Date : Published September 28th 2011 by Business Plus (first published January 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780446583411

Author : Peter Bregman

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Business, Nonfiction, Self Help, Productivity, Personal Development, Psychology

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Mary says

I am starting to notice that there is a lot of overlap in business/time management books. This one referred to several studies that I was familiar with from other reading (Jonah Lehrer and Malcolm Gladwell particularly).

Some of Bregman's advice fits in with Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity, some of it is challenging the premise that you can get everything done. I think the strength of Bregman's argument is in the area of choosing priorities. He suggests that 5 areas of focus be chosen for your year (which may be quite broad, one of his examples is finding new clients) and that all but 5% of the stuff you spend your time on should fit into those 5 areas of focus. This seems like it would be very tough to do, but it would be incredibly valuable in terms of reducing stress and wasting time on stuff you don't really care about (how does so much of that end up in my day?) if you could achieve that level of focus. He does offer some solid thoughts on how to tell people no, which is key to making this work.

He also offers a framework for your to-do list (which he contends should only have stuff on it for 3 days after which if it isn't done or scheduled it's gone), and calendar, and an 18-minute per day (not 18 minutes in a row, but 5+1's+5) ritual to plan and refocus throughout the day.

I tried using his approach to daily planning yesterday and was hit with the reality that I couldn't do nearly as much stuff in a single day as I need to to keep on top of everything. However, the process did actually reduce my stress and I did get a few tasks actually crossed off my to-do list which is uncommon on a day when the office is short a person. (One of those tasks had only been there since Wednesday!) I think the approach is worth continuing to use.

Overall there is a lot of good stuff in this book to supplement other approaches that are working for you, or to serve as a structure for dealing with all the stuff life throws at you day to day.

Fahad Shaikh says

I expected more from this book but it was more of an article than a book. The teacher teaches 3 steps that you must do every day to stay focused and avoid distractions:

Step 1: Spend 5 minutes beginning every day (before starting work), in planning your day

Step 2: Set an alarm at the last minute of every hour to reflect on how you spent the last hour and what needs to be done in the next hour. Also, scan your task list again

Step 3: 5-Minute Review

At the end of the day, shutdown all devices and reflect:

Q1: What worked today?

Q2: What was your focus today?

Q3: Where did you get distracted?

Q4: What are lessons learnt? What corrective measures to take for the next day?

of hour? Also, it doesn't mention what areas of life one should focus and how to keep balance? Moreover, it also doesn't mention how to filter the distractions or declare those tasks as distractions. So, not a very comprehensive book in terms of time management.

Nishant Bhagat says

An excellent and a practical book. One you can buy and keep referring to as and when you work.

What works well with this book is that the language is simple, to the point. The chapters are nice and tight. Every aspect is expressed with a good example from personal life and then moves into the professional zone.

A must read for people who do want to get more out of their work day & life in a structured manner.

Jonathan says

Yes, another time management / self help book. Every time I swear off of these, I go to the bookstore and see one and then feel compelled to open it and grab it. While the space it crowded this one interested me on two fronts: 1) The author successfully grew a management consulting business which is very comparable to what I do...so I wouldn't have the normal solutions that work if you are a blogger but not in a consulting gig and 2) because of the statement "it's impossible to get it all done". As simple as that sounds, recognition of that fact is critical for me (who feels extreme guilt from lack of productivity).

This book is well organized but I did feel that there were some chapters that had little use to me and others which were treasure troves of good ideas and inspiration. The sections on pause and focus were all good and well but were too high concept and not enough practical application.

Then along came chapter 20- What Is This Year About? It is about starting by focusing on 5 things (with a 6th box for other things). ANd that these 5 areas should house 95% of your tasks. If not then you need to re-evaluate and either it really isn't a true focus, or you need to change your ways.

My 2nd favorite chapter was Chapter 24 - When Tomorrow? It is about the power of when and where. That when you specify when and where you are going to do something it gets done far more often than when it is just part of a to-do list. It is about migrating items from the to-do list to the calendar. It forces you to prioritize your to-dos based on realistic view of time constraints - what can be accomplished today.

Also helpful was Chapter 25 - The Three-Day Rule It is a litmus test about whether something is a priority. If it is on the to-do list without being scheduled (in the future is fine), then it must be removed. This is good for me who tends to leave tasks on my lists out of obligation.

I also found Chapter 42 - Would You Smoke Pot While You're Working? valuable. It is about multi-tasking. The most interesting thing here was his insights after a week without multitasking. Expected were #1 delightful quality time, #2 progress on challenging projects, #3 stress decrease but I really liked #4, #5 and #6.

#4 I lost all patience for things I felt were not a good use of time. How true is this...if we clear emails while on an hour conference call, we'll accept that as being productive.

#5 I had tremendous patience for things that I felt were useful/enjoyable

#6 There was no downside

For me the value of these few chapters are worth the price of admission.

Nanette Bulebosh says

I sought this book after hearing a radio interview with the author. The interview was great. The book? Not so much. I don't understand why so many writers of self-help books feel compelled to write in short, choppy, and annoyingly grammatically incorrect sentences. Do the publishers mandate this? Do they presume that readers of such books are illiterate morons with short attention spans? I start such books with such (admittedly naive) hopes: This will be the book to END all my PROBLEMS! But a few pages into it I want to throw the book against a wall because of the awful grammar and phony informality. The public radio interview offered just what I needed at the time: some tips for staying focused and avoiding distractions. The book offers the same things, but only if you can force yourself to wade through the author's many offenses against the English language. They are distractions in themselves.

Here's the interview: http://wpr.org/search/ideas_program_s...

Deb says

****Getting the right things done****

Who hasn't struggled with trying to accomplish a crazy amount of to-do's into one day? And, it often seems as if the list just keeps getting longer as the day progresses...and the frustration inevitably increases.

What if the solution wasn't doing more, but doing more of what really matters to you?

That's exactly the approach that Peter Bregman offers with 18 Minutes:

“18 Minutes provides a solution to these struggles and frustrations. It's a comprehensive approach to managing a year, a day, and a moment so that our lives move forward in a way that keeps us focused on, and doing, the things we decide are most important. An important first step in reclaiming our lives...This book will help you make smart, thoughtful decisions about what's worth doing and what's not. And it will offer you some simple tools and skills to follow through on those decisions so you spend your time doing the things that matter while avoiding the things that don't. This book is also about enjoying the process. Managing your life shouldn't feel like a chore. And neither should reading a book about managing your life...18 Minutes will home in on who you are and how you can best use your talents to achieve the things that will make you happy, productive, and successful. And if you are a little—or even a lot—out of focus, don't worry: 18 Minutes will bring you back in.” (pp. xviii, xx, xxi)

I loved reading this book, and loved even more putting into practice the suggestions offered here. (How lucky was I to discover this book during a time in my life when I had a potentially overwhelming set of to-do's to accomplish when moving into a new home, while balancing a full-time job, self-care, and a myriad of other life details!)

There's so much to take away from this book. In an attempt to put in to-go form, here's a recap of the key

points that Peter offers at the end of each of his bite-sized—but highly nourishing—chapters:

Part One: Pause—Hover Above Your World

- Reducing your forward momentum is the first step to freeing yourself from the beliefs, habits, feelings, and busyness that may be limiting you. (p. 9)
- A brief pause will help you make a smarter next move. (p. 14)
- Regular rest stops are useful interruptions. They will refuel your body and mind, naturally reorient your life toward what's important to you, and create the time and space to aim your efforts more accurately. (p. 19)
- The world changes—we change—faster than we tend to notice. To maximize your potential, you need to peer through the expectations that limit you and your choices. You need to see the world as it is—and yourself as you are. (p. 24)
- Life isn't just about some of you; it's about all of you. Don't negate, integrate. (p. 29)
- Don't settle for being less than you are. It won't serve others and it won't serve you. (p. 33)
- Knowing what outcome you want will enable you to focus on what matters and escape the whirlwind of activity that too often leads to nowhere fast. (p. 37)

Part Two: What Is This Year About?—Find Your Focus

- Start experimenting from who you are and choose your next move—your focus for the year—at the intersection of the four elements. That's where your power lies. (p. 47)
- The first element is your strengths. Over the coming year, play the game that is perfectly suited to your strengths. (p. 51)
- The second element is your weakness. Rather than avoid them, embrace your weaknesses and spend your time this year where they're an asset instead of a liability. (p. 55)
- The third element is your differences. Assert them. Don't waste your year, and your competitive advantage, trying to blend in. (p. 60)
- The fourth element is your passion, which is sometimes hard to find. One way to recover your passion is to pursue your desire. As you choose your focus for the year, pay less attention to “shoulds” and more attention to “wants.” (p. 64)
- Anyone can do anything as long as three conditions exist: (1) You want to achieve it; (2) You believe you can achieve it; (3) You enjoy trying to achieve it. (p. 67)
- To home in on your passion, think about what you love doing—what's important enough to you that you're willing to persist over the year, even when it feels like you're not succeeding at it. (p. 69)
- Your year will be best spent doing work that you enjoy so much, it feels effortless. You'll always work tirelessly at your passions—hard work will feel easier. (p. 75)
- Focus your year on the things that matter to you. On things that have specific meaning to you. (p. 80)
- Staying connected to your guideposts will help you avoid tunnel vision and keep you moving in the right direction. (p. 84)
- Failure is inevitable, useful, and educational. Just don't give up—stay focused over the year—and it will pay off. (p. 88)
- Don't be paralyzed by an uncertain future. Just keep moving. (p. 94)
- The time to judge your successes or failures is never. (p. 99)
- Focus your year on the five areas that will make the most difference in your life. (p. 105)

Part Three: What Is This Day About?—Get the Right Things Done

- Plan your day ahead so you can fly through it, successfully maneuvering and moving toward your intended destination. (p. 114)
- Reduce your overwhelm by putting your tasks into an organized list, focused on what you want to achieve for the year. (p. 120)
- To get the right things done, choosing what to ignore is as important as choosing where to focus. (p. 124)
- If you really want to get something done, decide when and where you are going to do it. (p. 129)
- Never leave things on your to-do list for more than three days. They'll just get in the way of what you really need to get done. (p. 133)

- The right kind of interruption can help you master your time and yourself. Keep yourself focused and steady by interrupting yourself hourly. (p. 138)
- Spend a few minutes at the end of each day thinking about what you learned and with whom you should connect. These minutes are the key to making tomorrow even better than today. (p. 143)
- Just 18 minutes a day can save you hours of inefficiency. The trick is to choose your focus deliberately and wisely, and then consistently remind yourself of that focus throughout the day. (p. 147)

Part Four: What Is This Moment About?—Mastering Distractions

Mastering Your Initiative

- Create an environment that naturally compels you to do the things you want to do. (p. 158)
- You need to be motivated for only a few seconds. Know when you're vulnerable and you'll know when you need to turn it on. (p. 162)
- Fun reduces our need to motivate ourselves because fun is motivating. (p. 167)
- Fear can be a useful catalyst to change—then pleasure sustains it. If you need help getting yourself going, don't choose one or the other. Choose one before the other. (p. 173)
- A good story—one you feel deeply about and in which you see yourself—is tremendously motivating. Make sure the story you tell about yourself (sometimes only to yourself) inspires you to move in the direction you want to move. (p. 179)
- Your mind can help you move forward or can get in the way. Choose the fantasy world that supports you. (p. 184)

Mastering Your Boundaries

- Resist the temptation to say yes too often. (p.190)
- When you say no, mean it, and you won't needlessly lose your time. (p. 195)
- Don't wait too long to bring something up. People can only respect boundaries they know are there. (p. 198)
- A few moments of transition time can help make your next task shorter, faster, and more productive for you and others. (p. 203)
- When you shorten transition time, you create a boundary that helps you and others adjust to a new reality. (p. 208)
- When you take a vacation—or any other time you want to be undisturbed—schedule a specific time to take care of the things that would otherwise creep into each and every available moment. (p. 212)

Mastering Yourself

- Distraction, used intentionally, can be an asset. (p. 219)
- We don't actually multitask. We switch-task. And it's inefficient, unproductive, and sometimes even dangerous. Resist the temptation. (p. 225)
- The world doesn't reward perfection. It rewards productivity. (p. 230)
- Don't settle for imperfect. Shoot for it. (p. 236)
- Stay alert and adapt to changing situations. Keep your eye on the ball, whichever ball that may be. (p. 241)

Conclusion: Now What?—You Don't Have Ten Gold Behaviors: Choosing Your One Thing

- Choose the one thing that you think—given your particular situation—will make the biggest difference in your life. Choose it and do it. (p. 248)
- It all starts with your one thing. (p.251)

Peter expresses his hopes for this book:

“I wrote this book so [you] could look back at the end of each moment, each day, each year—and when the times comes, life itself—and be able to say: ‘I used my time well.’ ” (p.xxi)

I feel like he is right on track with his mission. And, given the recent changes I am already seeing in my own approach to getting (the right) things done, I can clearly say that “I used my time well” in reading this book!

What a difference 18 Minutes can make!

Robin says

A terrific book to motivate and organize yourself. I loved it so much I read through it twice, then bought it for two of my friends.

My favorite part of it dealt with not only understanding your strengths, but also taking a much kinder view of your "weaknesses," which might actually be just quirks that make you uniquely suited for particular types of business, art, and other activities. Recognizing those quirks and emphasizing them, rather than hiding and apologizing for them, might be exactly what sets you apart in the business or creative world.

I also appreciated Bregman's advice about narrowing your list to just five areas of personal and professional goals to focus on daily, and letting go of other obligations and activities that don't necessarily fit into your top five. We all have a lot of things we think we should or could do every day, but those aren't always the activities that will get us where we want to be, either in business or in our personal lives.

All in all, one of the best goal-setting and mental organization guides I've read in years. Highly recommend.

Greg says

18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distractions, and Get the Right Things Done is a worthwhile read, especially for people who need not only to manage their time better, but also ensure their time is being spent on the right things. Too often, wisdom about the proper priorities of work, family, volunteerism, and so forth is won at the expense of years (even decades) of misdirected labor and focus. A thoughtful read of this book won't tell the reader what to do, but may cause the reader to think more deeply about their own priorities and the true value of their goals. "Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy."

Several themes stood out for me from Bregman's book. For example:

1. Events catalyze reactions, but shouldn't determine them. How you react should be determined by the future you want to create. Remember Covey's that we can make something useful of the space between stimulus and response.
2. Almost anyone can do almost anything, so long as three conditions exist: (a) you *want* to achieve it, (b) you *believe* you can achieve it, and (c) you *enjoy trying* to achieve it. It is the third that is so often lacking, and so important. If you want to be great at anything, you had better enjoy being poor at it for long enough to become good at it!
3. He describes 18 minutes of "ritual" planning and review, spaced at the beginning, hourly, and end of the day, that can help people to make better use of their time. Seemed a little too structured for me, but it is a thought-provoking idea. I did like his ideas around managing by priorities, rather than by lists, and making sure that urgency doesn't become a black hole to importance.

There are other discussions of worth in the book, but what stands out as important for each reader will be

different depending on the preparation, experiences, and needs of the person. It is worth the time to read, and more importantly, ponder on the messages in is book.

Stuart says

This was a good book, from a daily inspirational perspective through its stories. However, definitely not the daily workflow management guide that I thought it would be. I also found the cut up sections to be distracting making the book difficult to follow. Though the stories a had point they intended to make, I didn't always connect them to their section of the book. Perhaps if I took the time to sit down review the section I am reading, and relate the story to the section I may have benefited from that. Instead, I read it from cover to cover.

I hope to review this book later, and maybe even reread, with the intent of finding solutions from the stories and the way it is laid out. But at present, it didn't meet my expectations, other than motivating story by story to walk-in to my new job and stay motivated to complete my tasks.

Beth says

I know I've had this on my currently reading shelf forever, but I swear I'm going to finish it, because it has some great ideas on how to stay focused on goals and not get off into the timewasters that will destroy the best-laid plans. Plus, a lot of it reinforces what I already do, which I enjoy almost as much as the new ideas.

Finished!!!

What did I take away from this book?

Mainly that I'm already a focused individual, and I'm on the right track. Really. But it's because I wandered around lost for a good bit of my twenties trying to figure out who I wanted to be, and then I figured it out, and ever since then I've been doing it. Po Bronson's book, *What should I do with my life?*, had a lot to do with that. I figured out that I wanted to be a writer, wanted to have a family, wanted a job where I don't have to stand up in front of people, don't have to take work home or work overtime, but that's intellectually stimulating and that pays okay. Public library! Perfect!

Having a family and a full-time job makes it difficult to work in the writing and keep from feeling like I'm letting everybody down with my levels of commitment, but I've discovered I can write for forty-five minutes at breakfast, and again at lunch, without it interrupting family or work, and I still get to feel complete. It's not really enough time, but once the kids are older I'll have a little more free time, maybe.

So I'm already focused, and that part of this book was great but not really necessary.

The thing I liked most was the part that originally came from *Outliers*, by Malcolm Gladwell. He said that "ten thousand hours of practice is the magic number to become the best at anything." Yay! I've put several thousand hours in over the last ten years, plus a couple of years of creative writing instruction in my undergrad degree, so I'm on my way to being the best! Watch for my name in lights! Or at least, on goodreads, right? (PS I do already have a collection of short stories available, and if you're interested in reviewing it message me and I'll send you a copy for free.)

The thing I liked second most was the part where he said "Make sure the story you tell about yourself (sometimes only to yourself) inspires you to move in the direction you want to move." I like the idea of framing my story. It's like those moments when I'm driving down the highway on my way to somewhere or sitting in the living room with the kids and I suddenly realize *my life is just as interesting and entertaining as the ones people write about in books and on TV*. Maybe that sounds weird, but I think it's important to enjoy and be proud of your own life. Otherwise, why wouldn't you just give up on it? Also, it's very motivating to remind myself that I'm the kind of person who...well, in my case, who gets up at five to rewrite and edit my current YA project before I get ready for work. I'm the kind of person who takes my kids to the science museum on my day off. I'm the kind of person who ignores the dishes to read a book, and loves folding laundry, and secretly loves country music even while disagreeing with the values represented in the lyrics of most of the songs. I believe in ghosts, and reincarnation, and global warming.

Okay, but you're not reading this to learn more about me. It's a book review.

This is a decent book, and if you're needing help to cut through all the crap of your life and get focused, this book might be the one for you. Also, it's short, which I think is important in a self-help book.

Chung Nguyen says

Finally finished this one. Of course I procrastinated on the time management book! I like Peter's tone: he's motivational without being patronizing. His personal anecdotes add interest to the book's overall theme, boiled down to one sentence: pick a small number of annual goals and schedule/calendar daily tasks toward accomplishing those few annual goals.

Dominick Quartuccio says

Totally misled by the title of the book.

By my account, the "18 minutes" strategy was first mentioned on page 110. It was mentioned again on page 146 and concluded on 147...never to be referenced through the remainder of the book.

In short, here's the 18 minute system:

- 1) Your Morning Minutes (5 minutes) - Reviewing your to-do list for the day.
- 2) Refocus (1 minute every hour) - Set a timer to go off every hour to check in with whether you've used the last hour productively, and how to set yourself up for the next hour
- 3) Your Evening Minutes (5 minutes) - Reviewing what you accomplished at the end of the day and setting up the next one.

That's the system for which the 251 page book (of which it appears on 3 pages) is entitled.

I finished feeling like the "18 Minutes" title was suggested by a clever publisher who knew a title and a few prominent recommendations on the back cover (Dan Pink and Robert Sutton) would sell an otherwise well-intentioned book without a novel and prominent central theme.

Can't judge by a book by it's cover - shame on me.

This is a break from my usual ritual of only posting the books with 4 and 5 star reviews - because typically I'll abandon anything less than a 4 before finishing it, in which case I won't write a review because I haven't read the entire book. I'm making an exception this time because I feel misled.

Bregman is heavy-handed with his personal anecdotes of his family, friends and personal experiences...which would be fine if I were reading a book authored by Elon Musk or Richard Branson whose larger than life personal brands represent a primary reason to purchase their books. While I respect his ability to consistently glean insights from everyday situations, I'm only willing to digest a few of those before my appetite for something more substantive kicks in.

I was more interested in hearing about his decades of consulting experience and war stories. Some of these anecdotes made their way into the book, but only superficially, failing to go into the type of depth and complexity I'm sure he's consulted his clients through. Leaving me to want for richer, more profound insights.

I agree with nearly all of his principles, but there wasn't much I hadn't seen or heard before. Said differently, I didn't come away with a provocative new perspective or anything that challenged my thinking.

I have no doubt Bregman is very talented at what he does. This book would be better suited with a proper title that authentically positions the heart of his message.

Tim says

Peter Bregman is an author and business consultant whose book 18 Minutes provides a good way to focus on your life in the year ahead. Some of my key takeaways from this book.

1. Find your focus for the coming year by leveraging your strengths, embracing your weaknesses, asserting your differences, and pursuing your passions. Bregman says to focus on around 5 goals for the coming year, with a mix of professional and personal goals.
2. Prior to each day, you should review your plan to be sure you'll do work in your areas of focus and at the end of each day, you should review what you learned, accomplished, and should focus on in the coming day. And, at the top of each hour, review the past hour to evaluate how productive you've been. This is where the 18 minutes in the title comes from: five minutes at the beginning, five minutes at the end, and 8 minutes through out the day.
3. Mastering distractions from yourself or others can help you live in the moment and not lose focus on your overall goals.
4. For me, his advice to slow down and pause--whether at the end of the week or during a conversation--will be very useful.

Overall, there is nothing too remarkable about this book, but it is a quick read that provides good reminders for those of us who lead busy lives. Most useful to me are the 3 sets of questions that can help review the day:

- How did the day go? What success did I experience? What challenges did I endure?
- What did I learn today? About myself? About others? What do I plan to do--differently or the same--tomorrow?

- Whom did I interact with? Anyone I red to update? Thank? Ask a question of? Share feedback with?

I'll be sure to integrate these with my daily rituals.

Happy reading!

Rob Fulton says

18 minutes my oh my...

This book at first look was another TimeMangement book. I didn't want to read another time management book. The best way I can save time is not reading a book in the first place.

However. There are some great takeaways from this book. It's worth the read just to get the system down. It works immediately.

Step 1. Work from a world of having 3-7 goals (max) each year.

Step 2. Spend 95% a day on your goals, and 5% a day on that crap you have to do, like emails and calls.

Step 3. Follow the daily regimen to check in with yourself each hour, at end of day ETC.

Overall the value of the book comes to help RECENTER you. That's the gift you receive from reading it. If you're a fan of this topic, the 2 other books that I found were super valuable was 12 weeks, and Manage Your Day To Day. SUPER VALUABLE!

Emma Sea says

1.5 stars
