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The Freedom to Do Anything

We All Want More Free Time, Right?

All of your time is free time—every minute.

That can be a hard pill to swallow, especially when we are bombarded with responsibilities, obligations, and important tasks to accomplish every week of every year. However, as you will soon see, you have an incredible opportunity with the time you already have, with the work you are already doing, and with the calendar you know is already overbooked (again).

Working on goals that matter to us is what we are here to do, and no matter how you define it, your time is your time. How you choose to spend it is influenced by more factors than we have time to unpack in this book, but let's start with the biggest chunk for most people: work.

FREE TIME: AN EXCUSE TO KEEP WORKING

I know this is the Type A in me speaking loudly, but work is not the enemy—it is one of our greatest means to fulfillment

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and goal achievement. Work is a love affair with our inner creative and a real opportunity to leave the world better than we found it.

My wife, Tessa, and I are self-identified workaholics, and we both work from home. We naturally fill our free time with more work because we genuinely love what we do.

Every Friday night is date night for the two of us—a chance to stop working, get out of the house, and eat dinner together somewhere in Nashville. I would love to say that we have tried all of the best restaurants, but we are way too predictable (and cheap) for that. If not tacos at Las Palmas, then tacos at Taco Mamacita. If not Mamacita's, then back to Las Palmas. Tacos win almost every week.

Date night used to be scheduled at 5:00 pm, then 5:30, then 6:00. A few weeks ago, we skipped it because both of us would rather finish our projects than leave anything undone. Though Tessa and I intentionally schedule free time on our calendar to be filled with a night out, we ultimately choose in the moment how we want that time to be spent.

Free time becomes a placeholder on our calendar for priority management fighting against impulsivity. In other words, in the open spaces on our calendar we could tackle our responsibilities and goals, or spontaneously do whatever we want. Knowing the two of us, “whatever we want” often means choosing to extend our workday a little longer.

This choice comes with its own set of pros and cons, but when you genuinely love what you do, working a few extra hours can often bring more satisfaction than clocking out early to get a jump start on the weekend. On the flip side, you could find

yourself working to the bone and falling into the trap of staying busy because it is the only thing you know how to do.

FREE TIME: THE ULTIMATE ESCAPE

Free time can also be your greatest chance to do anything other than what you dislike. We often plan to leave open blocks of time on our calendars (mostly nights and weekends) so that we can stop doing whatever it is we have been doing all week. In other words, we hate our jobs and are dying to do absolutely anything else.

Given the opportunity to do *absolutely anything* in an open block of time, we do a little dance because it sounds so intriguing and hopeful. Here, the term *free time* is seductive. It infers that we never have enough of it and that something amazing will happen when it shows up.

It is easy to dream about how time away from the office could be spent surfing the ocean, climbing mountains, or rereading *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but what do you do in the moment?

How is your current free time being occupied? Is it routinely as fulfilling and rejuvenating as you hoped?

Chances are that you actually have enormously more free time than you realize, but you just call it something different:

- Me time
- Family time
- Boys' night out
- Girls' night in
- Napping
- Hustling

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- Training
- Catching up on *Game of Thrones*

Wanting more free time to unwind and relax is admirable and necessary to balance out the stress of life, assuming you define *free time* as any time outside the office . . . or the kids . . . or the spouse . . . or the dog . . . or the _____ (you get the picture).

Defining what free time means to you is the most important first step to ensuring you get as much of it as you want.

THE MYTH OF FREE TIME

The thing about free time is that it is up to you to define what it means, how you use it, and how much of it you believe is necessary to achieve a healthy sense of balance (*which is a word that is often misused and results in lots of guilt*).

Free time is a myth. It has never existed and it never will.

Every minute of every day is up to you. There are no restrictions. You can do whatever you want, whenever you want.

As radical as that sounds, it is true.

You can get up off your couch and go for a run right now. You can walk into your boss's office and quit right now.

If you choose, you can change the entire course of your life in an instant—this instant.

Now, most of us would never take advantage of this fact because we box ourselves in with occupations, families, mortgages, and other self-created boundaries to define and optimize our time here on earth (and to avoid winding up homeless, alone, or in jail).

And this is a good thing.

I am not arguing that because we all have the freedom to do anything that we should. Quite the opposite—because we can do anything, we have to choose very carefully how our time is spent, or the whole thing falls apart.

Having the power to choose what to do with every waking minute is an enormous responsibility that most of us surrender to societal structures, employers, family members, or the latest hit series on YouTube. (*I will not quote Spiderman right now, but you know that line is coming next, don't you?*)

And yet, it is true, you do have incredible power to choose how you spend your time, and you do have the responsibility to make the most of it.

THE TIME MANAGEMENT CONUNDRUM

Time management is a bit of a farce. You can never actually manage time because it moves forward at its own pace, regardless of what we do.

Activities, on the other hand, are up to us.

We get to choose what to engage in or disengage from. We get to opt in or opt out, say yes or say no, get roped into something, or wiggle our way out of it.

The greatest challenge with managing our many activities is doing so inside the time box of twenty-four hours. Though time is technically infinite, daylight is not. We are only awake for so long before we crash and pass out.

This clear daily boundary leaves us with a problem most of us (including myself) struggle to overcome. There is just too much to do in the few hours we have each day—too many responsibilities, too many obligations, too many *everythings* that seem to never end.

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The abundance of choice is paralyzing, overwhelming, and exhausting. More opportunities exist today than ever, which means more work exists today than ever. We are stressed out because life is inherently stressful. The challenge is ubiquitous and, without a clear plan, very few among us can escape the trap of this modern mayhem.

In my work as a productivity coach, I see a few common problems that appear to affect nearly everyone, and most on a daily basis.

Too much, too often

Having more work to accomplish in shorter time spans may be the most prolific problem in most companies and households, and on most personal calendars.

Downsizing causes those left over to take on more tasks, family members find themselves solving problems for others instead of addressing their own responsibilities, and the twenty-four-hour clock never gets any bigger.

The problem is not that more work actually needs to get done, it is that more nonsense needs to get cut. A clear lack of priorities leads to the chaos, overwhelm, and stress that accumulates from doing too much, too often.

Working harder only gets you so far. Working faster can only last for so long. Working on nonessentials wastes even more precious time, and saying yes to yet another task adds to the already overinflated schedule.

Last-minute catastrophes

I frequently survey the subscribers to my email newsletter about their productivity mistakes and pitfalls.

One question asks, “*What is your biggest frustration around your own productivity?*” The most common answer is **procrastination**—waiting until the last minute and avoiding the work that needs to get done right up until it’s almost too late.

The last-minute stress that builds up as a deadline nears can be debilitating. Yes, some people thrive on pressure, but not many do so well when that pressure never lets up. When we find ourselves prioritizing activities that never had to get done in the first place, we find ourselves panicking as the clear priorities float to the top of the list just as they need to be addressed.

More coffee! now!

If a pot of coffee could solve all of our productivity problems, you and I both would likely just hook up an IV drip of dark roast espresso and start bulldozing through our bucket lists.

The challenge with productivity in this sense revolves around naturally derived energy and focus—two elements that, when combined, create a powerhouse of potential.

Most office environments serve up endless opportunities for staying awake to burn the candle at both ends without ever truly crafting a solution to stay alert and centered on one thing at a time.

Longer work hours, collaborative office environments, increased demands, and a heavy reliance on stimulants just to get through the day also introduce a slew of health problems from poor sleep and weight gain to high blood pressure and eventual trips to a marriage counselor.

It is not a pretty picture.

When results are prioritized above sustainability, when productivity is prioritized above sanity, and when “trying to get it

all done” is prioritized above *doing only what matters*, we find ourselves trapped in a prison of perfectionism.

When the bar is too high, it is too high, and there comes a point when the madness has to stop.

A DANGEROUS WORD

I wrote this book for one specific and clear reason: *productivity is a dangerous word*.

The double-edged sword of getting more done is that you can check more boxes, and so you do—over and over again. Doing more is alluring and certainly provides clear benefits, but (as we just discussed) at enormous costs.

The opposite is also true.

When I tell people I teach others how to get more done, it is quite common to see a reaction of “*Oh, I don’t need MORE to do . . .*” In other words, we know we are doing too much already, and the last thing we want is to have to do more in order to do less.

No one actually needs another book on getting things done, or another ten-step online video course on achieving four-hour workweeks, and yet we struggle day in and day out with balance. *We still* never can get it all done.

FREE TIME AT ITS FINEST

We are having the wrong conversation about productivity. We should be talking about how to do less when all we ever do is talk about how to do more. What is really going on here?

This is not an anti-productivity book, but it was designed to help you outsmart the temptation and repercussion of doing

more in order to optimize the few things that actually provide the outcomes you have been striving so hard to produce.

Saying you should work smarter, not harder is a bit cliché, but if it works for you, own it. Work as intelligently as you can.

This book is here to help you make critical changes to your calendar, outwit your nemesis of distraction, and redesign your life with more clarity and resolve than ever before.

Free time at its finest is when your calendar serves you, and not itself or someone else. When open blocks of time show up again and again, you have a tremendous opportunity to live differently, to change the lives of those around you, and to secure a more prosperous future.

If you would like more freedom to pursue your grandest goals, or even just enough downtime to take a solid nap, you are in the right place. With more free time comes more creative breakthroughs, clarity on your most important goals, and the freedom to choose how to live your best life.

The steps to reach this new life are about to unfold.

THE FREE-TIME FORMULA

The Free-Time Formula is a seven-step system to help you find happiness, focus, and productivity no matter how busy you are.

It is a path to high achievement without the burden of slaving away 24/7 to get there. In short, it is a process to cut the nonsense, focus, and achieve more than ever.

The seven steps

This book is divided into seven steps (or parts), aligned to the seven steps of the formula, with two chapters dedicated to each step:

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1. Find Out What's Really Going On
2. Clarify What Matters
3. Flex Your Muscles
4. Cut the Nonsense
5. Schedule What Matters
6. Prevent Future Nonsense
7. Solidify Your Ideal Rhythm

The process is designed to be sequential, as each step builds upon the lessons from the previous steps.

You can feel free to work through each component one at a time at your own pace. There is no required time element for any step, though I do provide a seven-day action plan at the end to help jump-start your progress.

Also, to expedite the process for you to get results, skip chapters. As a productivity strategy, it is wise to never read any book word for word unless the information is incredibly dense and epically important for your future.

Read what you need now, take action, and then come back at a future date for the other content.

Guaranteeing more free time on your calendar can be as simple as cutting a current event from your calendar, or as complex as restructuring your entire life from the ground up.

The Free-Time Formula provides the flexibility to take either approach. Whether you are just looking for a few quick wins, or a new start at life, the formula will help you break down the steps and make it happen.

Here is a quick rundown of each step in the formula:

Step I: Find Out What's Really Going On

The first step in *The Free-Time Formula* is designed to bring self-awareness front and center. You will conduct a

self-evaluation and time audit to determine how each day plays out for you. This information will determine just how much progress is possible.

Step II: Clarify What Matters

The second step will highlight the vital few priorities that truly mean something in your life now. We will examine warning signs to see if you are off track from your goals and filter your ideas to gain clarity on what to do next.

Step III: Flex Your Muscles

There are few things, if any, that I value more than my own health. One of the most powerful forces that will allow you to do your best work every day is being in the best physical and mental shape of your life. In the third step, we will focus on quick yet highly effective strategies for boosting your energy, physical fitness, and mental acuity.

Step IV: Cut the Nonsense

In the fourth step, you will have the chance to purge. There is always more going on than is necessary, and you will begin to build the efficient systems that will reduce friction and get you to point B faster.

Step V: Schedule What Matters

In step five you will have the opportunity to fill all of that wonderful new free time on your calendar with meaningful goals. I will also break down how to craft your own Red-Carpet Calendar and how to effectively schedule what matters most every week.

Step VI: Prevent Future Nonsense

In the sixth step, we will fight against our greatest nemesis, distraction. I will provide strategies to help you block yourself and others when it matters most.

Step VII: Solidify Your Ideal Rhythm

Finally, in the seventh step, we will establish your daily rhythm of digging hard into your work and then take a big step back to strategize more intelligently. This final component wraps up the formula with a clear seven-day action plan.

Free Bonuses

Readers of *The Free-Time Formula* get free access to a variety of bonus materials to supplement the book including a guided workbook, book club questions, templates, and more. Sign up: www.JeffSanders.com/FreeTimeBonus.

GRAB YOUR (DIGITAL) HIGHLIGHTER

As with everything I create, this book is designed with a single purpose in mind: *to get results for you through direct action*.

Action is the key differentiator between an idea and a medal around your neck. I have conversations nearly every week with well-meaning and highly educated folks who believe they have read everything about productivity, and yet find themselves struggling.

Get your highlighter ready; this is quotable:

Knowledge is a means to an end, NOT the result itself.

Read that sentence again. It is true. I know it sounds crazy, especially if you are in academia, but this will save you a ton of time.

Productivity is an action game—not a contest against your neighbors to see who can get the most Amazon Prime drones delivering stacks of books to your front door. Dusty books on a shelf will not make you run a marathon, start a business, or build your dream home in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

Knowing dozens of productivity strategies is vastly different from *consistently applying* them AND *getting tremendous results* because of them.

Highlight that one too.

I once skimmed through the popular personal development book *The Slight Edge* by Jeff Olson. I was underwhelmed, so I put the book down and ignored it.

One day I was reminded of the advice I am giving you right now. I went back to the book, looked at it a little closer, and had to catch my breath.

Yes, I knew many of the lessons, stories, and strategies in the book because I had read so many other personal growth books in the past, but (and this is the key to everything), I was not actually *doing* many of the strategies. *Ah!*

Talk about a wake-up call. This smack in the face was all I needed to get up, move, and start changing my life.

Knowing something is never the same as doing it—ever.

Also, despite my paperless lifestyle, I am obsessed with physical books and audiobooks. I have never read a single digital book from cover to cover, and I do not plan to anytime soon.

For the sake of this book, you can choose any medium that gets you from point A to point B—but you have to get there.

Point B is at the *end* of this book, and there are dozens of new ideas, strategies, and action steps waiting for you to discover.

So, let's get to it!

QUICK REVIEW: *FREEDOM TO DO ANYTHING*

1. Free time is a myth.

Every minute of every day is up to you; however, because time is limited and you can do anything with it, you have

to choose very carefully which activities rise to the top and warrant precious space on your calendar.

2. There is just too much to do.

There is almost always too much scheduled in the few hours we have each day—too many responsibilities, too many obligations, too many *everythings* that seem to never end. To face the challenges of modern daily life, we need a clear plan to focus on the few things that matter most.

3. Your ticket to freedom lies in *The Free-Time Formula*.

With the seven-step system in this book, you can cut the non-sense in your life to focus and achieve more than ever.

CHAPTER 1 ACTION PLAN

1. Stop.

Before you move on to chapter 2, I would like to guarantee that the promise I am making to you with this book is fulfilled. To do that, we need to get you a tangible result right now.

Yes, now is the time to stop reading and do something in this moment. This is not homework; it is *self-work*—the whole point of this book. Pick something, anything that will tangibly make tomorrow easier, smoother, or more productive. I recommend being a little bold and doing something dramatic.

Small, consistent changes are the most effective over the long-term, but big action makes you feel good now. Go big.

Then, email me and tell me about it, jeff@jeffsanders.com. I respond to every email within twenty-four hours, so let's build this relationship right away. I do not want you going through this book on your own.

Radical change is often too complicated to attempt by yourself, plus you get to chat with the author. I know that means something because I frequently interview many of my favorite authors on my podcast. Talking to them greatly enhances my reading experience, and dramatically increases the odds that I will take direct action with the book's content.

(Cheat: If you would like, you can use Step #2 below as your action. It is a good one!)

2. Start a daily journal.

Find a place to take notes about the inconsistencies you find as you move throughout your day.

Just like when you buy a red car, and all of a sudden you see dozens of red cars you never knew were there before, when you begin thinking about efficiency and productivity you will see opportunities around every corner to improve your systems, cut excess noise, and get more done.

3. Grab your (digital) highlighter.

It's time to jump right in!

