

A BOOKLET BY MATTHIAS MILLER

Do the Right Work

For Leaders Too Busy to Get Things Done

Matthias Miller

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By Matthias Miller

*This booklet is dedicated to
the courageous men and women
who are changing the world
without selling their soul.*

Before You Start

Getting the Most from This Booklet

The culture around us has given us a toxic perspective of time. The reason so many leaders struggle with their time is because we've been indoctrinated with a single message: "you're broken, and the only way to fix it is by moving faster."

This booklet breaks that delusion.

This booklet has two parts: the foundational mindset and practical habits. Both are vital. Ideas mean little without action, and actions mean little without the "why".

Before you get started, I want to make sure you get the most of this guide. This guide is deceptively short, and for a specific reason. I wanted this guide to be accessible. Rather than a hefty book to pore through, I wanted to give you something short you could read, absorb, and later review.

While you read this booklet, you will be tempted to say, "Oh, I already know that," or, "That doesn't really apply to me." Please don't assume that. Even though I've chosen to live my life by these principles, I continue to remind myself why I do what I do.

I mean it honestly when I say these ideas have changed my life, and I fully expect they can change yours as well. You may be tempted to skip over certain ideas simply because they're brief. However, I want to remind you that sometimes powerful ideas are expressed in only a few paragraphs.

I highly encourage you to grab a pen or highlighter (and maybe a cup of coffee), and set aside some time to process this booklet. If you do that, you will set yourself up to get the most out of it.

Once you've done that, carry on!

PART ONE

Laying the Foundation

"Busy" Is Everywhere!

Do you ever wonder why "busy" shows up in so many conversations?

Last night, I went to the local florist to pick up flowers and some fudge for my wife. The clerk fumbled with the paper and tried to start a conversation. "How was your day?" She paused momentarily. "Busy?"

She could have asked me a hundred different questions. Yet she asks me one: "Were you busy?"

I'm notoriously bad at small talk, so I answered with a simple "yes". Behind my simple answer, my mind was doing gymnastics:

If "busy" means being active and productive, then yes, I absolutely was busy! However, if "busy" means being overcommitted, driven by other people's demands, and stressed by the demands on me, I was definitely not busy. What do you mean by "busy"?

For many, "busy" is a badge of honor. It proves to everyone that they're productive, creative and successful. To say they're not busy implies that they're lazy, unproductive, and failing.

For others, "busy" is a prison. It explains why they can't do the things they want to do.

The truth is we all have twenty-four hours in every day, and we spend every minute of every day doing something. Busyness is not about how much time we have, because we all have the same number of hours in every day. Busyness is about how we spend our time.

Just talk with your employee. If he works until midnight to meet a deadline, he's busy. If he comes home from a concert at 1:00 AM, he's just enjoying life.

Busy Is the Symptom of a Disease

Busyness is the symptom of an insidious disease that denies the choices we have. I believe the feeling of being "busy" comes from the sense that we are out of control and that we are living someone else's agenda.

One of the most invigorating feelings is being able to spend your waking hours on your agenda, knowing that you're doing the things that really matter. You might still spend your day serving other people, responding to other people's requests, fulfilling other's obligations, or grinding through unpleasant tasks. However, when you've set your own agenda, these make you feel productive, not busy.

We are all in control of our choices. Even the most challenging situation offers you the opportunity to embrace a perspective of control and empowerment. You have the power to recognize that even though parts of the situation are out of your control, you get to choose to face the challenge, to determine your own perspective, and make the most of the mess you're in.

The suffocating feeling of busyness is evidence of a belief that your life has drifted outside of your control. You've surrendered choices that are yours to make—often because you feared the consequences of those decisions. Shifting your perspective, recognizing the power you hold to change your situation, is the first step in breaking free.

My wife and I believe so firmly in the importance of our perspective that we have practically removed the word "busy" from our vocabulary. It is not a denial of reality. Rather, it is a reinforcement of our personal beliefs that we have the power to choose how we spend our time, and that when we make poor decisions, we deal with the consequences.

As a result, even though my wife and I are engaged in many different activities and both live a very "full" life, we would be hard-pressed to call ourselves "busy".

Time Is a Silent Killer of Leaders

Time seems to be the mysterious killer of many business leaders.

It seems many of them burn out before they reach their prime, somehow unable to meet the demands. They never reach the pinnacle of their career because their personal lives crumble under the weight of the expectations. If they somehow manage to stand up under the weight of the expectations, their effectiveness is hindered by their growing responsibilities.

Let's face it: it's a tough road.

Business leaders succeed because they are hyper-responsible, high-achieving individuals. They are willing to go the extra mile, to do the extra work required to get things done and make things happen.

While this is a powerful strength, it can quickly turn into a debilitating weakness. This same drive introduces a subtle trap that snags them in its grip.

The trap comes through a positive, empowering belief: "We can do that." It is the same belief that empowers you, that gives you the choice to control your destiny. It comes through a belief that drives confidence and that provides surprising results to those who embrace it.

This same belief, when overextended, denies an important reality. Whether as an individual, a team, or a business, you are incapable of responding to every opportunity that awaits you. This raises two important questions:

1. Exactly where are the bounds of your capacity?
2. Exactly what needs to be within those bounds?

Unless you honestly answer those questions, the same work ethic that propelled you into success now threatens to keep you locked into this same level.

If you're not careful, it could even destroy you.

The Time Management Delusion

Many people try to solve this challenge with better "time management"—cutting corners here and there to save a few minutes. You can learn many wonderful techniques that can literally save hours off your week. However, it can also lead you into a rabbit hole.

Many people think of time management as the speed at which you get things done. If you walk a little bit faster to your truck, you can save a few minutes off your sales call. This focuses on "efficiency" by getting your tasks done more quickly.

While these can be helpful tools, they often leave you feeling busier than before because you must always get more done in less time.

You can get a much more dramatic shift by changing your focus. **Rather than focus on the speed at which you get things done, you can focus instead on the results you get for your effort.** This is a focus on "effectiveness".

Unless you are vastly inefficient, you will not get significantly better results by working faster. Instead, focusing on effectiveness introduces a new dimension to your approach, which is leverage.

Effectiveness is about finding the one or two small factors that drive your success. These are high-leverage activities that require less effort and produce higher results.

Let me warn you.

If you're not careful, you'll disregard the importance of these few paragraphs. These aren't philosophical ramblings.

This one shift in perspective has brought the most significant change in my performance. Don't let the simplicity of the idea fool you with its impact. If you're thinking, "Oh, I understand that" or "I don't need to know that", I challenge you to jump back and reread the above paragraphs several times.

Yes, it's really that important, and here's why.

People, Not Work, Are Created Equal

Every person on your team has equal worth. But the work they do? Not even close.

Your best idea can easily be ten times better than your worst. Your best employee can be ten times more productive. Your best customer, ten times more profitable. The same hour spent on two different projects will produce wildly different results.

And yet most leaders treat their to-do list like a democracy—every task gets the same attention, every project gets the same resources, every request gets the same response.

It's not true, and it's costing you.

While every single person has the same intrinsic worth and the same intrinsic potential for greatness, not every person brings the same value to your organization.

Spend an hour a week with one employee, and they'll become a strong leader in your organization. Spend an hour a day with another employee, and they'll still cost your business money every time they show up at work.

Spend a thousand dollars on one advertisement, and you'll get two customers. Spend a thousand dollars on a different ad, and you'll get twenty, two hundred, or two thousand.

When you stop treating everything as equal, you start to approach life differently:

- » Not every e-mail needs to be answered.
- » Not every phone call needs to be returned.
- » Not every project needs to see the light of day.
- » Not every request needs to be fulfilled.
- » Not every person needs one-on-one mentoring.

This is not about dropping your responsibilities, being careless, or overlooking your team.

It is about taking a proactive response to your priorities as a leader.

For you and your organization to reach the full potential, you have to dedicate your attention and energy to the parts of the business that ultimately matter. Anything outside of that is robbing your time and draining your energy, distracting you from your vision.

Darwin's Insight into Time

The answer to your constraints comes from an unlikely source, Charles Darwin, whose theory deals marvelously with your time constraints.

It's about the survival of the fittest.

A lush ecosystem will never reveal to you the toughest and most enduring animals. However, harsh desert environments with limited food and resources will quickly reveal the forms of life with an unbreakable quality.

As counterintuitive as it seems, more time and money do not always offer greater opportunity. Narrowing your focus and tightening your constraints are sometimes the best tools in uncovering the greatest opportunity.

In a world where all time and all resources are at your disposal, it makes little sense to measure the effectiveness of your actions. However, when your resources are limited, you are forced to strictly evaluate what part of your work is the most effective.

The best solution for managing your time is not about extending your day for more time.

It's not about chasing after more resources.

It's about allowing only the fittest to survive.

It's about letting the bad ideas die.

It's about letting the best ideas take the lion's share of your time.

If you embrace your constraints, they will lead you down the path of your best work.

Turn Your "No" to a "Yes"

To take Darwin's theory a little further, your life is full of dinosaurs trying to eat each other's lunch. The dinosaurs you feed will become bigger and stronger, eventually overtaking the other dinosaurs.

If you say "yes" to everything, you'll start squeezing out the things that matter to you. However, if you say "yes" to the right things, you'll squeeze out the things that are only a distraction. When your mission is unclear and undetermined, you have no reason by which to turn down other people's requests. However, when your life is compelled by a strong "yes", it becomes easy to say "no" to other opportunities:

- » If you have a strong "yes" to your family, you can turn down the job that requires you to leave them for days or weeks at a time.
- » If you have a strong "yes" to yourself, you can turn down the extra hours and responsibilities that prevent you from properly caring for yourself.
- » If you have a strong "yes" to your mission, you can easily say "no" to the requests that are distractions from where you need to be.
- » If you have a strong "yes" to your vision, you can easily say "no" to the once-in-a-lifetime opportunities that continue to present themselves.

Again, the answer lies in a shift in perspective.

The question is not whether you're saying "no". The question is, **"Are you saying 'no' to the right things?"** Are you unintentionally saying "no" to the things that ultimately are the most important to you, simply because you haven't strengthened your "yes"?

No man ever says to himself, "I'd like to wake up tomorrow morning twenty pounds overweight, feeling sluggish and burned out, in a relationship that I hate." Nor does a woman ever say, "I'd like my kids to grow up feeling slighted because I never had enough time for them. I'd like my daughter to be a teenager before I start spending time getting to know her."

That's not what happens. Instead, we tell ourselves, "I don't want to let down my team, my business, or my friends. I need to do my part in making this a success."

Many leaders are more scared of saying "no" to their board, their boss, or their team than they are afraid of saying "no" to themselves, their family, and their personal vision. Every single "yes" that you give offers an implicit "no" to something else. The question is merely, "Are you saying 'yes' to the right things?"

The only way to be able to say "no" without a shred of guilt is becoming crystal-clear on the things that are important to you. It's impossible to feel guilty for saying "no" to something lesser, and saying "yes" to something greater.

It's hard to feel bad for not answering an e-mail when you're working on long-term objectives that will transform business growth. It's hard to feel bad for not answering the phone when you're in the middle of strategic mentoring with your successor.

Take a Vacation from the Guilt Trip

You need to take a permanent vacation from the guilt trip.

Many people find it difficult to let go of their work without feeling some measure of guilt. That guilt comes from different places, but its effect is the same.

If you've grown up with a Protestant work ethic, you've got a little voice in your head that says the harder you work, the more pleased God will be with you. That true selflessness means responding to every need, every time, no matter the cost to yourself.

If you've grown up in hustle culture, the voice sounds different but says the same thing. Rise at 4 AM. Outwork everyone. Post about it. Rest is for people who don't want it badly enough.

Both voices arrive at the same destination: guilt for not doing more, fear that slowing down means falling behind, and the quiet belief that your worth is measured by your output.

Though we may not verbalize these beliefs, they are embedded within the religious, cultural, and professional fabric of our day.

That's not to say hard work isn't important, because it is.

However, work was never meant to overtake our lives, and it was never meant to impose guilt upon us for being unwilling to sacrifice our lives to it. We were never meant to play the martyr for someone else's crisis.

Let go of the guilt. Now.

Live from the Big Picture

Ironically, one of the best ways to break free from busyness is to deliberately step away from the activity.

I'll be honest. I love to hit the ground running. I get my best momentum by going straight into the highest priority work. But I've learned the hard way that momentum without direction is just motion. If I don't regularly step back to check where I'm headed, I end up moving fast toward the wrong things.

For me, this looks simple. Every morning I stumble into the kitchen, get my wife's coffee ready, and drink a full water bottle. Somewhere in those quiet minutes—before the inbox, before the demands—I get a few moments to check my mindset. To remember what I'm about and why I'm here.

The format doesn't matter. Maybe it's five minutes with a journal. Maybe it's prayer and reflection. Maybe it's a walk. The point is this: your day will fill itself if you let it. Your defense against drift is a habit of zooming out—regularly, deliberately—to make sure the work you're doing is the right work.

Without that, you'll stay busy. With it, you'll stay effective.

Permission Not to Be Busy

In light of the cultural pressure towards busyness, you're the only one who can give yourself permission to break out of its grip, completely guilt-free.

It means letting go of the fear of not having enough, not doing enough, and not being enough. It means letting go of the need to fit in, to follow the crowds wherever they may go.

It's about permission to be different, to break the status quo so that you can end up somewhere entirely different.

This is about permission to become deliberate in choosing the opportunities that are right for you. It's permission to say "no" to certain responsibilities and certain opportunities, so that you can become everything you were meant to be.

It's permission to pour yourself wholeheartedly into your work and your vision, knowing that it will continue to serve you, not enslave you.

It means permission to spend a weekend with your family, no need for excuses and no need for guilt.

It means permission to quit work when it's time to quit, even when you have a thousand things that could yet be done.

It means permission to approach life from a radically different perspective, measuring not by the work you put in, but the results you get back out.

It is permission to live free from the bondage of busy to make the biggest impact you can on the world.

PART TWO

Making It Practical

Now that you understand the mindset, I'd like to share some of my personal habits. These are not theoretical ideals—these are habits I embrace because they bring tangible benefit to my life. They've helped me, and they will help you if you let them.

#1. Don't wake up to someone else's agenda.

Many people wake up and immediately hand their attention to their inbox, their news feed, or their text messages. Within thirty seconds, they're reactive. The day is already running them.

For a while, I replaced my phone with a conventional alarm clock and left it in another room. When that alarm went off, the first thing I saw wasn't someone else's crisis, someone else's opinion, or someone else's highlight reel. More recently, I've gone back to using my phone as an alarm clock. But I have no social media on it, and almost all notifications are turned off.

Whether you leave your phone in another room or keep it on your nightstand, make sure that when you pick it up, it's not picking your agenda for you.

#2. Create a keystone habit to start off your day.

For me, it means getting my wife's coffee ready, then drinking a full water bottle. This simple act sets me up for the rest of my morning routine. These small habits can cause a domino effect, creating a "muscle memory" for a healthy mindset and emotional place to approach your day. Athletes use these kinds of habits for a reason!

#3. Put your best work where your best energy is.

Your highest levels of creative energy are before lunch, particularly on Monday and Tuesday. That's when you solve the hard problems, make the strategic decisions, and move the important things forward.

Most leaders do the opposite. They front-load their week with meetings, calls, and catch-ups—then wonder why they never get to the work that actually matters. By Wednesday, their sharpest thinking is already spent on other people's agendas.

Flip it. Protect Monday and Tuesday mornings for your highest-leverage work. Push meetings to Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday afternoon. You'll be stunned by how much more you accomplish with the same number of hours.

#4. Treat your first hour like it's worth ten.

Every single day, the first hour sets the trajectory for the rest of it. Whatever you give your attention to in that window will shape your momentum for hours afterward.

Many people spend that hour clearing out emails, responding to Slack messages, and putting out yesterday's fires. By 9 AM, they've already spent their sharpest thinking on someone else's priorities.

I've found I do my best work first thing in the morning. That's when the ideas come, when the hard problems get solved, when the important things move forward. I protect that hour. I give it to whatever matters most, not just whatever showed up most recently.

#5. Control your inbox.

E-mail immediately puts you on somebody else's agenda and distracts you from the one or two most important things that you should focus on today. I've relentlessly optimized my inbox so only the most important emails catch my attention.

I keep email access on my phone, but I've disabled automatic syncing and all notifications. I can search for messages when I need them, but I'm never interrupted by them.

#6. Find your focus tools and lean on them.

I have stretches of time when I need to be highly focused and at the top of my game. Personally, I have three tools I use:

- » 5AM appointments at Starbucks
- » Noise canceling headphones with focus@will

- » "Body doubling" with a team member or with others using a service like flow.club

Find the tools you need for focus, then lean on them heavily.

#7. Tame your phone.

Turn off all unnecessary notifications.

Just like e-mail, text messages and phone calls put you on someone else's agenda and distract you from the things that are most important. If you're in a meeting or need to focus on a highly creative task, put your phone on "Do Not Disturb".

If your business requires you to take calls and respond to texts, hand your phone to an assistant and teach them how to screen your calls. Better yet, hire someone whose job it is to manage your schedule and protect your time.

#8. Exercise a minimum of 20 minutes every day.

Yes, that's a minimum. If your role demands you to be active, you might already be doing that. However, you might also benefit from more.

Exercise is a great way to stay energized, alert, and help manage the natural stress of life. I've tried exercising at different times of the day, and each has its benefits:

1. Exercising in the morning helps you wake up and get the day started.
2. Exercising in the afternoon helps you push through the afternoon slump and reset your focus.
3. Exercising in the evening (after work) allows you to disconnect from work and transition into "home life".

The best time varies from person to person, and from season to season. Choose a time that works best for you, but make sure it happens. If you're in this for the long haul, you owe it to yourself, your family, and even your business.

This might be as simple as grabbing a team member and having your check-in on a walk. It might mean grabbing a phone call while you're walking.

#9. Get a minimum of 7 hours of sleep each night.

Yes, you can laugh at me! I understand that each person seems to need different amounts of sleep, but don't fool yourself into some kind of superhero who doesn't need sleep. You'll make better decisions, and ironically, you'll get more done. Know exactly where your cognitive downturn is.

Do this especially when you're doing creative work or have a lot on your mind. Getting enough sleep not only leaves your mind sharper the next morning, but it also helps you process and remember important things that happen to you. Your mind relies on your sleep to process all of the stimuli you get during the day.

#10. Leave work behind on the evenings and weekends.

Disconnecting from work is critical. If you're driven, your work will creep into the rest of your life unless you have strong boundaries around it. As difficult as it is, it's well worth the effort. The better you disconnect, the more effectively you will reconnect on Monday morning with fresh energy and fresh ideas to tackle another week.

In fact, your best ideas will often come when you are specifically not thinking about your work.

#11. Be fully present in the moment, with the person you're with.

This is a simple but powerful habit.

When you're with your friend, be fully present. Don't think about the next thing to say or the next thing to do. Just be there. When you're at work, don't be vacationing at the beach or snowboarding down the mountain. Just be there.

Everywhere you go, be fully present and trust that being fully present in your current situation will not rob you of other opportunities.

If you find yourself unable to be present, it might be a sign that you've said "yes" to something that's not a fit for you. It might mean you need to find a new way to engage.

#12. Deliberately celebrate your "wins".

Have you ever tried to buy a vehicle that "almost nobody else drives"? The moment you leave the sales lot, you start seeing the car everywhere. Our minds filter the world based on what we're looking for.

The same is true for your work. If you only focus on what's left undone, that's all you'll see. But when you start deliberately noticing your progress, when you pause to celebrate before diving into the next goal, you train yourself to see momentum.

Celebration isn't a luxury. It's essential.

#13. Start small, then keep experimenting and learning.

Everyone's different, so it doesn't make sense to replicate what everyone else is doing. Learn from other people, experiment with what works for you, and decide which techniques work for you.

Most importantly, don't try to implement all these ideas. Start small. Pick the one that takes the least effort and will yield the greatest result.

The culture around us has given us a toxic perspective of time. We've been indoctrinated with a single message: "you're broken, and the only way to fix it is by moving faster." The secret to a dramatic shift in productivity is a fundamentally different perspective—not of time, but of the work itself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthias Miller is the founder of CodeHaus and operates as The Technical CFO—providing fractional CFO services combined with custom ERP development for manufacturing companies. His intentional pursuit of professional growth has given him extensive experience in software development, business systems, leadership, and financial operations. He lives in Colorado with his wife Bonita and their family.

CLEAR NUMBERS. RIGHT SYSTEMS. CONFIDENCE IN YOUR TEAM.

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Others advise. We execute with intention.