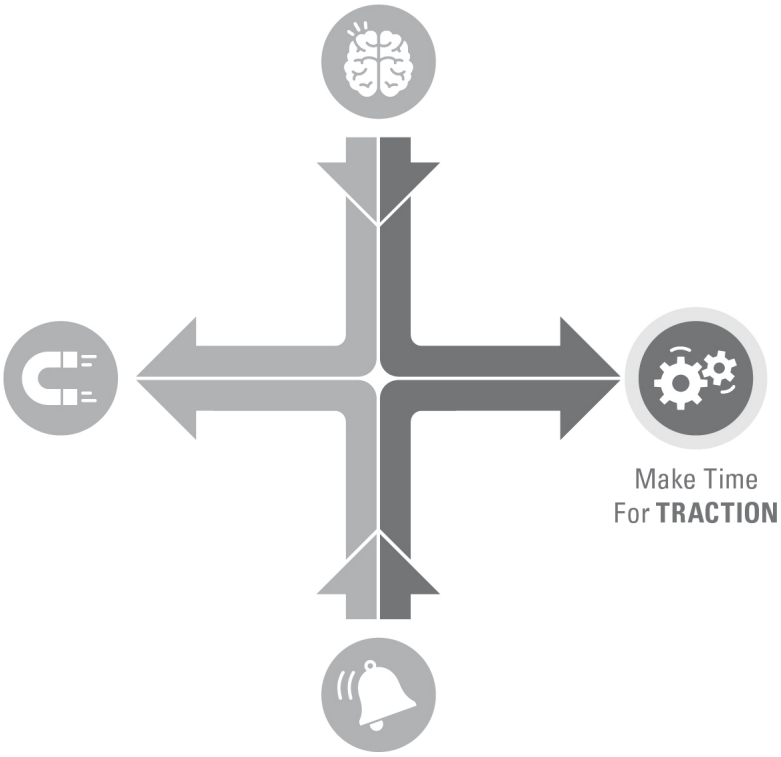
Part 2

Make Time for Traction



Chapter 9

Turn Your Values into Time

Traction draws you toward what you want in life, while distraction pulls you away. In part one, we learned ways to cope with the internal triggers that can drive us to distraction and how to reduce the sources of discomfort; if we don't control our impulse to escape uncomfortable feelings, we'll always look for quick fixes to soothe our pain.

The next step is to find ways to make traction more likely, starting with how we spend our time. The German writer and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe believed he could predict someone's future based on one simple fact. "If I know how you spend your time," he wrote, "then I know what might become of you."

Think of all the ways people steal your time. The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca wrote, "People are frugal in guarding their personal property; but as soon as it comes to squandering time, they are most wasteful of the one thing in which it is right to be stingy." Though Seneca was writing more than two thousand years ago, his words are just as applicable today. Think of all the locks, security systems, and storage units we use to protect our property and how little we do to protect our time.

A study by Promotional Products Association International found only a third of Americans keep a daily schedule, which means the vast majority wake up every morning with no formal plans. Our most precious asset—our

time—is unguarded, just waiting to be stolen. If we don't plan our days, someone else will.

So we need to make a schedule, but where do we begin? The common approach is to make a to-do list. We write down all the things we want to do and hope we'll find the time throughout the day to do them. Unfortunately, this method has some serious flaws. Anyone who has tried keeping such a list knows many tasks tend to get pushed from one day to the next, and the next. Instead of starting with *what* we're going to do, we should begin with *why* we're going to do it. And to do that, we must begin with our values.

According to Russ Harris, author of *The Happiness Trap*, values are "how we want to be, what we want to stand for, and how we want to relate to the world around us." They are attributes of the person we want to be. For example, they may include being an honest person, being a loving parent, or being a valued part of a team. We never *achieve* our values any more than finishing a painting would let us *achieve* being creative. A value is like a guiding star; it's the fixed point we use to help us navigate our life choices.

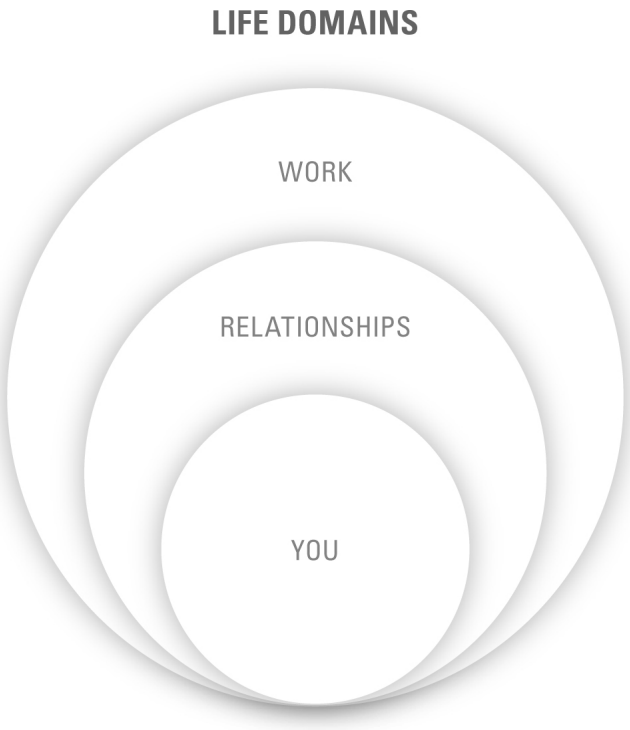
Though some values carry over into all facets of life, most are specific to one area. For example, being a contributing member of a team is something people generally do at work. Being a loving spouse or parent occurs within the context of a family. Being the kind of person who seeks wisdom or physical fitness is something we do for ourselves.

The trouble is, we don't make time for our values. We unintentionally spend too much time in one area of our lives at the expense of others. We get busy at work at the expense of living out our values with our family or friends. If we run ourselves ragged caring for our kids, we neglect our bodies, minds, and friendships and prevent ourselves from being the people we desire to be. If we chronically neglect our values, we become something we're not proud of—our lives feel out of balance and diminished. Ironically, this ugly feeling makes us more likely to seek distractions to escape our dissatisfaction without actually solving the problem.

Whatever our values may be, it's helpful to categorize them into various life domains, a concept that is thousands of years old. The Stoic philosopher Hierocles demonstrated the interconnected nature of our lives with concentric circles illustrating a hierarchal balance of duties. He placed the human mind and body at the center, followed by close family in the next

ring, then extended family, then fellow members of one's tribe, then inhabitants of one's town or city, fellow citizens and countrymen next, finishing with all humanity in the outermost ring.

Inspired by his example, I created a way to simplify and visualize the three life domains where we spend our time:



The three life domains: you, relationships, and work.

These three domains outline where we spend our time. They give us a way to think about how we plan our days so that we can become an authentic reflection of the people we want to be.

In order to live our values in each of these domains, we must reserve time in our schedules to do so. Only by setting aside specific time in our schedules for traction (the actions that draw us toward what we want in life) can we turn our backs on distraction. Without planning ahead, it's impossible to tell the difference between traction and distraction.

You can't call something a distraction unless you know what it's distracting you from.

I know many of us bristle at the idea of keeping a schedule because we don't want to feel hampered, but oddly enough, we actually perform better under constraints. This is because limitations give us a structure, while a blank schedule and a mile-long to-do list torments us with too many choices.

The most effective way to make time for traction is through "timeboxing." Timeboxing uses a well-researched technique psychologists call "setting an implementation intention," which is a fancy way of saying, "deciding *what* you're going to do, and *when* you're going to do it." It's a technique that can be used to make time for traction in each of your life domains.

The goal is to eliminate all white space on your calendar so you're left with a template for how you intend to spend your time each day.

It doesn't so much matter *what* you do with your time; rather, success is measured by whether you did what you planned to do. It's fine to watch a video, scroll social media, daydream, or take a nap, as long as that's what you planned to do. Alternatively, checking work email, a seemingly productive task, is a distraction if it's done when you intended to spend time with your family or work on a presentation. Keeping a timeboxed schedule is the only way to know if you're distracted. If you're not spending your time doing what you'd planned, you're off track.

To create a weekly timeboxed schedule, you'll need to decide how much time you want to spend on each domain of your life. How much time do you want to spend on yourself, on important relationships, and on your work? Note that "work" doesn't exclusively mean paid labor. The work domain can include community service, activism, and side projects.

How much time in each domain would allow you to be consistent with your values? Start by creating a weekly calendar template for your perfect week. You'll find a blank template in the appendix and a free online tool at NirAndFar.com/Indistractable.

Next, book fifteen minutes on your schedule every week to reflect and refine your calendar by asking two questions:

Question 1 (Reflect): "When in my schedule did I do what I said I would do and when did I get distracted?" Answering this question requires you to look back at the past week. I recommend using the Distraction Tracker found at the back of this book to note when and why you become distracted, per Dr. Bricker's suggestions of noting your internal trigger from chapter six.

If an internal trigger distracts you, what strategies will you use to cope the next time it arises? Did an external trigger, like a phone call or a talkative colleague, prompt you to stop doing what you wanted to do? (We'll address tactics to control external triggers in part three.) Or was a planning problem the reason you gave in to distraction? In which case, you can look back through your Distraction Tracker to help answer the next question.

Question 2 (Refine): "Are there changes I can make to my calendar that will give me the time I need to better live out my values?" Maybe something unexpected came up, or perhaps there was a problem with how you planned your day. Timeboxing enables us to think of each week as a mini-experiment. The goal is to figure out where your schedule didn't work out in the prior week so you can make it easier to follow the next time around. The idea is to commit to a practice that improves your schedule over time by helping you know the difference between traction and distraction for every moment of the day.

When our lives change, our schedules can too. But once our schedule is set, the idea is to stick with it until we decide to improve it on the next go-round. Approaching the exercise of making a schedule as a curious

scientist, rather than a drill sergeant, gives us the freedom to get better with each iteration.

In this section, we'll look at how to make time for traction in the three domains of your life. We'll also discuss how to sync expectations of how you spend your time with the stakeholders in your life, like coworkers and managers.

Before moving on, consider what your schedule currently looks like. I'm not asking about the things you *did*, but rather the things you committed to doing in writing. Is your schedule filled with carefully timeboxed plans, or is it mostly empty? Does it reflect who you are? Are you letting others steal your time or do you guard it as the limited and precious resource it is?

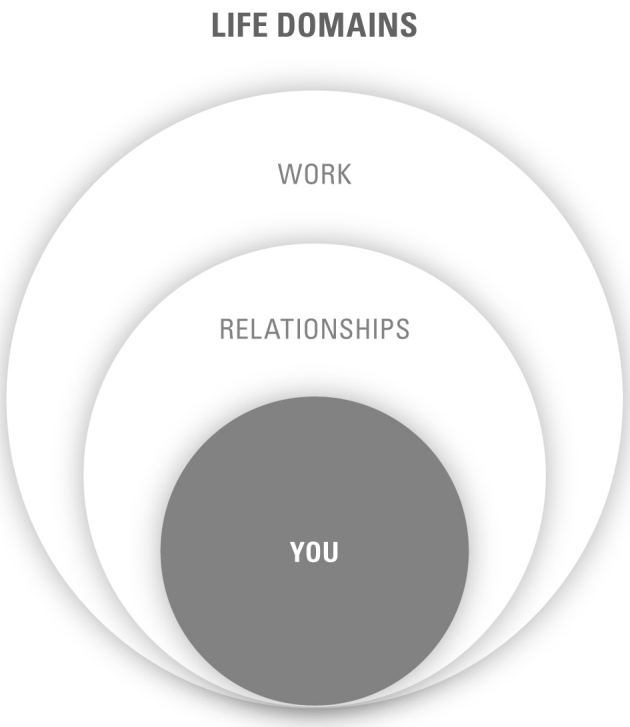
By turning our values into time, we make sure we have time for traction. If we don't plan ahead, we shouldn't point fingers, nor should we be surprised when everything becomes a distraction. Being indistractable is largely about making sure you make time for traction each day and eliminating the distraction that keeps you from living the life you want—one that involves taking care of yourself, your relationships, and your work.

REMEMBER THIS

- **You can't call something a distraction unless you know what it is distracting you from.** Planning ahead is the only way to know the difference between traction and distraction.
- **Does your calendar reflect your values?** To be the person you want to be, you have to make time to live your values.
- **Timebox your day.** The three life domains of you, relationships, and work provide a framework for planning how to spend your time.
- **Reflect and refine.** Revise your schedule regularly, but you must commit to it once it's set.

Chapter 10

Control the Inputs, Not the Outcomes



In this visual representation of your life, you are at the center of the three domains. Like every valuable thing, you require maintenance and care, which takes time. Just as you wouldn't blow off a meeting with your boss,

you should never bail on appointments you make with yourself. After all, who's more critical to helping you live the kind of life you want than you?

Exercise, sleep, healthy meals, and time spent reading or listening to an audiobook are all ways to invest in ourselves. Some people value mindfulness, spiritual connection, or reflection, and may want time to pray or meditate. Others value skillfulness and want time alone to practice a hobby.

Taking care of yourself is at the core of the three domains because the other two depend on your health and wellness. If you're not taking care of yourself, your relationships suffer. Likewise, your work isn't its best when you haven't given yourself the time you need to stay physically and psychologically healthy.

We can start by prioritizing and timeboxing "you" time. At a basic level, we need time in our schedules for sleep, hygiene, and proper nourishment. While it may sound simple to fulfill these needs, I must admit that before I learned to timebox my day, I was guilty of spending many late nights at work, after which I'd quickly grab a double cheeseburger, curly fries, and a decadent chocolate shake for dinner—a far cry from the healthy lifestyle I envisioned.

By setting aside time to live out your values in the "you" domain, you will have the time to reflect on your calendar and visualize the qualities of the person you want to be. With your body and mind strong, you will also be much more likely to follow through on your promises.

You might be thinking, "It's all well and good to schedule time for ourselves, but what happens when we don't accomplish what we want to, despite making the time?"

A few years ago, I started waking up at three o'clock every morning. Over the years I'd read many articles about the importance of rest and knew that the research was unequivocal—we need quality sleep. I'd toss and turn, disappointed that I wasn't following through on my plan to get seven to eight hours of shut-eye. It was on my schedule, so why wasn't I asleep? It turns out that sleeping wasn't completely under my control. I couldn't help the fact my body chose to wake me up, but I could control what I did in response.

At first, I did what many of us do when things don't go as planned—I freaked out. I'd lie in bed, thinking about how bad it was that I wasn't

sleeping and how groggy I was going to feel in the morning, and then I'd start thinking of all the things I had to do the next day. I'd mull over these thoughts until I could think of nothing else. Ironically, I wasn't falling back asleep because I was worried about not falling back asleep—a common cause of insomnia.

Once I realized my rumination was itself a distraction, I began to deal with it in a healthier manner. Specifically, if I woke up, I'd repeat a simple mantra, "The body gets what the body needs." That subtle mind-set shift took the pressure off by no longer making sleep a requirement. My job was to provide my body with the proper time and place to rest—what happened next was out of my control. I started to think of waking up in the middle of the night as a chance to read on my Kindle and stopped worrying about when I'd fall back asleep.[2] I assured myself that if I wasn't tired enough to fall asleep right at that moment, it was because my body had already gotten enough rest. I let my mind relax without worry.

You see where this is leading, don't you? Once my rumination stopped, so did my sleepless nights. I soon started regularly falling back asleep in minutes.

There's an important lesson here that goes well beyond how to get enough sleep. The takeaway is that, when it comes to our time, we should stop worrying about outcomes we can't control and instead focus on the inputs we can. The positive results of the time we spend doing something is a hope, not a certainty.

The one thing we control is the time we put into a task.

Whether I'm able to fall asleep at any given moment or whether a breakthrough idea for my next book comes to me when I sit down at my desk isn't entirely up to me, but one thing is for certain: I won't do what I

want to do if I'm not in the right place at the right time, whether that's in bed when I want to sleep or at my desk when I want to do good work. Not showing up guarantees failure.

We tend to think we can solve our distraction problems by trying to get more done each minute, but more often the real problem is not giving ourselves time to do what we say we will. By timeboxing "you" time and faithfully following through, we keep the promises we make to ourselves.

REMEMBER THIS

- **Schedule time for yourself first.** You are at the center of the three life domains. Without allocating time for yourself, the other two domains suffer.
- **Show up when you say you will.** You can't always control what you get out of time you spend, but you can control how much time you put into a task.
- **Input is much more certain than outcome.** When it comes to living the life you want, making sure you allocate time to living your values is the only thing you should focus on.

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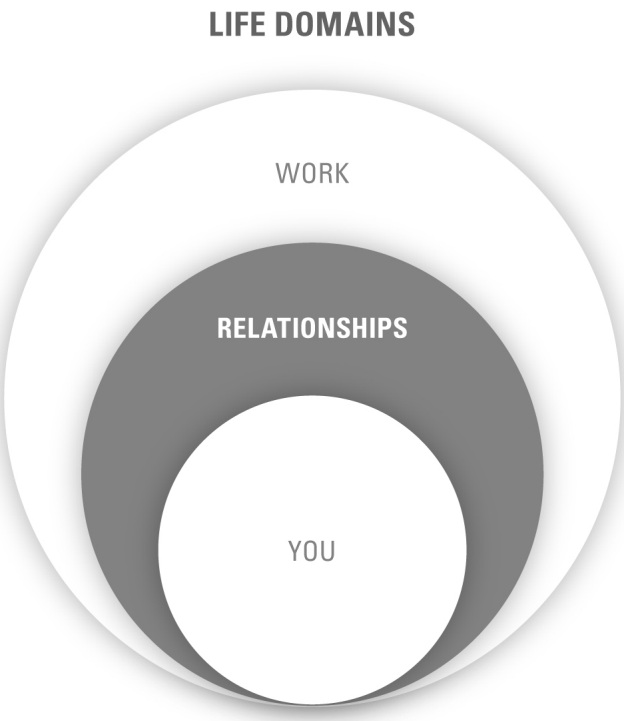
[2] The Kindle e-reader is less harmful to sleep than other devices. Anne-Marie Chang, Daniel Aeschbach, Jeanne F. Duffy, and Charles A. Czeisler, "Evening Use of Light-Emitting EReaders Negatively Affects Sleep, Circadian Timing, and Next-Morning Alertness," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 4 (January 27, 2015): 1232, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1418490112.

Chapter 11

Schedule Important Relationships



Family and friends help us live our values of connection, loyalty, and responsibility. They need you and you need them, so they are clearly far more important than a mere “residual beneficiary,” a term I first heard in an

Economics 101 class. In business, a residual beneficiary is the chump who gets whatever is left over when a company is liquidated—typically, not much. In life, our loved ones deserve better, and yet, if we're not careful with how we plan our time, residual beneficiaries are exactly what they become.

One of my most important values is to be a caring, involved, and fun dad. While I aspire to live out this value, being a fully present dad is not always "convenient." An email from a client informs me that my website is down; the plumber texts to tell me that his train is stalled and he needs to reschedule; my bank notifies me of an unexpected charge on my card. Meanwhile, my daughter sits there, waiting for me to play my next card in our game of gin rummy.

To combat this problem, I've intentionally scheduled time with my daughter every week. Much like I schedule time for a business meeting or time for myself, I block out time on my schedule to be with her. To make sure we always have something fun to do, we spent one afternoon writing down over a hundred things to do together in town, each one on a separate little strip of paper. Then, we rolled up all the little strips and placed them inside our "fun jar." Now, every Friday afternoon, we simply pull an activity from the fun jar and do it. Sometimes we'll visit a museum, while other times we'll play in the park or visit a highly rated ice cream parlor across town. That time is reserved just for us.

Truth be told, the fun jar idea doesn't always work as smoothly as I'd like. It's hard for me to muster up the energy to head to the playground when New York's temperatures fall below freezing. On those days, a cup of hot cocoa and a couple of chapters of *Harry Potter* sound way more inviting for us both. What's important, though, is that I've made it a priority in my weekly schedule to live up to my values. Having this time in my schedule allows me to be the dad that I envision myself to be.

Similarly, my wife, Julie, and I make sure we have time scheduled for each other. Twice a month, we plan a special date. Sometimes we see a live show or indulge in an exotic meal. But mostly, we just walk and talk for hours. Regardless of what we do, we know that this time is cemented in our schedules and will not be compromised. In the absence of this scheduled time together, it's too easy to fill our days with other errands, like running to the grocery store or cleaning the house. My scheduled time with Julie

allows me to live out my value of intimacy. There's no one else I can open up to the way I can with her, but this can only happen if we make the time.

Equality is another value in my marriage. I always thought I behaved in a way that upheld that value. I was wrong. Before my wife and I had a clear schedule in place, we found ourselves bickering about why certain tasks weren't getting done around the house. Several studies show that among heterosexual couples, husbands don't do their fair share of the housework, and I was, I'm sad to admit, one of them. Darcy Lockman, a psychologist in New York City, wrote in the *Washington Post*, "Employed women partnered with employed men carry 65 percent of the family's child-care responsibilities, a figure that has held steady since the turn of the century."

But like many men Lockman interviewed in her research, I was somehow oblivious to the tasks my wife handled. As one mother told Lockman,

> *He's on his phone or computer while I'm running around like a crazy person getting the kids' stuff, doing the laundry. He has his coffee in the morning reading his phone while I'm packing lunches, getting our daughter's clothes out, helping our son with his homework. He just sits there. He doesn't do it on purpose. He has no awareness of what's happening around him. I ask him about it and he gets defensive.*

It was as if Lockman had interviewed my wife. But if my wife wanted help, why didn't she just ask? I later came to realize that figuring out how I could be helpful was itself work. Julie couldn't tell me how I could help because she already had a dozen things on her mind. She wanted me to take initiative, to jump in and start helping out. But I didn't know how. I had no idea, so I'd either stand there confused or slink off to do something else. Too many evenings followed this script, ending in late dinners, hurt feelings, and sometimes tears.

During one of our date days, we sat down and listed all the household tasks that each of us performed; making sure nothing was left out. Comparing Julie's (seemingly endless) list to mine was a wake-up call that my value of equality in our marriage needed some help. We agreed to split

the household jobs and, most important, timeboxed the tasks on our schedules, leaving no doubt about when they would get done.

Working our way toward a more equitable split of the housework restored integrity to my value of equality in my marriage, which also improved the odds of having a long and happy relationship. Lockman's research supports this benefit: "A growing body of research in family and clinical studies demonstrates that spousal equality promotes marital success and that inequality undermines it."

There's no doubt scheduling time for family and ensuring they were no longer the residual beneficiary of my time greatly improved my relationship with my wife and daughter.

The people we love most should not be content getting whatever time is left over. Everyone benefits when we hold time on our schedule to live up to our values and do our share.

This domain extends beyond just family. Not scheduling time for the important relationships in our lives is more harmful than most people realize. Recent studies have shown that a dearth of social interaction not only leads to loneliness but is also linked to a range of harmful physical effects. In fact, a lack of close friendships may be hazardous to your health.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that friendships affect longevity comes from the ongoing Harvard Study of Adult Development. Since 1938, researchers have been following the physical health and social habits of 724 men. Robert Waldinger, the study's current director, said in a TEDx talk, "The clearest message that we get from this seventy-five-year study is this: good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period." Socially disconnected people are, according to Waldinger, "less happy; their health declines earlier in midlife; their brain functioning declines sooner; [and]

they live shorter lives than people who are not lonely." Waldinger warned, "It's not just the number of friends you have . . . It's the quality of your close relationships that matters."

What makes for a quality friendship? William Rawlins, a professor of interpersonal communications at Ohio University who studies the way people interact over the course of their lives, told the *Atlantic* that satisfying friendships need three things: "somebody to talk to, someone to depend on, and someone to enjoy." Finding someone to talk to, depend on, and enjoy often comes naturally when we're young, but as we grow into adulthood, the model for how to maintain friendships is less clear. We graduate and go our separate ways, pursuing careers and starting new lives miles apart from our best friends.

Suddenly work obligations and ambitions take priority over having beers with buddies. If children enter the picture, exhilarating nights on the town become exhausted nights on the couch. Unfortunately, the less time we invest in people, the easier it is to make do without them, until one day it is too awkward to reconnect.

This is how friendships die—they starve to death.

But as the research reveals, by allowing our friendships to starve, we're also malnourishing our own bodies and minds. If the food of friendship is time together, how do we make the time to ensure we're all fed?

Despite our busy schedules and surfeit of children, my friends and I have developed a social routine that ensures regular get-togethers. We call it the "kibbutz," which in Hebrew means "gathering." For our gathering, four couples, my wife and me included, meet every two weeks to talk about one question over a picnic lunch. The question might range from a deep inquiry like, "What is one thing you are thankful your parents taught you?" to a more practical question like, "Should we push our kids to learn things they don't want, like playing the piano?"

Having a topic helps in two ways: first, it gets us past the small talk of sports and weather, giving us an opportunity to open up about stuff that really matters; second, it prevents the gender split that often happens when couples convene in groups—men in one corner, women in another. Having a question of the day gets us all talking together.

The most important element of the gathering is its consistency; rain or shine, the kibbutz appears on our calendars every other week—same time, same place. There's no back-and-forth emailing to hammer out logistics. To keep it even simpler, each couple brings their own food so there's no prep or cleanup. If one couple can't make it, no big deal; the kibbutz goes ahead as planned.

The gathering lasts about two hours, and I always leave with new ideas and insights. Most important, I feel closer to my friends. Given the importance of close relationships, it's essential we plan ahead. Knowing there is time set aside for the kibbutz ensures it happens.

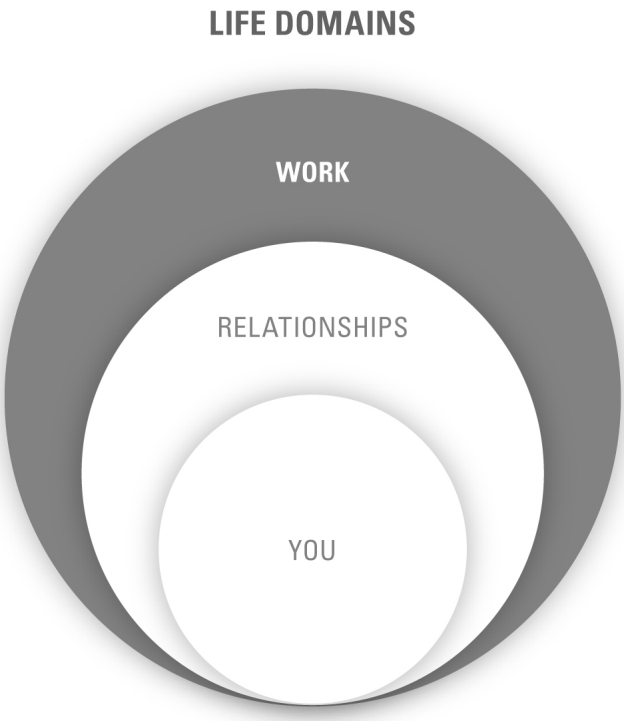
No matter what kind of activity fulfills your need for friendship, it's essential to make time on your calendar for it. The time we spend with our friends isn't just pleasurable—it's an investment in our future health and well-being.

REMEMBER THIS

- **The people you love deserve more than getting whatever time is left over.** If someone is important to you, make regular time for them on your calendar.
- **Go beyond scheduling date days with your significant other.** Put domestic chores on your calendar to ensure an equitable split.
- **A lack of close friendships may be hazardous to your health.** Ensure you maintain important relationships by scheduling time for regular get-togethers.

Chapter 12

Sync with Stakeholders at Work



Unlike the other life domains, I don’t need to remind you to make time for work. You probably don’t have much of a choice when it comes to this area. Given that work likely takes up more of your waking hours than any

of the other domains, it's even more important to ensure the time spent there is consistent with your values.

Work can help people live their values of being collaborative, industrious, and persistent. It also allows us to spend time on something meaningful when we labor for someone else's benefit—like our customers or an important cause. Unfortunately, many of us find that our workday is a hectic mess, plagued by constant interruptions, pointless meetings, and a never-ending flow of emails.

Thankfully, it doesn't have to be this way. We can do more and live better by clarifying our values and expectations with each other at work. Clarification around how we spend our time at work fosters and reinforces the central quality of a positive working relationship: trust.

Every company has its policies. However, when it comes to how employees manage their workloads, many managers have little idea how their colleagues spend their time. Similarly, perhaps the biggest unknown to the employee is how they should spend their time, both inside and outside of work. How responsive should employees be after hours? Are they required to attend happy hours or other events full of "mandatory fun"? Will managers and clients expect employees to fulfill last-minute deadlines? Should they let their spouses know to expect late-night outings when company execs drop into town?

These questions are significant because they directly affect our schedules and, subsequently, the time we have for the other domains in life. A recent survey found 83 percent of working professionals check email after work. The same study notes that two-thirds of respondents take work-related devices, such as laptops or smartphones, with them on vacation. And about half the respondents said they've sent work-related emails during meals with family or friends.

Staying late at work or feeling pressured to reply to work-related messages after hours means spending less time with our family and friends or doing something for ourselves. If these demands become more than the employee bargained for, trust and loyalty can erode, along with one's health and relationships. The trouble is, we don't typically know the answers to these questions until we are already in a role.

There are also many unknowns from the employer's perspective. When tasks and projects take longer than originally planned and expectations

aren’t met, managers are left guessing why. Is the employee not capable? Is he not motivated? Is she looking for another job? How are they spending their time? In response to underperformance, managers often ask employees to do more and work longer hours. But this common knee-jerk reaction asks employees to give more than they expected, stressing the working relationship and prompting them to push back in subtle ways.

What does this pushback look like? While often done unknowingly, we find ourselves doing low-priority work, slacking off at our desks, chitchatting too much with colleagues, and generally reducing productive output.

Other times, we (perhaps unconsciously) sabotage our companies by doing pseudowork, tasks that *look* like work but aren’t in line with the company’s top priorities. (Think: spending time on pet projects, corporate politicking, sending more emails, or holding more meetings than necessary.) This sort of pushback seems to increase when people work more hours. In fact, studies have found that workers who spend more than fifty-five hours per week on the job have reduced productivity; this problem is further compounded by their making more mistakes and inflicting more useless work on their colleagues, resulting in more time spent to get even less done.

What’s the solution to this madness?

Using a detailed, timeboxed schedule helps clarify the central trust pact between employers and employees.

Through regular review, the two parties can make informed decisions regarding whether the employee’s time is spent appropriately and help them allocate time to more important tasks.

An advertising sales executive at a large tech company in Manhattan, April struggled with her schedule. The mounting pressure to sell more and do more in pursuit of a management role had embittered her friendly disposition. Those pressures infected April's schedule in the form of more meetings, more unplanned conversations, and more emails. Those additional tasks crowded out the time she had to focus on her priorities: caring for her customers, closing more sales, and demonstrating greater results.

When I met with April in her office, she looked frazzled. She had two months left to close over a third of her annual sales quota of $15 million, and I could tell her mind was elsewhere. April feared she wouldn't meet her goal and had concluded that *she* was the problem—she just wasn't working hard enough and therefore had to do better. In her mind, *better* meant working even more hours.

Striving to be more productive was making April miserable and was causing her to neglect the other domains of her life. But productivity itself wasn't her problem; she was a productive person who could squeeze a lot out of a small amount of time. Rather, the problem was her lack of a timeboxed schedule, compounded by the self-limiting belief that she, and not her management of time, was the problem. "I'm too slow," she told me over lunch one day. But there was nothing wrong with April. She wasn't slow, but she *was* lacking the productivity tools for her new role.

Though scheduling her time at work didn't come naturally to her, April subdivided her workday to account for the most important tasks she wanted to accomplish. She carved out time for focused work first, aware that creating new client proposals could be done faster and better if she did it without interruption. Every diversion slowed her down and made it more difficult to get back to customizing the pitch. Then she reserved a block of time for client calls and meetings, followed by time in the afternoon for processing emails and messages. I encouraged April to share her work-related timeboxed schedule with her manager, David.

To her surprise, when they sat down to discuss her schedule, April found that David was extremely supportive of her intention to stick to a more planned-out day. "He knew I was burning the candle at both ends," she told me. "When I proposed a weekly schedule, he actually seemed

relieved. He told me it was helpful to know when he could call or message me instead of guessing if I was with my family."

When she sat down with David, she realized many of the commitments clogging her calendar weren't nearly as important to him as the time she spent closing deals. Thanks to their newfound alignment, David agreed she didn't need to attend so many meetings or mentor so many people and reassured her that this would not adversely affect her career ambitions, as long as she put in the time for her most important task: increasing revenue.

To help them stay in sync, April and David decided to meet for fifteen minutes every Monday morning at eleven o'clock. Reviewing her schedule for the week ahead would reassure them both that April was spending her time well and enable them to adjust accordingly, if necessary. At the end of the meeting, she realized she could gain greater control over her workday and also cut back on the time she spent tethered to her phone at night—time that came at the expense of her personal life. April loved the outcome: a detailed view of her entire week that respected her values, reduced distractions, and, ultimately, granted her more time to do what she really wanted.

April's story is not everyone's story. The way April allocated her time won't be the way you spend your time, but schedule syncing is essential, whether with a family member or an employer. Regularly aligning expectations around how you'll spend your time is paramount, and must be done in regular, predictable increments. If your schedule can be synced weekly, then review it and get agreement for that period, but if your schedule changes daily, getting into the routine of a brief daily check-in with your manager will serve you both well. If you report to multiple bosses, a timeboxed calendar can serve as a way to get alignment around how you spend your time. There's no mystery about what's getting done when there's transparency in your schedule.

Remember, the Indistractable Model has four parts. Mastering internal triggers is the first step and making time for traction is the second, but there's much more we can do, as you'll soon learn. In part five, we'll also dive into the role of workplace culture and why persistent distraction is often a sign of organizational dysfunction. For now, it's important not to shortchange the simple yet highly effective technique of schedule syncing.

Whether at work, at home, or on our own, planning ahead and timeboxing our schedules is an essential step to becoming indistractable. By defining how we spend our time and syncing with the stakeholders in our lives, we ensure that we do the things that matter and ignore the things that don’t. It frees us from the trivialities of our day and gives us back the time we can’t afford to waste.

But once we’ve reclaimed that time, how do we get the most out of it? We’ll explore that question in the next section.

REMEMBER THIS

- **Syncing your schedule with stakeholders at work is critical for making time for traction in your day.** Without visibility into how you spend your time, colleagues and managers are more likely to distract you with superfluous tasks.
- **Sync as frequently as your schedule changes.** If your schedule template changes from day to day, have a daily check-in. However, most people find a weekly alignment is sufficient.