

# SUMMARY

## MY MORNING ROUTINE

**BENJAMIN SPALL AND MICHAEL**



# **Summary of “My Morning Routine” by Benjamin Spall and Michael Xander**

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Written for anyone who feels like sleep is a drug, their bed is their dealer, and their alarm clock is the police, *My Morning Routine* (2018) will teach you how to optimize your morning routine for a successful start to the day.

Introduction	5
Find Your Motivation	6
You Can do Your Best Work in the Mornings	8
The Benefits of Early Morning Exercise	10
The Value of Morning Meditation	12
Give Yourself a Little “Me” Time	14
Final Summary	15



# QuickRead

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# Introduction

What does your morning routine look like? If you're like most of us, you probably don't bound out of bed first thing in the morning, feeling refreshed and positive like all those people in commercials advertising the next great way to get your best night's sleep. Instead, you probably play a game of whack-a-mole with your alarm, hitting "snooze" five times before realizing you've definitely cut it too close and you're about to be late. Or maybe you lay in bed and scroll through your social media for a few minutes before you actually get up. But one thing's for certain, whether your mornings are lazy or frenetic, most of us aren't getting off to our best start. But wouldn't it be nice if you could? Wouldn't it be great if you had a morning routine that left you feeling energized and full of creativity?

Well, by following Spall and Xander's morning life hacks, you can! And the best part is that their system doesn't advocate a set of immovable rules that you have to follow dogmatically. Instead, it recognizes that everyone is different and we need the ability to craft an individualized morning routine that suits our unique needs. So, by taking examples from their interviews of 64 of the world's most successful people, Spall and Xander bring you the best practices they learned from authors, artists, Olympic athletes, and everybody in-between! And through this summary, we're going to learn:

- Why meditation is crucial for your morning routine
- Why working out boosts your mental health and
- How you can craft your perfect morning routine

# Find Your Motivation

We've all been there-- your alarm goes off in the morning and you find yourself wondering if it would really be that bad if you just quit your job. Or dropped out of school. Or skipped that big meeting. Whatever your morning holds, in the early, drowsy hours, we can rationalize almost anything if it will give us a few extra minutes of sleep. But mornings don't have to be a nightmare! One of the best ways to reduce your morning stress is to give yourself a reason to get out of bed every morning. Or rather, a reason that transcends your fear of getting fired. (Because, let's be honest, that's what gets most of us out of bed). But what if we replaced that grudging reluctance with a motivation that excited us? What would our lives look like then?

We might find that they look something like the mornings of MIT president Leo Rafael Reif. He sets his alarm for 6 a.m. every morning, but he's usually awake a good 30 minutes before it ever goes off. So, why would anyone choose to get up at 5:30 in the morning? Well, in Reif's case, it's because he wants to spend time going through his email inbox. That's because MIT is a diverse institution with a global impact, and as president, it's crucial that he stays in the loop with everything that affects his university. And because his day is often jam-packed with a number of important projects, Reif feels that he can't afford to take a blasé approach to the university's communication systems; without dedicating specific time to his emails, he worries he might miss something. So, his motivation for getting out of bed is staying on top of communication and promoting the wellbeing of his institution! That's worth missing some sleep for, right?

But you don't have to be the leader of a global organization to find a motivation for getting out of bed. The root of your motivation might be similar to Reif's, though, because no matter who you are or what you do, all it takes to get motivated is to find something you really care about. Just consider author Caroline Paul, who's also an early riser. Although she's not responsible for a university, she still chooses to get up at 6:00 am because

she wants to spend a few hours reading before her busy day takes over. Because reading is something she loves, Paul finds that a couple of hours spent engaging with a good book provides a soothing and rejuvenating start to her day and sets her up for success. Similarly, street photographer Andre Wagner also values mornings and consistently starts his day by leaving the house at 7:00 am. The ability to wander the streets of New York with his camera, capturing the early morning light and sleepy scenes brings him a sense of renewal and peace while jumpstarting his creativity.

If you find yourself admiring their dedication and asking, “How do they do it?” the answer is not that they just hate sleep. Instead, they all have one common denominator: the refusal to hit the snooze button. In fact, during the course of their interviews, the authors noticed that this was a consistent theme among every successful early riser they met with. Because although 71% said they used an alarm to start their days, only 34% said they made use of the snooze button. This means that, for the most part, every successful early riser recognized that we might want to grab a few extra minutes of sleep, but it’ll make us feel worse in the long run. So, rather than wasting our time and energy with the endless “five more minutes” plea, these early birds are smart enough to resist that temptation and jump out of bed.

# You Can do Your Best Work in the Mornings

If you've never been a morning person, that might sound preposterous. But morning productivity isn't limited to a chosen few who are wired that way. We can all take advantage of those early morning hours to jumpstart our day and tackle those things on our list that we never seem to get around to. Sheena Brady knows this from personal experience. In order to dedicate time to her new startup, Tease Tea, she spends the hours from 7:00-11:00 am working before she heads to her "regular job," working on Shopify.

Similarly, author and public speaker Todd Henry finds that early mornings help him to get rid of that "never enough hours in the day" mentality. Instead of trying to cram everything in at the tail end of his day, when he was already exhausted from a long work day, he started getting up earlier to make time for the things that were most important to him. And the success of his career just goes to show how well it's paying off! So, once you're willing to get up earlier, how can you make the most of your mornings? One way to get your day off to the right start is to avoid checking your emails first thing. The authors found that many successful people swear by this practice, including author Ryan Holiday, who says that he always accomplishes at least one other task before opening his inbox in the mornings. In his case, that's a bit of early-morning writing, but you can start your day with whatever works best for you, whether that's a quick jog or a shower that gets you up and running.

Shane Parrish, founder of the Farnam Street blog, also swears by the no-email rule. After noticing how he felt enslaved to his emails, he stopped letting that pressure take control and found that by taking this one simple step, his day and mental health were significantly improved! So, what do successful people do with that time instead? In addition to wake-up activities like exercise or bathing, many successful early risers report that taking control of your day by starting a to-do list is often helpful. For example, Geoff Colvin, senior editor at Fortune magazine, starts every morning by sitting down and writing a list of everything he wants to



accomplish that day. And once he has that list on paper, he immediately tackles those goals.

# The Benefits of Early Morning Exercise

If you've just barely managed to convince yourself of the value of getting up early, exercising first thing in the morning might be the last thing you want to do. But believe it or not, the benefits of early morning exercise are indisputable-- and invaluable! In fact, it's considered such a vital component of a successful morning routine that over 79% of the authors' interviewees confirmed that they all start their mornings off with some form of exercise. And it's every bit as good for the mind as it is for the body! Olympic swimmer Caroline Burekle can attest to this; she starts her day at 5:30 every morning and hits the gym before she does anything else, remarking that for her, it's not just part of what she has to do as an athlete. She considers it a form of meditation.

By contrast, Sherry Lansing, former president of Twentieth Century Fox, admits that she often skips her workout routine but acknowledges that she feels a noticeable difference in her mind and body when she makes time for exercise. Her honesty raises a great point because sometimes, skipping your workout is unavoidable. But having the self-awareness to recognize that you feel better when you exercise (and remembering to get right back into your routine as soon as possible) is vital. However, it's also important to remember the necessity of balance. Don't overwork yourself; if you miss your routine one day, working extra hard the next day isn't more productive, it's dangerous. So, take a tip from Lansing's playbook and develop a structured routine which alternates between different forms of exercise.

For example, she dedicates Mondays and Wednesdays to Pilates and Tuesdays and Thursdays to running on a treadmill for an hour and a half, followed by some weightlifting. This variation between types of exercise helps to avoid strain and injury (and prevents boredom at the same time!) Although getting started can seem like an impossible task, breaking your exercise goals down into small chunks can help you build a steady routine over time. And if you're worried about finding time, it might be helpful to

incorporate your exercise routine into an activity you already do every day. For example, you could do a quick set of jumping jacks while your coffee brews in the morning!

# The Value of Morning Meditation

Meditation is all over social media, so if you're not into that sort of thing, it's easy to dismiss it as the next big fad. But in fact, it's so much more! And in addition to the benefits it offers your personal life, meditation can also help you optimize your professional success. Or at least, that's what over 50% of the authors' interviewees and a few leading scientists say. But you don't have to take my word for it! Just take a look at a few of their examples, like Michael Acton Smith, CEO of the meditation app Calm. Smith is not only invested in promoting meditation through his business, he believes in it so much that he kicks off every morning meeting at work with a guided meditation session.

Likewise, Aiste Gazdar, founder of London-based Wild Food Cafe, agrees that meditation is the only way to get her day off to a successful start. Not only does she start her day early, she uses meditation as that first activity of the morning (the one you should practice before checking your emails). Gazdar reports that her morning meditation sessions are little slices of calm which she can use to bring peace to her day before real life gets overwhelming and that that early dose of calm is so crucial, she can't afford to go without missing a session. Smith and Gazdar's assessments are supported by the testimonials of other notable figures such as Ed Catmull, the president of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios, and author Ruth Ozeki. Both confirm that they meditate for 30-60 minutes each day and never allow themselves to go without because of the peace and comfort it brings.

So, if you feel like adding peace and comfort to your day is a pretty good idea, let's take a look at how you can put that into practice. For starters, remember that meditation is all about being present in the moment and mindful of your surroundings, so if you're not sure how to get started, focus on a basic daily task like making your coffee in the morning. As your coffee brews, you can concentrate on breathing in deeply through your nose and then slowly exhaling, allowing yourself to breathe out for longer than you

breathed in. As you do so, take stock of the sensations you're experiencing-- the feeling of the kitchen tile against your bare feet, the smell of the fresh coffee, and how your body feels as the air enters and leaves your body.

By keeping your attention centered on these simple forms of sensory stimuli, you can allow your thoughts to come and go without judgment. Remember that instead of getting lost in your thoughts or being distracted by value judgments such as, "I shouldn't be thinking that" or "That's stupid," your job is to acknowledge your thoughts from a place of understanding and simply return your focus to your breathing. Continuing this practice even for a simple 20 minutes a day over a period of 21 days will help you develop a pattern of mindfulness that will infuse your days with a new sense of clarity and calm.

## Give Yourself a Little “Me” Time

As you’ve probably noticed, each of the morning routines we’ve looked at so far have a common element. No matter how these self-starters choose to spend their time, the key similarity is that none of them are doing something they have to do for work or study. Each person spends the very first hours of their morning focusing on personal development. And although they’re practicing good habits which will definitely boost their productivity and concentration for the work day, the key difference is that they’re all doing something that’s personally enriching.

So, take a note from our self-starters’ playbook and ask yourself what you would find most beneficial for jump-starting your morning. Do you want more time to read? To paint? To learn a new language or develop a new exercise routine? All of these options are available to you, whether you choose to start your day at 5:00 am or at 7:00. No matter what you choose, it’s important to remember that the first early hours of the morning are all about helping you become the healthy, fully developed person you want to be. And it doesn’t hurt that an extra dose of “me time” will help you feel more ready to take on the day!

## Final Summary

Although the successful people mentioned in this book differ greatly in terms of their life goals and occupations, they all have one thing in common: a stellar morning routine. By cultivating a unique routine which sets them up for success, each of these go-getters has discovered a formula which suits their individual needs. And you can do the same! By implementing just a few of the simple practices discussed in this book and tailoring them to your needs, you can get your day off to the best start ever. And whether you choose to prioritize motivation, exercise, reading, or writing, remember that the key isn't following one prescriptive method, it's all about getting up early and finding the habits that are healthiest for you.



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