

SUMMARY

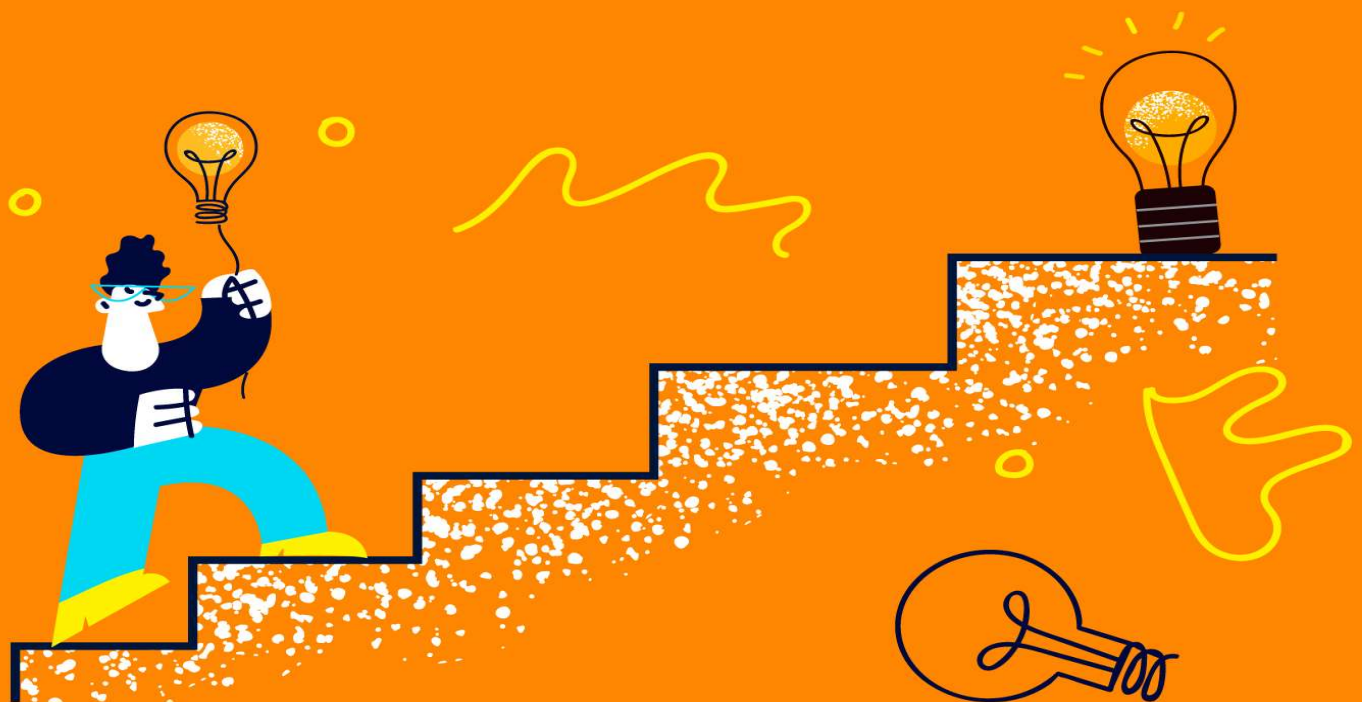
BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

TIME AND

HOW TO

SPEND IT

BY JAMES WALLMAN



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Summary of Time and How to Spend It by James Wallman

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Learn how to make smart investments with your time.

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Introduction

“You get many of me, but never enough. After the last one, your life soon will snuff. You may have one of me but one day a year, When the last one is gone, your life disappears.” Can you guess the answer to this popular riddle? If you guessed “days,” then you’re exactly right! This riddle was designed to voice the human anxiety about never having enough time. Because, let’s be honest, we’ve all been there! We’ve all hit the snooze button a little too often in the morning, bargaining for another five minutes we can’t afford. We’ve all stared down the barrel of a looming deadline, wondering what would happen if we couldn’t finish something in time. And we’ve all fretted over the fleeting days of our lives, worrying that perhaps our lives are too short, that perhaps we’ve wasted too much time.

Indeed, human beings have a uniquely fraught relationship with time and we always worry that we have neglected to spend our time wisely. But the author believes that we shouldn’t have to struggle with this perpetual anxiety. Instead, by following his top tips for maximizing our time, James Wallman posits that we can take control of our days and use our time in such a way that our lives will be happier, healthier, and more productive as a result! And over the course of this summary, we’ll examine his theories about time and how to spend it.



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We Have More Free Time Than we Think we Do

In an episode of the police comedy series Brooklyn Nine Nine, a character jokingly chastises his girlfriend for not taking her phone with her into the bathroom. He jokes that “looking at memes while you’re on the toilet is the whole reason to go in there!” And it’s pretty safe to say that we’ve all had that experience. It’s especially likely if your days are dominated by a hectic work or school schedule. In many cases, your moment alone in the bathroom is your only time to take a breather, relax, and scroll through your social media. But of course, before you know it, that five minutes has turned into thirty or even an hour as you drag your break out. We often steal these little moments of time throughout our days. And on one hand, that’s completely understandable; there’s nothing wrong with taking a few moments to yourself during the day. In fact, the author firmly believes that we all deserve some down time!

But the trouble is how and when we access that time. For example, in the previously mentioned case of an extra-long bathroom break, you’re literally stealing time from yourself when you take a long time in the bathroom to scroll through memes. Why do that when you could dedicate a special hour or so to simply relaxing or doing something you enjoy more? (And, let’s be honest, scrolling through memes is fun but it’s probably not anybody’s favorite hobby!) So, why not dedicate time that you could enjoy freely? The author posits that we don’t deliberately set aside time because we often feel guilty for doing so. Growing up in a capitalist society has taught most people to prioritize productivity above all else and this has created generations of people who don’t know how to relax. As a result, we tend to view unproductive time as a waste.

But despite the lies that are fed to us by capitalism, the author affirms that nothing could be further from the truth! Time spent in relaxation is vital for mental and physical health. And productivity should not be the purpose of our lives. You deserve to exist as more than just a cog in the capitalist machine, with the majority of your time, life, and energy being consumed by the production and consumption of goods. But sadly, it’s one thing to tell

ourselves this. It's another to actually internalize and believe it. So, because we often struggle to believe that truth, we struggle with feeling guilty about scheduling relaxation and we steal time alone with memes instead. And despite that stolen time with our social media, we reach the end of our days feeling weary and beleaguered, wishing that we had more time to enjoy the things we really love. This lingering malaise is often compounded by the popular acronym FOMO: the Fear Of Missing Out.

The pervasive prevalence of social media encourages us to believe that everyone else is out there living a happier and more exciting life than you. Social media offers us a (heavily filtered) glimpse at other people's lives, inviting us to imagine that they're enjoying better experiences, better clothes, better days, and that our own lives fail in comparison. So, even while we feel guilty for taking a moment to relax, we also feel guilty for not saying yes to every opportunity that comes our way. It's no surprise that this results in a miserable, frenetic existence. And the author believes that we should take advantage of our right to take back control and reclaim our quality of life.



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Be the Hero of Your Own STORY

Did you ever read those “choose your own adventure” books as a kid? At the end of each chapter, you got to evaluate a scenario and decide which ending you wanted to read. If you chose Option A, your story might lead to one type of adventure. But if you chose Option B, it might have a completely different ending. Well, the author posits that our lives are just like that. Our lives are our very own “choose your own adventure” story. And we have a choice about the directions our lives ultimately take!

That’s why the author coined an acronym to help. And it’s no coincidence that the acronym spells out STORIES! Those seven letters represent the seven pillars that will help you reclaim the direction of your life. We’ll explore each of these concepts in detail in the following chapters, but for now, you need to know that they stand for: Story, Transformation, Outside & Offline, Relationships, Intensity, Extraordinary, Status & Significance. You can use these seven pillars as guidelines for your future decision-making processes. We’ll start by imagining how that would work in practice. But before we dive in, let’s examine one of the core insights of the author’s research. Through the course of his study on the human relationship with time, he discovered that people overwhelmingly find experiences more meaningful than activities.

To put this into context, you could say that brushing your teeth is an activity because it’s a physical action you do. But brushing your teeth has never been the highlight of anybody’s day! The same could be said of scrolling through memes on your Facebook feed. By contrast, swimming with dolphins in Maui is an experience, and it’s one that you’re unlikely to forget. So, if you were given a choice between brushing your teeth, checking Facebook, or swimming with dolphins, which experience do you think would be most meaningful to you? Which one would seem like the best use of your time? Pretty much everyone would say swimming with dolphins, right? And because it’s such a meaningful experience, you’re also unlikely to feel as though that moment was a waste of your time. So, going forward, your first

lesson from this chapter is to prioritize experiences over mundane activities when you choose how to spend your time.

The next lesson is all about evaluating your life narrative. So, just like the example we used in the beginning of this chapter, you should think about your life like a story. And that means evaluating the individual chapters, characters, and incidents that contribute to your story. By applying the author's STORY acronym to your life, you can use this as a template to evaluate your future experiences and decisions by asking yourself a simple question: how does this experience impact my life story? When evaluating experiences according to this model, transformation is the core ingredient to consider. Your goal is not to amass a collection of humdrum and mundane memories that left no impact on you or anyone else. For example, if you spend your life eating potato chips and watching YouTube videos, that can hardly be considered transformative. It's also unlikely to have a positive impact on you or anyone else.

But swimming with dolphins or volunteering at a local soup kitchen could definitely change your life! For example, while swimming with dolphins, you might realize that you feel a sense of peace, joy, or calm you've never experienced in any other aspect of your life. You might discover the one thing you've always needed or realize what your life has been missing. Your experience with this feeling could motivate you to change careers or make a similarly big life decision that would invite peace and joy into your everyday life. Similarly, volunteering with a local soup kitchen could help you to reevaluate your life's priorities. You might be overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude for the blessings in your own life or discover a calling to help others. You might find that giving back to the community has unexpected restorative benefits that you desperately needed. As a result, both of these experiences have the power to be uniquely transformative in their own ways.

But, of course, that doesn't mean that all the transformative experiences in your life have to be big or spectacular. They don't have to involve travel or exotic vacations; you can find transformative experiences right in your own

backyard. But as you choose how to spend your time in the future, you should be focused on finding transformative experiences, wherever they might be.



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Developing Your STORY

Now that we've unpacked the meaning of the Story and Transformation aspects of the author's acronym, it's time to take a closer look at the other letters. We'll start with the O, which stands for Outside & Offline. As you've probably already guessed, this part is inviting you to disconnect and engage with nature. Because nature has uniquely transformative benefits of its own! Disconnecting from your indoor, online life is also easier than you might think. For example, most of us make time to go to the gym or work out in some capacity. So, what if you took that work-out outside? Even if you simply go for a quiet and relaxed walk, the author's research indicates that spending a little bit of time outside can have a powerful impact on your mental health and well-being! That's because studies have shown that people are happiest when they're outside, away from their workplaces, and surrounded by greenery. This is in direct contrast to the proven negative impact of social media. Studies also show that our happiness plummets and our anxiety spikes in response to the time we spend on our phones. So, unplug for at least 15 minutes each day and take a walk!

Next up is Relationships. Investing in healthy relationships is an awesome way to spend your time! It's no secret that healthy relationships make us happy, prevent loneliness, and help us to cultivate meaningful life experiences. So, whether you enjoy playing soccer, playing board games, or playing online video games, find someone to play them with! The type of activity doesn't matter; each of these are examples of activities that you can use to bond with someone else and develop a happy, mutually beneficial relationship. And if you're an introvert, don't worry-- we're not leaving you out! Even if you enjoy more solitary pursuits, the author observes that you can still find meaning and belonging by identifying with a community who shares your interests. For example, maybe you enjoy reading by yourself in silence with a cup of coffee. But you could also enjoy a book club or volunteering at a library! These opportunities would enable you to continue enjoying your solitary pursuits while also connecting with a like minded community. And whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, a team player

or a solitary bookworm, there are multiple opportunities for developing happy and satisfying relationships with others.

Next up is the Intensity part of your STORY. When you pursue your interests and transformative experiences, it's important for them to include a certain amount of intensity. If they're too easy, you'll lose interest. If they're too difficult, it will just be unsatisfying. For example, if you were to work a preschooler's puzzle, it would be too easy for you; your mind wouldn't be engaged at all and you would likely grow bored and lose interest. By contrast, if you were to work an extremely advanced puzzle for competitive puzzle nerds, you might find it too challenging and grow frustrated. Neither of these options would leave you saying, "Wow, that was a fun and satisfying experience!" But if you were to attempt a puzzle that's just above your typical level of mastery, your brain would enjoy the pleasant challenge of beating your personal best. When you finally mastered the puzzle, you would feel excited and accomplished. And that's the level of intensity you should strive for in your personal and professional life.

But it's also important that your time should be Extraordinary. Put simply, you should seek extraordinary experiences. But as we discussed in the previous chapter, you don't have to fly to Maui and swim with dolphins every week in order to cultivate an extraordinary experience. You can find extraordinary moments in your everyday life by simply shifting your priorities and awareness of each moment. For example, the opportunity to do a random act of kindness might be a small, extraordinary moment in your day. And lastly, that brings us to the S in our acronym: Status. We commonly associate status with extraordinary things like having an absurd amount of money or being a celebrity. But the author observes that neither of these things are true measures of status. Rather, status is determined by your perception of yourself, not what others think of you.

However, we often struggle to accept this because it seems that social status grants a certain amount of power and advantages in life. But the author argues that we can manufacture these advantages for ourselves by pursuing the things that will make us feel better about ourselves: education, money,

and power. You've often heard the saying that "knowledge is power" and the author believes that this is absolutely true. The more you know, the more you will feel that you are qualified for opportunities. As a result, you'll put yourself forward for new jobs, experiences, and leadership positions. Similarly, if you work hard at earning more money, you can open more doors for yourself and unlock access to a host of new experiences. This in turn will help you to feel more powerful.

But that doesn't mean that you're seeking power over others in the same fashion as a dictator. Rather, it might simply mean that you are an influential figure in your workplace or community and that you have the power to make a positive impact on the lives of those around you. And as a result of taking control of your life, you will also feel that you have more power over yourself. You will know that you have the power to get things done and create the life you want because you've seen yourself in action. And it all started by making smart investments with your time!



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Final Summary

Time: it's one of the most valuable commodities we have. But we often waste it, spend it poorly, or let it slip away. However, the author posits that you can reclaim control of your life and your time with just a few simple tweaks to your worldview. Start by thinking of your life as a “choose your own adventure” story and by configuring yourself as the hero of your own story. You can also use the author's acronym STORIES to help you prioritize your Story, Transformation, Outside & Offline, Relationships, Intensity, Extraordinary, Status & Significance. By adjusting your priorities accordingly, you can invest your time in the things that truly matter and thus create a truly satisfying life.



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