BEAT

INFORMATION

OVERLOAD

How To Finally Beat Information
Overload, Avoid Overwhelm And Have a
Clearer Mind To Move Forward

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Introduction

As a society, we have instant access to more information than ever before. With the arrival of the computer, the invention of the Internet, and the popularity of social media, we have entered into a world of 24/7 information. We have so much information coming into our brains that we don't stop and take the time needed to decipher, interpret, and apply meaning to the knowledge we've gained. We've become absorbed in the overpowering need to know everything about anything and everyone.
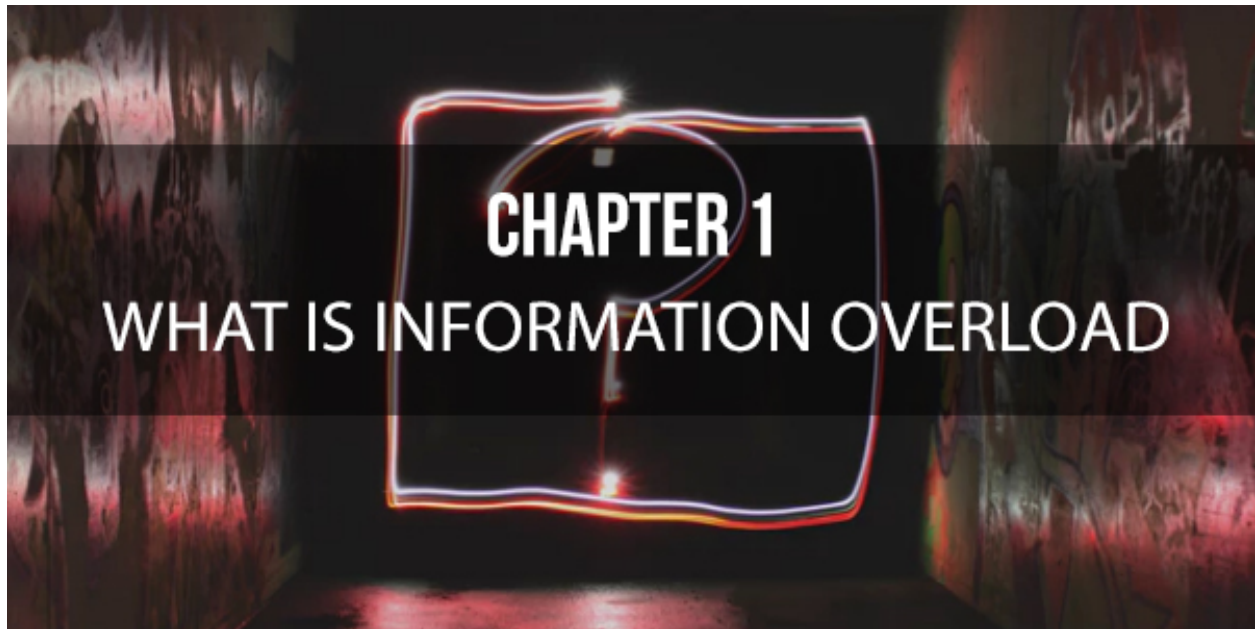
The world is changing at an exceedingly rapid pace. Life seems to have become much more demanding and stressful over the last several decades. We've officially entered the Age of Information that is being ruled by computers, smartphones, and a constant stream of information that we have a need to know relationship

with. We have a hard time separating ourselves from our phones for even five minutes. Technology has taken over our lives and overloaded our minds.

All the information that we obtain while surfing the web and browsing our social media sites has created a technology addiction in much of the population. We've forgotten what silence feels like and are overloaded with information that is available to us 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This has led to the overshadowing of our ability to communicate face-to-face and has clouded our mind with digital information that has affected how we process and retain information. This addiction to technology has also resulted in more people trying to multitask, which results in decreased productivity and focus, and an increase in erroneous errors.

To bring ourselves back to the present and beat the information overload that we've become subject to, we have to be willing to disconnect from technology and reconnect with each other. This book will guide you through the process of beating information overload to have a clearer, more focused mind that will allow you to move forward.

Chapter 1 – What is Information Overload

Information overload is described as, an overwhelming feeling upon the receipt or collection of an indigestible or incomprehensible amount of information, the sense of being faced with an amount of data that one has no hope of completely processing, or when a person feels unable to read all the information that is presented or available to them, mainly where they need to make a decision based on that information but can't because there is just too much to take in, in the time available.

Today, thanks to the Internet and social media, we are always besieged by information regardless of whether we asked for it or not. This can best be seen in the obscene amount of junk emails that clog our inboxes daily. It can also be seen in the increasing number of sources where you can obtain information. People often interchange the word data and information. However, the

two are distinctly different. Data refers to the elements or pieces of information that individually have little or no value, while information is the organization and interpretation of that data into a format that provides new insight. Information, unlike data, is directly associated with learning.

When you learn a new subject, you are implementing three simultaneous processes. First, you acquire the new information that may run counter to or replace information that you already know. Second, is the process of transformation where the knowledge gained is manipulated to make it fit new tasks. The final learning process is the evaluation of the information to ensure that it is adequate to the task. Therefore, information can be described as the acquisition of new knowledge from various sources and data elements, that when internalized can affect a difference in an individual's previous thoughts, education, or actions. Keeping this in mind, information overload can be simply put as too much information that one can comprehend at any given time causing feelings of stress, helplessness, and anxiety.

The Start of Information Overload

You may not know this, but information overload predates the advent of the Internet and popularity of social media sites. In fact, it has a long history that dates back to 1453, when Gutenberg invented the printing press. The printing press allowed the development of new communication patterns, with information being printed and distributed by the millions instead of being copied by hand. People went from reading just a few hundred words a day to being able to read pages and pages of information. This resulted in a massive transformation in society.

We can only assume that people were excited by the invention of the printing press. As a result of Gutenberg's invention, books

became less expensive to produce, meaning they could be distributed to the masses. Books were no longer just for the select few and scholars. Symbolism and group presentation systems soon followed as a way to communicate messages. This included periodicals, associations, and new political parties. Shortly after, libraries began sprouting up everywhere as a way to organize all the new books of information.

It didn't take long for printing presses to start printing anything that came their way to make more money, with little attention being paid to the quality of information being printed. This resulted in scholars becoming overwhelmed with the access to this knowledge, giving birth to information overload.

In recent decades, advances in information technology have evolved from using carbon paper ditto machines to photocopying. This has made replicating information more accessible and led to information being digitized and copied in limitless numbers. The digitized information has allowed for the publishing of information that was previously restricted to the printing press. The introduction of the word processor has eliminated the need for a secretary equipped with a steno pad with access to a typewriter and white-out.

Today, information has become a valuable commodity in the knowledge economy. We love information and thrive off of it. Information has become readily available with just the click of a

button and can be automatically delivered to any electronic device. Technology has helped to increase productivity and enabled people to increase their access to information. Much like the printing press, the Internet has opened our world up to a myriad of information.

Communication has become easier and quicker thanks to the advances in cell phones, smartphones, and computers, but the information we obtain from these channels can become overwhelming. With the deluge of new information formats like text messages, Twitter, cell phone, email, etc., it's a wonder we can keep up with it all.

The Onslaught of Information

There are many reasons why people are beginning to suffer from information overload. To start, the volume of information that is available today is rising at an increasingly rapid rate. If you have a computer, you have the ability to publish content online. There are now blogs, chat forums, videos, and other communication channels where we can obtain information. Every day, an increasing amount of people are starting to participate in this age of digital information. Just on Facebook, there are more than 500 million users, with 50 percent of them logging into their account daily, spending over 700 billion minutes per month on the site, according to Facebook.

The ability to publish information is no longer limited to scholars, poets, or those who have a gift for writing. Anyone can set up a blog in mere minutes and start sharing their thoughts. As long as you have access to the Internet, publishing and sharing information can be done fairly easily, quickly, and at the simple click of a button. This makes it extremely challenging to wade through the information we're exposed to.

While search engines like Google can help us narrow down our search and provide us with relevant results, it can still be overwhelming to try to filter through the unnecessary information. The problem now is that there is an overabundance of information on every topic imaginable. While search engines attempt to provide you with unique and relevant information first, trying to decipher the information that pertains to your need is mind-boggling. Throw in social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, and you'll find a plethora of opinions and ideas on any topic you can think of, leading to an abundance of unnecessary information.

So, the question becomes, how do we manage all of this information? What can we do to prevent ourselves from becoming information addicts? Being aware that there is an issue with handling all the information is the first step. The challenge now becomes how to learn to sift through and manage the information that bombards our minds.

Chapter 2 – The Mind Under Siege
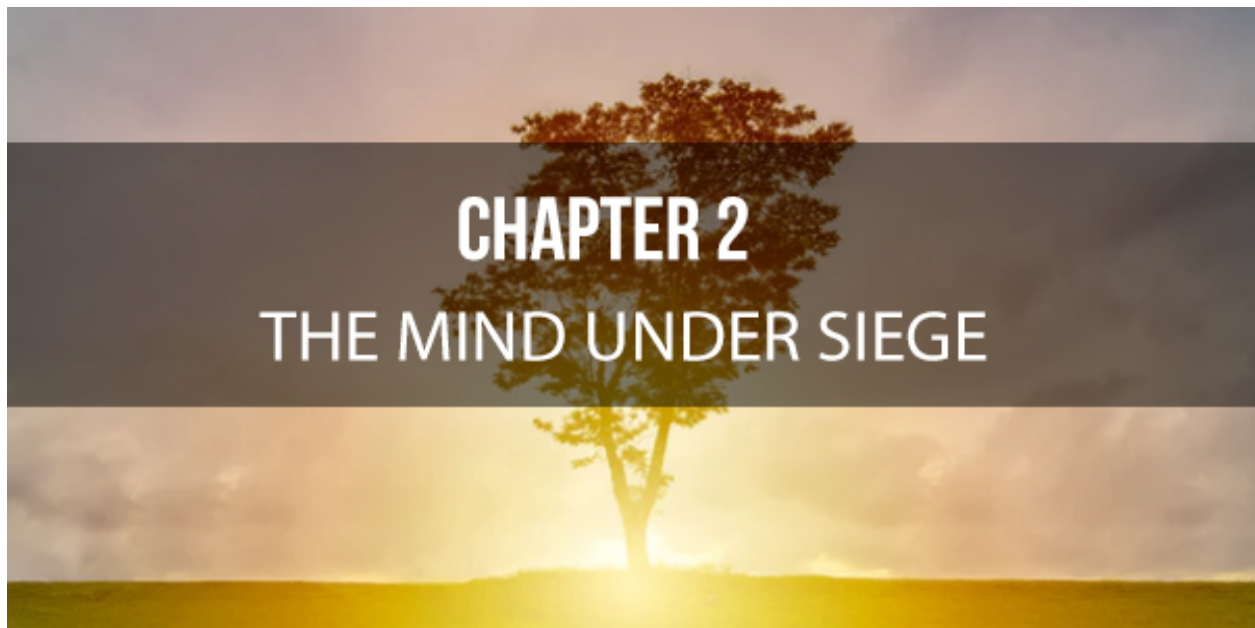
In today's digital society, our minds are under siege. We feel this from the moment we open our eyes and pick up our smartphones until the moment we fall asleep at night. Our minds are filled with tasks to complete, dates to remember, and expectations we need to fulfill. We can't seem to keep it all in front of us. We are constantly deluged with information that grows by the minute. The exponential growth of information we are required to absorb daily is impacting the way we work, live, and play. The rate at which our world is changing is fast and accelerating at breakneck speed, yet our minds are the same as they were thousands of years ago. Author and filmmaker, Rick Smolan states that a person in the 15th century would need their entire life to be exposed to the amount of information that the average person today experiences

every day. The effects of this information overload are affecting us in ways that impact every aspect of our lives. We are experiencing more stress than ever before and a general sense of being overwhelmed.

Understanding the Enemy

Information overload is the enemy that is silently creeping up on us daily. It is changing our lives in a subtle yet dramatic way. We've gradually moved from a quiet simplistic world to one that is dominated by information. However, we've barely acknowledged this change. By examining our environment and understanding the limitations on our internal memory, we can begin to form a foundation of understanding and overcome information overload.

You have to come to understand the limitations of your capabilities and establish the correct fundamental skills and techniques to overcome these limitations successfully. This will help you to reach new levels of productivity in your life. There are those among us that have quietly designed their lives based on their wishes. This creates a sense of control and calmness in today's chaotic world. Before you can reach this sense of power and calm you have to carefully examine yourself and your limitations.

Social Media's Role in Information Overload

Social media changed how the world communicates and shares information. Technological breakthroughs have drastically changed the way we obtain our news and information. In fact, 61 percent of people today get most of their news online.

Before the Internet made it possible for anyone to publish information, we relied on professional journalists to research stories and deliver to us what they discovered. Governments and corporations controlled this information, and there was often a delay in sharing information. People huddled around their televisions to be informed of world events. If companies wanted to share news or information about their business, they would have to write a press release and have it distributed to traditional media channels. The media channels would then decide what information they would share with their viewers. Companies who wanted to market to their consumers through traditional media would have to pay for advertising slots and commercial slots, which could cost them millions.

Traditional media, in essence, is very structured and predictable. There are certain rules and guidelines that have to be followed. Despite the idea of "freedom of speech" those working in traditional media are limited in what they can say and do. The information that you get from traditional media is often hierarchical, biased, and non-interactive. If you want to share your opinion about a news item, you have to mail a letter to the editor or producer of the show. Compared to today's media, the exchange of information and ideas is relatively slow in traditional media.

Enter Social Media

In 2002, two full years before Facebook launched, Jonathan Abram created the online social network site, Friendster, starting the idea of social networking sites and social media. The new social networking sites began a trend of online communication versus face-to-face communication. They allowed you to quickly find out what was going on with family and friends by just logging onto the site. If you have an Internet connection, you have the ability to communicate with anyone in the world quickly and inexpensively. This new ability to exchange information was quick and free-flowing.

After MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and a variety of other social networking sites were introduced, a whole new world was opened for people around the globe. Add to this the ability to blog and keep online journals; people can more easily share their opinions and ideas freely with people around the world. Since 2002, the Internet has exploded with an abundance of information.

As we began spending more and more time on the Internet interacting with others, governments and corporations started to take notice. Soon, businesses began to realize that for them to keep up with this new era of information and attract new customers, they were going to have to start participating in social media as well. This caused the exchange of information to

become even more rampant. Now, instead of being exposed to just news and information, we have corporate communication, promotions, and ads, thrown into the mix.

This has brought about a new way for businesses to market and advertise to consumers. Companies have started to create social media strategies and campaigns to interact with consumers. Social sites like Twitter are no longer a place for people to share what they were doing that day. With the rise in popularity of social media sites, the idea of quantity over quality has become more prevalent.

To gain more friends on Facebook or get more followers on Twitter, people will say anything and everything, so they can be seen on internet search engines. This has resulted in the quantity of information exchanged becoming more important than the quality of information available. Now, people have to wade through the muddy waters of the Internet to find information that matters the most.

A Flood of Information

Not that long ago, we would sit down to breakfast and read the morning news or watch on the TV to find out what was happening in the world. Then we would have gone about our day. With social media, we can receive our information in real time. Anything that

is happening in the world is broadcasted instantly on social media. We've entered a time where anyone can share news and information in a split second.

Information and news have become like a river, constantly flowing into our lives. The flow of communication is 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The information we receive has reached exponential proportions. Managing and processing this continuous flood of information has become an enormous challenge for most people.

There is an upper limit to how much information your mind can process at once. When you multitask, your brain isn't able to handle things efficiently. By nature, we're curious creatures, and we like to be knowledgeable and seek out information. So, when there is a continuous flood of information, it can be difficult for us to turn it off. We feel the need to know more. However, all the information coming into our brains at once can be detrimental to our health.

Chapter 3 – Understanding the Limits of Your Working Memory
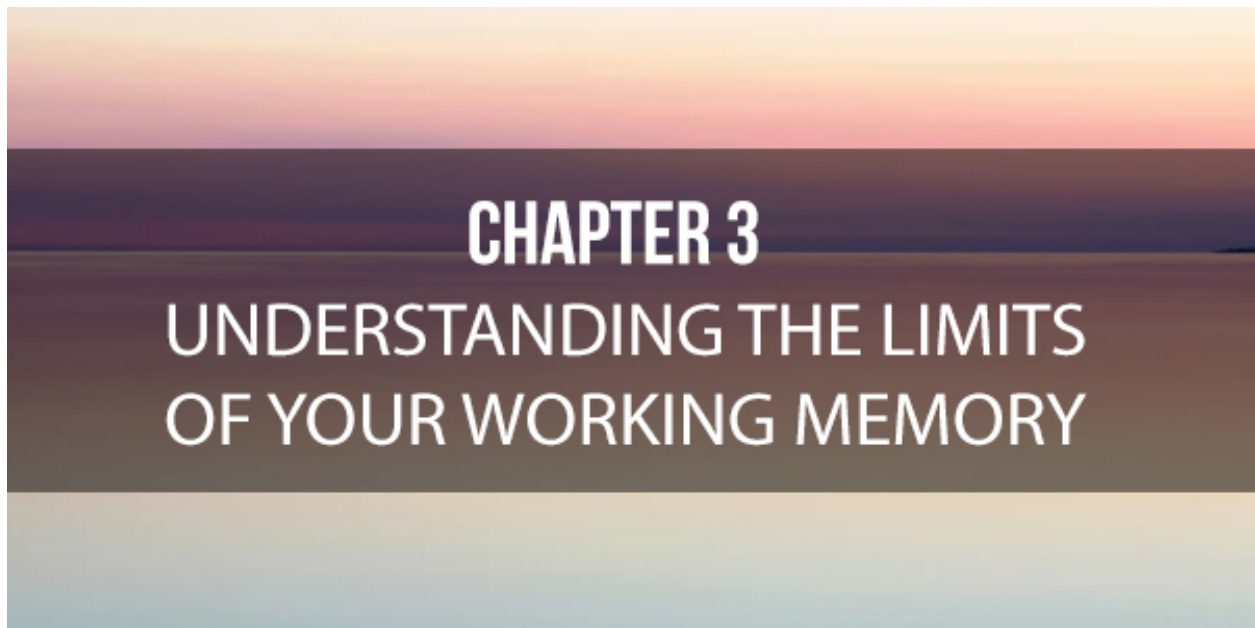
The beautiful thing about the advancement of technology is that we now have quick access to information. We're able to surf the web with our phones while on the go and get the answers we need by conducting a simple search on the Internet. You can do this research from the comfort of your own home or anywhere else for that matter. Performing a simple search on the Internet will give you an answer to your question, so the period between not knowing something and knowing something is a mere second. We now have the ability to share information at a speed that once was thought to be impossible.

You can't deny that information is essential. Without the Internet, social media sites, and blogs, it would be hard for any one person to keep up with the latest news on topics that are of interest. With television and newspapers, you are only provided information that the producers or editors deem to be important. With the Internet, you are in complete control of what you read and can create filters on information and news that suit your interests. Although technology can help to reduce the information overload that we all experience, it can also contribute to the problem.

With the steady stream of information that is easily accessible, you would expect that people would be more knowledgeable. And perhaps they are, but one thing that this constant flood of information has brought is addictive behaviors. In today's age of information and technology, people can't seem to go without their computers or smartphones. A typical scenario that has emerged along with these technological advancements is the constant need to check email and social media accounts.

This constant onslaught of information by our electronic communication devices has caused people to have shorter attention spans. Some believe that information overload has had a detrimental effect on verbal communication skills. The leading cause of these declining skills is multitasking, a response due in part to information overload.

What Information Overload Does to the Brain

As the technological environment speeds up to a dizzying degree, Torkel Kleinberg, a professor of developmental cognitive neuroscience at Karolinska Institute in Sweden warns that "the immense burden of information overload and multitasking can exceed the limits of our slowly evolving stone-age brain." In 2008, he used data showing the subtle increase in IQ scores during the last century and its link to educational improvements. He discovered that there were gaps between the rapid transmission of information via high-tech, electronic devices and the brain's relatively slower capacity to process information, ultimately leading to memory malfunctions.

Information overload has given us a glimpse into the environment that we must encounter daily. Many would argue that while we are under a constant barrage of sensory information and that our minds can filter out the trivial or unimportant information that is in front of us. However, after years of research on the brain, and the capability of working memory, it's clear that it isn't so simple to filter out the information that isn't important. To understand how to succeed in this new world of information overload, we must understand our capabilities as well as our limitations.

The Limits of Working Memory

You're on the couch watching TV after a long and stressful day. An ad comes on that reminds you that you need to order some more baby formula. Before you forget, you decide to get your laptop from the office and place an order. You get up off the couch and grab your coffee cup to put in the dishwasher on your way to your home office.

While you're in the kitchen, your husband asks what your schedule is for tomorrow, and reminds you that your son needs to be picked up from soccer practice at 6 pm. You tell him that it shouldn't be a problem and remind yourself to enter it into your calendar. You continue on to your office. You enter the doorway and can do nothing but look around. Your mind is blank, other than the fact that you remembered you had to do something in the office.

We've all dealt with this situation and is a perfect example of the limitations of our working memory. Your working memory is like having a notepad next to you wherever you go. However, the pen that you use has invisible ink that will disappear after a short time. Working memory has always had its limitations, yet, in today's world, these limitations cause a significant amount of stress and sense of overwhelm.

Working memory is defined as "the system responsible for the transient holding and procession of new and already-stored information, and is an important process for reasoning, comprehension, learning and memory updating." Working memory, in actuality, is an umbrella term that includes the central executive and its related subsystems that are required to process information that comes into our minds.

Often, working memory is confused with short-term memory; however, the term working memory is actually more appropriate for understanding how we process information, as well as helping us to understand the parameters that we need to work within.

It is essential that you understand that this capability of processing information is stored for a short amount of time in our brains. A good example is walking into another room and forgetting what you were looking for. To recover a memory that was lost in working memory, you have to apply other associations, using your long-term memory to recover the specific object you were looking for in the first place.

The events that we are confronted with on a daily basis consist of information overload. Our inability to handle information have detrimental effects on our capacity to create the focused attention that we need for quality work. There are several studies that indicate that what we're experiencing in our information-overloaded lives is akin to the symptoms of ADHD.

Scientific research regarding the ability to improve working memory stems from the science of brain elasticity, or the analogy that your brain is a muscle that can be exercised and developed over time. In today's hectic and information burdened world, we need a set of skills that allow us to combat the ever-growing amount of information that is looking to invade our consciousness.

Nobody is Immune from Information Overload

If you own a computer, TV, radio, or cell phone, you are prone to succumbing to information overload. Our minds have become so busy processing the information that we've become disconnected form face-to-face, personal connections. The issue has now become how we can manage the bombardment of information, so we can get back to living a more productive life.

Chapter 4 – Seeing Information as a Commodity
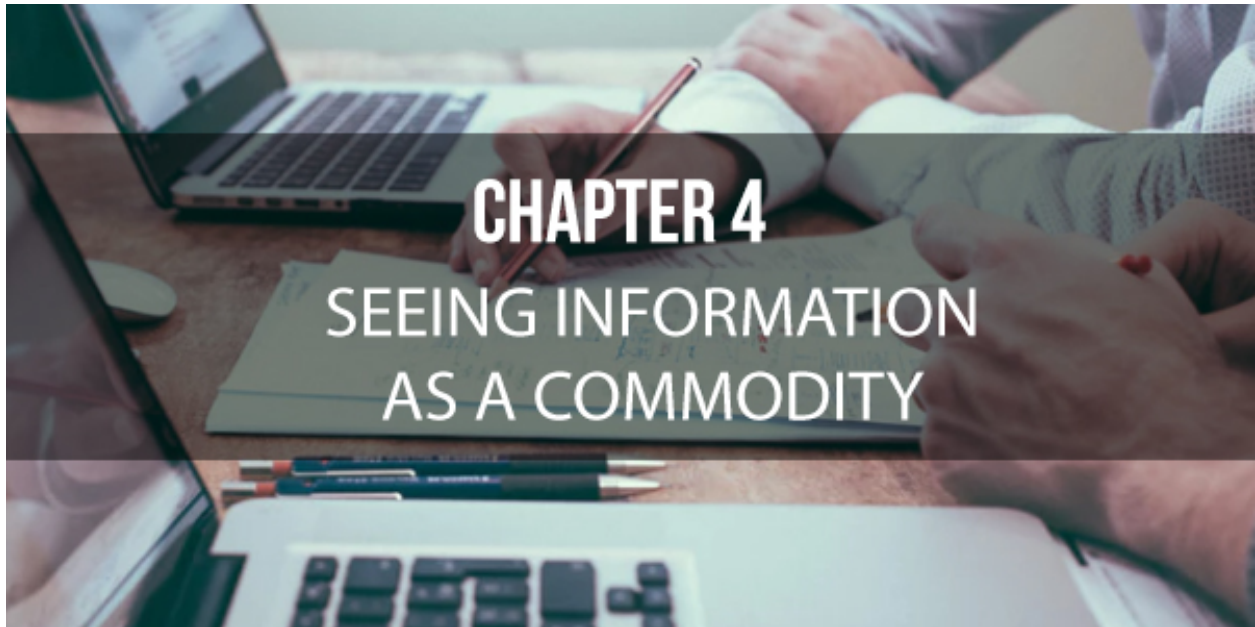
Now that we've come to understand the limits of our memory, we have to ask ourselves, "What information do I learn to keep, and what information can I let go?" Before the invention of the printing press, information in Europe was a critical commodity that was used to separate the elites from the masses. Books were written in Latin by monastic scribes that could only be read by a small minority of the population. Before the printing press, much of the population in Europe was illiterate, and the elite class would use this to their advantage. During this time, the saying "knowledge is power" had a completely different and frightening reality than today.

The invention of the printing press, allowed books to be printed in mass. This created the opportunity for more people to learn to read. This was the first step in the democratizing of information and the ability to stop the reliance on oral communication as the primary tool in education. It was also the first step in information overload.

The Information Superhighway

The second stage in the age of information is known as the information superhighway, a term coined by former vice-president Al Gore. The invention of the Internet became this generations' mass democratization of information on a worldwide scale. While we still lived in the information age, up until the design of the

Internet, information was still a valuable commodity. With the help of the Internet, the masses have learned how to distribute information, religious views, and political views, while providing the vehicle for people of lower means to become educated.

Today, those who want to educate themselves don't have to look very far. Wikipedia, Google, Khan Academy, and most college courses can now be found on the Internet. Many of the changes over the last several decades have come and gone with little notice. However, the impacts will soon start to reveal themselves as the amount of information available at the click of a button continues to increase exponentially.

The Age of Conceptualization

We are now entering the third wave in the age of information. This wave is a side effect of the information age, and it is referred to as the "Age of Conceptualization." The Internet and our ability to find information almost anywhere at any time of the day, has turned information into a cheap commodity. Providing information for information sake has become an expectation and not just a privilege. This has resulted in people needing to not only provide information but synthesize it as well to provide value.

Another unfortunate side effect of the information age is the coining of the term "a whole new mind." It is required of us to survive, as well as thrive in the sea of information that surrounds us every hour of every day. We need to figure out how to seamlessly navigate this sea of information while filtering and synthesizing the information that is important to us.

There are many who will argue that the age of information isn't a threat to our current way of life. They will point to the fact that our primordial brains could always filter the information it receives. They will argue that our ancestors, 20,000 years ago needed to filter out individual sounds to discern an antelope from a lion. However, our world of sensory overload is nothing like the world 20,000 years ago.

Our world of sensory overload has been purposely designed to grab our attention. From the pop-ups on our computer screens to the ding on our mobile phones. All of these sounds and images have an agenda. They are all vying for our attention and our money.

Think about the mobile phones that were available just ten years ago. They had nothing more than a tiny monochromatic screen that would allow you to text a few words or read a couple of emails. Today, smartphones are loaded with information. You have a countless number of apps that can do everything from process email, scan documents, play games, access your entire

picture library, control your home thermostat, or perform banking transactions, and the list goes on. All of these functions that didn't exist just ten years ago are readily available, pushing information at you every minute of the day.

Today, we are confronted with an unprecedented amount of information, and we all generate more information than ever before in human history. Dennis Overbye, a former Boeing and *New York Times* writer, noted:

> ***"this stream of information contains more and more information about our lives – where we shop and what we buy, indeed, where we are right now – the economy, the genomes of countless organisms we can't even name yet, galaxies full of stars we haven't counted, traffic jams in Singapore, and the weather on Mars. This information tumbles faster and faster through bigger and bigger computers down to everybody's fingertips, which are holding devices with more processing power than the Apollo mission control."***

Just trying to keep our own media and electronic files organized can become overwhelming. Everyone has the equivalent of over half a million books stored on their computers, not to mention everything we have stored on our cell phones. Since the Internet

was invented, we have created a world with 300 Exabyte of human-made information.

Our brains do have the ability to process all the information that we are bombarded with, but it comes at a cost. We can end up having trouble separating the trivial from the important, and we become tired from processing all this information. Our neurons are living cells with metabolisms. To survive, they need oxygen and glucose. When they've been working hard, we experience fatigue. Every text message or tweet you get from a friend, every status update you read on Facebook is competing for resources in your brain along with important things like where you left your passport, how to invest your money, or how to reconcile with a family member you just argued with.

Our conscious mind has the processing capacity of 120 bits per second. This is the amount of information we can pay conscious attention to at any given time. To understand one person speaking to us, we need to process 60 bits of information per second. This means that with our processing limit of 120 bits per second, you can barely understand two people talking to you at the same time.

With such restrictions on our attention, it's no wonder so many people feel overwhelmed by managing the most fundamental aspects of their lives. Our focus is the essential mental resource that we have. It determines which element of the environment we

need to deal with. For the most part, there are various automatic subconscious processes that make the correct choice about what information will get passed through to our conscious awareness.

Unfortunately, we are taking in more information than our brains can handle. The global economy means that we are exposed to vast amounts of information. We now hear about revolutions and economic problems in countries halfway around the world right as they are happening. Our brains are soaking all this information in as it was designed to do, but it is competing with the things that we need to know to live our lives.

Emerging evidence suggests that learning and embracing new ideas is helping us to live longer lives and might even help to reduce our risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. So, it's not that we need to limit the amount of information that we take in, but rather we need to have a system for organizing it.

Chapter 5 – Overcoming Challenges in an Information-Driven World
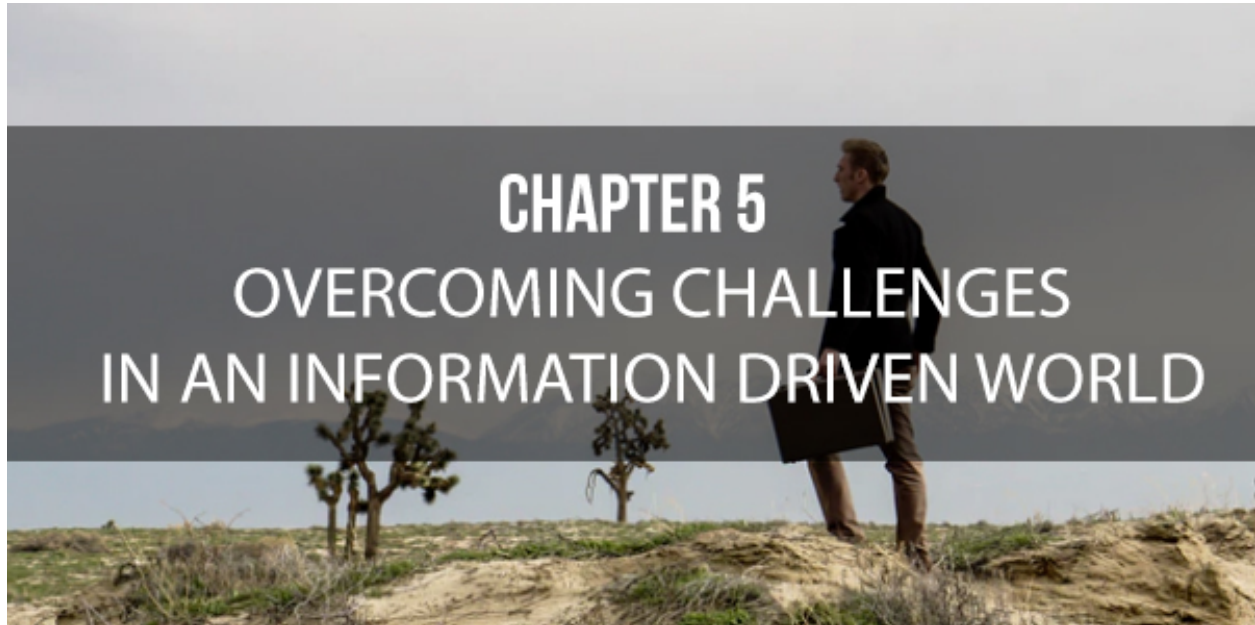
When people refer to a lack of productivity, they often point to procrastination and fear. Whether we're dealing with the challenges of procrastinating on a report we have to write, or a test we need to study for, or a speech we need to deliver. Procrastination can also be a symptom of fear. Fear that we don't know enough, and that we're not good enough. Procrastination can also be a product of overwhelm.

Overwhelm can best be described as the normal state of a typical day at work. While it doesn't seem like a big problem, in and of itself, it can add up to be destructive to your potential. You go down the list of tasks that you need to complete for the day and skip the tough ones like the presentation that's due next week.

When you compile the number of times these instances have on a daily basis, they can add up to be a disaster in your career.

If you've ever felt like you've had so much to do that you don't know where to begin, you're not alone. Most people think like this every 10 to 15 minutes on a given day. This is as a result of the lack of clarity that we have in the way we process things and how we utilize our working memory. Working memory is a lot like your RAM on your computer. If the RAM is overloaded or it's trying to process information that isn't easily digestible, it is unable to quickly prioritize the tasks and move forward, just like your brain.

You can transform the way you handle your daily tasks that will result in an explosion of productivity. This method is fairly simple to implement starting today. When used correctly, you'll be amazed at how much you can get done in a short amount of time.

Get Everything Done

The method for getting everything done uses the simple idea of allocating concrete blocks of time to tasks throughout the day. It is all about the present moment and helps you to give yourself entirely to the moment, so you can enjoy the process while becoming incredibly productive.

The system is simple. Just list the number of tasks that you need to complete for the day. Beside each of the tasks, assign a block of time in five-minute increments. Follow this with other times in increments of 5 or 26. When you're done, your list will look something like this:

Email . . . 5, 26, 26

Tasks . . . 5, 10

Report Writing . . . 5, 26, 52

Break . . . 17

Presentation . . . 5, 26, 52

After you've written your list, you will start down the list, tackling one block at a time. Starting with your email, use a timer to block out five minutes, when the timer goes off, move onto the next tasks for five minutes. When you reach the bottom of your list, go back to the top of your list and start again using the next time increment.

The five-minute increments are the key to making the process work. They serve to provide you with the momentum that is critical before you start the 26-minute period where you get the majority of your work done. When you follow this rule, you'll be shocked by how much you can get done.

This process will solve two problems for you. First, it eliminates the tendency for you to attack the easy tasks first. Second, it gets you engaged in all of the functions that you need to complete that day. The time limit imposed on the functions helps you to focus your attention on the task at hand. By setting yourself up to focus on a specific work in this way, allows you to get much more done within the timeframe.

Laser-like Focus

When you have to set a timer, something magical happens. It serves to eliminate your tendency to be a perfectionist and helps you to focus like no other tool can. When you have an open block of time and have 15 tasks on your list, you probably have the tendency, like so many others, to avoid the more complex tasks, knocking out the easier tasks first. This leaves you little time to handle or tackle the more complex challenge that you might face during the day.

However, by implementing the five-minute block method, the system overrules your natural tendency to move away from more difficult and complicated tasks. It helps you to overcome the initial fear and apprehension that is a natural part of challenging projects. It also helps you to eliminate the overwhelm that happens.

The other positive side effect of implementing this method is the laser-like focus it provides you. You become more focused on the task at hand and eliminate the noise in your mind as you go through each task. It becomes a great way to leverage your time by forcing you to focus on the here and now. Both the pressure of getting something done in five minutes and the realization that it's only five minutes is a fantastic combination that helps your mind to focus.

It's important to know that when you are implementing this method throughout your day that you give yourself plenty of room for error. Occasionally you will need to pull away from this process, especially if you continue to have to deal with distractions that pull your attention away. Over time, your mind

will begin to get stronger and be able to resist the distractions that are around you more easily.

Chapter 6 – Limiting Decisions

A great place to start as you try to beat information overload is by removing the difficult decisions in your life that are taking up our precious 'mental bandwidth.'

Many people believe that time is the reason we aren't able to get enough done during the day. We all tend to make excuses for the things we fail to do, like exercise, because we don't have the time. This isn't actually true. Just look back over your last week and think about those times that you spent a couple of hours on Facebook, YouTube, or any other website. What about all the time you spent watching TV? This is all time that you could have been using to complete tasks.

The problem isn't time. The question becomes your lack of energy. The reason that you're not entirely utilizing the time that is available to you is that you're low on energy. Your lack of energy can also decrease your will-power decreasing your ability to encourage yourself to act.

Energy management is more important than time management when it comes to overcoming information overload. A significant component of energy management is the ability to understand how big an impact making decisions have on our energy levels. Every time you have to make a decision, we take a hit on our energy levels, leaving you with less energy to spend on other, more critical tasks.

Every decision that you have to make, whether it's deciding what to wear or what you want to eat for lunch, uses up your mental energy. This means that you will have less energy when it comes to making other, more important decisions.

How to Reduce Decisions

There are several things that you can do to help you save your mental energy. You could go the route of Steve Jobs who wanted to reduce the number of little decision he made every day. He removed all variations from his wardrobe, leaving nothing but

black t-shirts and jeans, so he never had to worry about what he was going to wear again.

While this is an extreme measure, and not everyone will want to surrender all variations of their clothing, there are some more gently and moderate solutions that you can apply in your own life.

Limiting Your Clothing

You may not want to go as far as Steve Jobs as far as surrendering all variations of your clothing. There are other practical ways to reduce the decision making that surrounds choosing your attire. One of the easiest ways to do this is just to plan your outfits in advance so that you have all the items you need ready to go in the morning. You can go as far as writing this out on Sunday's for the entirety of your week. This method, while it sounds great in theory, often falls in practice. For example, what happens if you put the outfit on and don't like how it looks or are just not in the mood to wear it?

Another solution is to have a limited number of items in your closet that you know you like and that you know are suitable. This allows you to refer to any of the things in the morning without giving it much thought. While you are narrowing down your wardrobe to a small handful of acceptable items, be sure to choose your clothes in a way that they can be combined into

multiple different outfits. This entails making sure that most of your tops will work with most of your pants. This will allow you to throw together numerous combinations without a lot of thought.

Limiting Your Food Choices

If you don't want to have to restrict your clothing choices, you can always restrict your food choices to help you reduce the number of decisions you have to make every day. You can do this by keeping your breakfast and lunch choices consistent throughout the week.

These meals don't tend to be exciting in the first place. So, why not have the same meal at every breakfast and lunch? Keeping your breakfast and lunch consistent helps you to reduce the decisions you have to make, as well as reducing waste. It can also make shopping much easier because you don't have to search for a bunch of different ingredients.

Automate Your Shopping

If you choose to automate a lot of what you eat to help you limit your decisions, this will also create the opportunity to make your weekly shopping trips considerably easier. You can utilize your local supermarket's delivery system to automate your weekly

shopping. Most stores now offer this convenience, which allows you to avoid the stressful 'weekly shopping' trip, picking up a few additional ingredients for your meals instead.

Scheduling Your Evenings

To further reduce decision fatigue, you can plan your daily activities in the evening. This is done by making each night of the week 'something night.' For example, Monday night can become your 'rest night' where you allow yourself to watch TV without the guilt. You can make Tuesday night your 'date night' where you commit the evening to spending quality time with your significant other.

By setting tasks like this for each evening, you remove the stressful need to make the right decision and instead merely carry out and execute your plan to stay on top of things.

Reducing the daily decisions that you have to make will help you to simplify your life. There are many more methods that you can use to accomplish this, so start putting them into action and begin reducing the number of decisions you have to make. By getting yourself organized, you can start to beat information overload and develop a clearer mind to help you move forward.

Chapter 7 – Organizing Your Home

Now that you have developed some systems for reducing the decisions that you have to make daily, you should find that you have a bit more time and energy. There are very few of us that feel that our homes or workspaces are perfectly organized. We are continually losing our car keys and misplacing important pieces of mail. We go shopping and forget something that we needed to buy, and we miss appointments we thought we'd be sure to remember.

In the best case, our house is neat and tidy, but our closets and drawers are cluttered. We might even have unpacked boxes from the last move, even if it was more than five years ago. Our home offices accumulate paperwork faster than we can tackle it. Our garages, basements, attics, and the junk drawers in our kitchen are disorganized and messy.

Obviously, these are not problems that our ancestors had to deal with. When you think about what our ancestors might have lived like, it's easy to focus on the technological differences. They didn't have electricity, central heating, indoor plumbing, or cars. They spend more time grinding wheat and skinning fowl. They tended to eat what they could get their hands on, which included rats, peacocks, squirrels, and locusts.

The things we take for granted today didn't exist in European homes until a few hundred years ago. Before the 17th century, homes in Europe consisted of a single room that was shared by the entire family. The number of possessions the average person has today is far higher now than for most of our history. This has made organizing our belongings a distinctly modern problem.

Today, families tend to amass more possessions than their homes can comfortably hold, resulting in garages becoming cluttered with old furniture and unused sports equipment. It has been reported that 75 percent of Americans can't park their cars in their garages because they have too much, non-essential objects filling them. When confronted with this kind of clutter, women's stress levels spike, leading to fatigue, chronic cognitive impairment, and suppression of the body's immune system.

Adding to this stress is the fact that many of us feel that organizing our possessions have gotten away from us. Very few of us think that our homes are well organized. One solution to keeping your house organized is to put systems in place that will help you tame the mess. This means developing an infrastructure for keeping track of things, sorting them, and placing them in locations where they won't be lost. The task of these types of organizational systems is to provide you with maximum information with the least cognitive effort.

The number one issue we face with putting organizational systems in place is that it is a daunting task that we fear we won't be able to stick with. The good news is that we already use organizational systems throughout our home that protect us from the creeping chaos that surrounds us. Because we employ the use of a silverware drawer, we seldom lose spoons and forks. We don't forget our toothbrushes because we know to use them in a particular room and have a specific place where we store them. However, we do lose reading glasses because we have a tendency to carry them from room to room and have no designated place to put them.

A great deal of losing things arises from structural forces or the various nomadic stuff in our lives that aren't confined to a specific location, like the toothbrush. This neurological foundation is now well understood. We've evolved a specialized brain structure called the hippocampus that is used for remembering the spatial

location of objects. The hippocampus is an essential center for place memory.

Our place memory has evolved over thousands of years to keep track of things that didn't move. It is incredibly accurate for remembering stationary objects that are important for our survival. It isn't, however, useful for keeping track of things that are moved from place to place. Utilizing simple affordances, or ways that our environment can serve as mental aids, to keep track of the objects in our lives can rapidly ease the psychological burden of trying to keep track of everything.

The next step for beating information overload is to get your home organized. This is crucial because a tidy house is a reflection of an orderly mind. More than that, it can also create a tidy mind, and here the correlation becomes 'two ways.' Having a tidy home can make it easier find things, which saves both time and stress because you're no longer hunting for keys. It can also make your space more relaxing. Our brains actually crave organization and order. When you get your home tidy and organized, you'll have a calming space that you can relax in, plus you'll gain confidence because you'll actually know where everything is located.

Get Ruthless

One of the single most important things you can do on your journey to beat information overload is make your home tidier and easier to get around by being ruthless and throwing things out.

You might object at first with the idea of parting with your possessions, however, reducing the number of items that you have in your home can make your house considerably less stressful and help you stay on top of your chores.

A great place to start would be with your knick-knacks and ornaments. Go through all the things you have on display in your house and get rid of half of the items. Doing this allows you to create a more minimal space, which can immediately reduce the amount of stress that you feel when in your home. At the same time, you've also created a lot less work for yourself by creating surfaces that can be easily cleaned.

By getting rid of half of your decorations and knick-knacks you've also increased the average quality of the things that you do have on display. The items that you choose to keep will be your favorite items, meaning they will get more attention and more focus, compared to all the things that were detracting from them.

Another way you can be ruthless in organizing your home is by going through all the boxes that you haven't looked in for the last six months, removing anything of value and getting rid of the rest. The idea is that if you haven't used something in six months or more, then you don't need it. You'll quickly find that you don't miss any of those items.

Creating Designated Rooms

Another thing you can do is to try and create more separation between the different rooms in your house and think about how they'll affect you unconsciously. For example, if you currently iron your clothes in the living room or bedroom, you're making harder to relax in that space. This is because you associate these rooms with work now.

Consider making one of your spare rooms in your home a place to do chores, like ironing. This way, if that room becomes untidy, then it won't spill out into the other rooms of your house.

Alternatively, if you have kids and pets that make it hard to keep your house tidy, you can save just one room in your home, letting it become the place that you go to unwind with a book. It's important to remember for this to work you have to make rules that will help it stay pristine. Make sure that you don't do any

chores in the room, keep food out of the place, and don't let toys start to accumulate in your space.

Keeping Things Clean

Most experts will tell you the best way to keep your house clean is by cleaning up as you go, rather than letting things pile up. While this is a good tip, it may be difficult for you to stick to it, especially if you've never worked this way before. Here are a few things that you can do to make keeping your house clean.

When it comes to your kitchen, you only need a certain number of dishes and cookware to survive and entertain. You just need to keep enough items to serve the maximum number of guests that you have. Anything above this number provides you with the excuse to continue to use clean plates rather than washing the dirty ones. The way to look at it is if there's nothing clean to eat off of, then you'll be forced to stay tidy.

Getting Organized

Our brains are inherently good at creating categories making them a powerful lever for organizing our lives. We can organize our home and work environments in such a way that they

ultimately become extensions of our brains. This will require us to accept the capacity limitations of our minds.

The key to developing categories that are useful is to limit the number of types of things they contain to no more than four different kinds of things. This is relatively easy to do. If you have a drawer in your kitchen that holds cocktail napkins, matches, candles, and coasters, you can conceptualize this drawer as things for a party. Utilizing conceptualization when organizing your home helps to tie together these unrelated objects together at a higher level. Our brains are hardwired to make such categories that are cognitively flexible and can be arranged hierarchically.

When organizing your living space, your goal should be to off-load some of the memory functions from your brain into the environment. It is essential to keep your environment visually organized so that you aren't distracted when you are trying to relax. This is why you want to create designated places for things, so you can quickly locate them when needed.

Two essential steps for setting up a home organization system is, 1) the categories that you create need to reflect how you use and interact with your possessions, and 2) you need to avoid putting different items into a drawer or folder unless you can come up with an overarching theme. If you aren't able to do this, creating a miscellaneous or junk drawer is okay, but if you find that you have

more than one junk drawer, you need to take the time to re-sort and regroup their contents.

With thousands of different objects in our homes, we need to be proactive about reducing stress by participating in things that reset our working brains and allowing our mind-wandering mode to kick in regularly.

Chapter 8 – Organizing Your Social Lives

You may, like many, believe that your life would be a whole lot less stressful if it weren't for all the people. This is especially true when life is getting on top of us, and we don't have the time, money, or energy to devote to our friends.

Some of the most significant changes we face as a society today are cultural; changes to our social world and the way we interact with one another. Our social relationships are based on habits of altruism, reciprocity, commerce, physical attraction, and procreation. Our need to be close to others socially results in the unpleasant by-products of jealousy, rivalry, hurt feelings, suspicion, and competition for an increased social standing.

The people that we see daily constitute much of our social world and are implicitly categorized into groups like, family, friends, coworkers, service providers, and professional advisors. These categories are further subdivided. Your family may include your immediate family, your extended family, relatives you look forward to seeing and those who you don't. There are your coworkers who you will go out and have a beer with after work, and those you wouldn't.

An added complexity to your social relationships are the contextual factors that have to do with your job, where you live and your personality. As you learned in Chapter 6, categories are often more useful when they have flexible, fuzzy boundaries. Your social groups benefit from this greatly. The concept of "friend" will depend on how far you are from home, how busy your social life is, and many other circumstances.

Organizing Our Social World

Unlike our ancestors, whose social groups changed slowly, it has become increasingly difficult to keep track of all the social details that you need to know in your head. Cognitive neuroscience says that we should externalize information to keep our minds clear. This is why many successful people keep contact files with contextual information, like where they met someone new, what they talked about, and who introduced them.

While organizing your social contacts in this way may seem like a lot of busywork, keeping this information nicely organized will

allow you to have spontaneous interactions with others that will be more emotionally meaningful.

One practical solution for staying in touch with a vast array of friends and social contacts is using a tickler. A tickler is a reminder, or something that tickles your memory. It works best as a note on your calendar. You set a reminder for every month or two to check in with friends. When the reminder goes off, you send them a note, text, phone call, or Facebook post to check in. After doing this a couple of times, you'll start to settle into a rhythm and begin to look forward to staying in touch with your friends.

Externalizing memory doesn't have to be in physical form like a calendar, tickler file, key hooks, or index cards, but can include other people as well. You may call on your spouse to remember the name of the restaurant you liked in Denver or call a wife's friend or children if you've lost their cell phone number. The part of external memory that includes other people is called transactive memory and includes the knowledge of those in your social network who might possess the knowledge you seek.

A large part of organizing your social world successfully, is being able to identify what you want from it. For most of us we want to feel like we fit in somewhere and are a part of a group. Having a social network fulfills a deep biological need and activates regions of the brain that help us to position ourselves in relation to others.

It also activates emotional centers in our mind that help us to regulate emotions. So, how can we stay on top of all the things we need to do?

Prioritize

The first step to organizing your social world is to prioritize your calendar. If you have a busy social schedule, you may often feel overly stressed and put upon to participate in activities even when you don't have the time or inclination. However, there comes a time in life where you just can't do everything you want to do. This is when you have to start pruning your social network and start prioritizing.

At the top of your priorities should be your partner, children, and immediate family. If you're having a hard time turning down invitations, then you need to remind yourself that you need to spend most of your time and energy on your family. This doesn't mean you have to cut off all contact with your friends. All it means is that you might decide to accept only one invitation to spend time with friends a week.

Dunbar's Number is the number of contacts that we can realistically maintain relationships with. He puts this number at somewhere between 100-250, with '150' being the most commonly quoted figure. In reality, you can probably only

maintain about ten genuinely close relationships before you become overwhelmed.

Get Rid of Frenemies

With Dunbar's Number, you don't have enough room in your life for people that aren't really friends. These are the people that you may tend to count as friends but that you don't actually enjoy spending time with. These are the friends that constantly let us down and that we complain about with our other friends.

As you get older, you don't have time to keep people in your life that you don't enjoy being around. It's time to put these people aside and focus on those people that you really enjoy spending time with and who are there for you. By just removing some of the unnecessary people from your life, you'll be able to spend more time and energy on those who deserve it.

Limiting Facebook

Facebook is one of the largest culprits for many when it comes to stress, procrastination, and overwhelm. Not only does it take up a considerable amount of time by giving us something to browse through randomly, but it can also lead to stress and depression through what is called 'social comparison theory.'

Then there's the fact that Facebook allows us to keep in touch with people we no longer know, and no longer care about. While you might think that deleting Facebook is the best way to deal with this problem, in actuality you merely need to focus on streamlining your profile.

The first thing that you'll want to do is get rid of the Facebook app on your phone. Not only does it take a lot of juice to run, but it also continuously send you notifications and messages that aren't all that pressing.
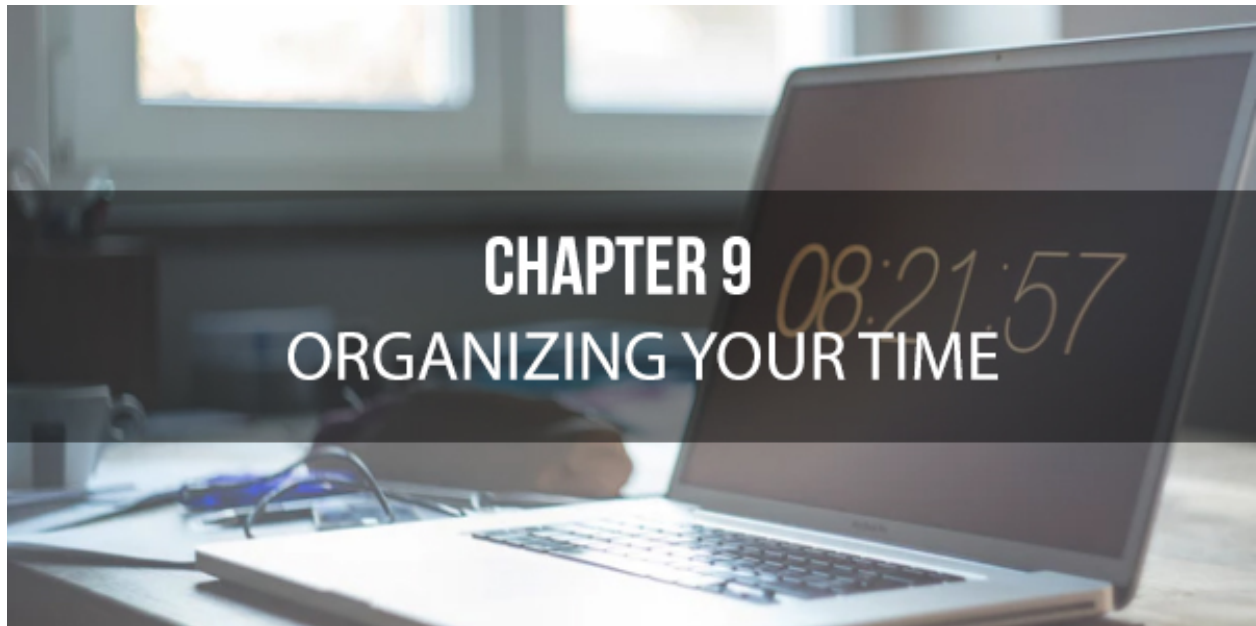
Next, you want to go through your friend's list and delete those contacts that aren't really your friends. People you went to Kindergarten with, people you met at random parties and people who you don't like can all get removed. When it comes to your news feeds, unfollow those people that you don't really want to see.

Taking these simple steps to streamline your Facebook profile will allow you to make better use of the site without the stressful, distracting, and time-consuming elements.

Organizing your social life will not only free up your time and energy to devote to the more essential things in your life, but it

can also help you to reduce the information overload that you are subjected to on a daily basis through the site.

Chapter 9 – Organizing Your Time

Some of the methods that were discussed in the last section for organizing and optimizing your social life can also be applied to organizing your time. For instance, scheduling essential tasks and things you want to do as though they were social commitments is an excellent way to organize your time.

Recognize Your Limits

The first point to consider when organizing your time is that you must consider your own limitations. This is where a lot of us fall into problems because we often forget that our energy is finite as well as our time. If you find that you're currently not doing the

things that you would like to be doing, again, you need to prioritize.

A perfect example of this is when we come up with plans to lose weight that inherently involves working out for an additional three hours on top of our regular training routines while also dieting. This results in you having less energy when you're expected to start exerting yourself for an extra three hours, along with traveling back and forth from the gym.

Because of your finite amount of energy, this scenario just won't work, leading you to fail at your goal. Like with your social relationships, it is vital for you to prioritize your time.

Make Time to Recover

When you have a finite amount of energy, it is crucial that you give yourself time to recover. When we can recharge our batteries and recover from our day, we are more productive overall. When we continue to go, doing one thing after another, we will eventually tire and stop working correctly.

To keep your productivity up, you need to find a way to divide your time between resting and working. This will help prevent you from getting into situations where you are only half working. Half

working is the worst thing you can do for your life because it means that you aren't really getting much done, but you're not relaxing either.

Half relaxing is just as bad. This is what happens when you're too tired to do anything useful, but you feel like you can't justify relaxing, so you end up just sitting on the couch zoning out. This results in you not getting anything done as well as failing to enjoy your time off.

This is why it is so crucial for you to allow yourself the time to recover and make full use of it. You can even schedule it, so you have something to look forward to while you're working, while at the same time ensuring that you'll actually take the time to rest and relax.

Timing Your Tasks

As you are deciding when you're going to schedule those crucial tasks and when you're going to plan for rest, it's helpful to consider the natural ebbs and flows of your energy.

There are natural times during the day when you're more productive and times of the day where you crash. Most of us, for instance, will find we hit a wall right after getting home from work

and are less productive at work after 3 pm. Likewise, it can take us a little while to get started in the morning.

You also need to take into account the activities that you participate in throughout the day that impact your energy level. One of the simplest ways to make yourself exhausted and want to crash is to eat dinner because your body needs to digest the meal you've just eaten, which leaves you with little energy to do anything else. If you want to keep your energy levels up, don't sit down on the couch, and don't eat a big meal until after you've completed your most important tasks.

Multitasking

As we've already discussed earlier, multitasking can be a destructive force on your mental clarity and productivity when you're at work. However, in the right circumstances, multitasking can be highly useful in your personal life. Multitasking doesn't usually work when you're trying to complete work tasks, but in your private life, it can be helpful in any situation where one of the tasks you're trying to achieve doesn't require your full attention.

An example would be when you need to go shopping; you can call a friend. Since you don't need to have your full attention on the task at hand, which would be buying food, you can catch up on your correspondences during this time. There are plenty of

household chores that you can multitask with to help you get more done, so you can have more time to relax. Multitasking at home can help you accomplish twice as much in half the time.

Closing Open Loops

One way to help you feel more on top of your life is to close all the smaller tasks that you may consider 'open loops.' While it makes sense to work on the biggest and hardest work tasks first, so you can ensure maximum productivity. When you're at home, you should aim to do the reverse.

When you're at home, your tasks are generally less pressing, so it makes sense to tick off the smaller tasks that you have to do so you have less stress and fewer things weighing on your mind.

We tend to put off small tasks like paying bills, calling friends, or RSVP'ing to an event because we find them stressful and don't want to use up our energy thinking about them. However, this just ends up causing us to unconsciously worry about them, resulting in us having less energy and time available to do anything else.

When you have tasks that can be completed quickly that are weighing on your mind, just tell yourself that it's better to get it out of the way now since it will have to be done eventually.

To help you get your time better organized, give yourself thirty minutes after you get home from work to close off these small tasks, or 'open loops' so you have less on your unconscious 'to-do' list, leaving you more time and energy to focus on what's important.

Chapter 10 – Organizing Your Professional Life
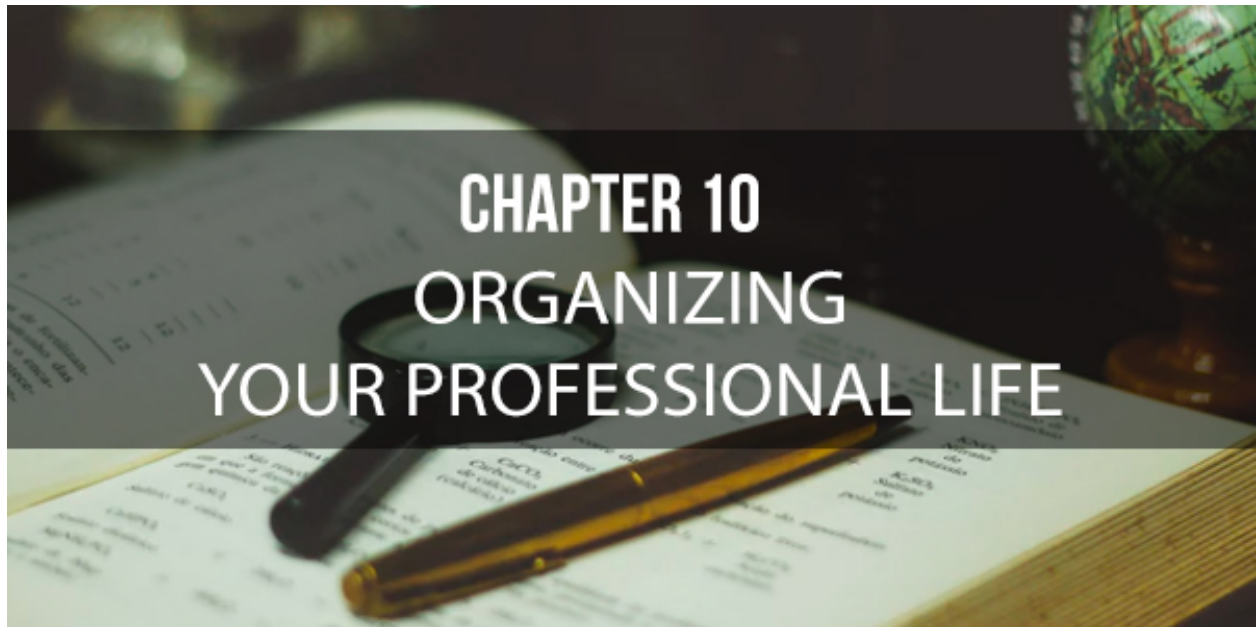
If you've been able to put the advice that you've read into action in your life, you've probably already started to notice that things have gotten easier. You have more time, fewer decisions to make, and less stress, thanks to a quieter social calendar.

This is great, but you're probably still over-worked and over-stressed because of your work. Work is often what makes so many of us stressed and is what leaves us with so little time to do anything else. Now's the time to put a stop to this destructive cycle.

Becoming More Productive at Work

The first thing that you need to do to organize your professional life is to start approaching your work more efficient and productive manner. To do this, you need to stop multitasking. Studies have shown that multitasking just doesn't work in a workplace environment. This is because the activities we perform at work that require our mental faculties don't enable multitasking.

In fact, what you think as multitasking is actually sequential tasking. Sequential tasking is when you quickly switch from one task to another and back. This takes up more mental energy, resulting in your productivity going down and less work getting completed.

Rather than continue sequential tasking, you need to learn how to set out the tasks you need to do and then work through them in order until they're complete. This is where the five-minute rule, discussed in Chapter 5, comes into play.

With the five-minute rule, you need to start your day with a to-do list. Beside each of the tasks, you need to assign a block of time in five-minute increments, following this with other times in increments of 5 or 26.

Once you've completed your list and assigned the appropriate blocks of time to each task, start working on your list, tackling one block at a time. Starting with your email, use a timer to block out five minutes, when the timer goes off, move onto the next tasks for five minutes. When you reach the bottom of your list, go back to the top of your list and start again using the next time increment. Continue this pattern until you've completed your tasks and are ready to go home for the day.

Removing Distractions

Now that you've developed your to-do list and implemented the five-minute rule to the list, you should be able to get into a 'flow state.' Being able to get into a flow state is where you're ready to shut out all outside distractions and work in a fast and focused manner. This results in you being able to do your best work and allows you to get through each of your tasks without succumbing to procrastination.

The number one key to being able to get into this state of mind is to ensure that you remove all distractions that can break your concentration. The worst distraction that you must remove from your work environment is email.

Your work email is the most significant culprit for becoming distracted and stressed at work. As soon as we start responding

to emails, we find ourselves switching from a proactive mindset to a reactive one. Instead of tackling our own tasks, we're working on someone else's agenda, making it less likely that we will be able to complete the tasks we have set for ourselves. This is why following the five-minute rule is so important because it limits the amount of time you spend reading and responding to emails.

Reducing Communication Overhead

Communication overhead is used to describe the adverse effects that meetings, phone calls, and emails have on your productivity. When you're on the phone or in a meeting, you're not working. To help avoid this bothersome cycle throughout your day, you need to try to keep unnecessary communication to an absolute minimum. This can be accomplished in several different ways.

If you find that you are constantly answering the phone, you can ask people to email you instead. If this doesn't work, you can preface each phone call by telling the caller that you only have five minutes, so you'll need to get straight to business. If they offer to call you back, just say 'no, it's alright, but we'll just have to make it quick.'

As for the endless meetings that you may have to attend, talk with your manager to see if it's necessary for you to be present at every meeting. You can start by skipping one to begin with and

explain that you have a ton of work to finish and you feel that your time could be better spent working on your daily tasks.

Conclusion

Managing information overload in your life is probably going to be a massive challenge for you. However, you should be very excited and committed to taking the challenge and diving in head first because once you beat the information overload, you'll have a clearer mind and be able to move forward in your life.

Everything that you do in your life is a result of the choices you make. From going to work in the morning to spending time mindlessly scrolling through your news feeds on Facebook. Think about all the choices you've made in your life and the consequences of the actions you took. As you move through your day choose to become more conscious about the choices and actions you take and start to regain control of your life. When you develop structure and establish good habits, you'll find that your

life will begin to slow down, allowing you find more enjoyment in the things you do.

Our thoughts can motivate and inspire us to take action, however, too much thought caused by spending hours on social media or reading and responding to emails can be counterproductive and downright exhausting. Learning how to conquer information overload will help you to relieve stress, clear your mind and become more productive in your life. Start taking control of your life by managing the information you subject yourself to and live your life to your fullest potential.