

DR KRISTY  
GOODWIN










# 1. Timeblock to your chronotype

## ALIGN YOUR WORK SCHEDULE TO YOUR ENERGY PEAKS AND TROUGHS

Your chronotype is your biological disposition to be a morning person (lion), an evening person (wolf), or somewhere in between (bear). It's your personalised biological rhythm that determines your natural inclination throughout the day to be awake, to sleep and shapes when your energy levels are at their optimum.

Given that more and more workplaces have adopted flexible work arrangements, it's now easier for us to synch our work tasks and commitments to our chronotype. In doing so, we not only bolster our productivity and performance, but we can also improve our wellbeing.

	 Lion	 Bear	 Wolf	 Dolphin
 Ideal Wake Time	6AM	7AM	9AM	6.30AM
 Ideal Sleep Time	10PM	11PM	1AM	11.30AM
 Peak Performance Window	6AM - 11AM	10AM - 3PM	5PM - 10PM	3PM - 9PM

Based on The Power of When by Michael Breus, PhD

# DR KRISTY

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## G O O D W I N

Having an intimate knowledge of your chronotype and the natural dispositions for sleep and energy, empowers us to make educated decisions regarding the timing of tasks we undertake at work and also helps us to build boundaries around our wellbeing so we can sleep and exercise at ideal times of the day.

We need to timeblock (preferably on our calendars) the times of the day when our energy and focus are at their peak and use this to complete what Cal Newport calls 'deep work'. This type of work is the most cognitively-taxing work that we undertake such as data analysis or modeling, preparing client reports. During this time, we need to build a fortress around our focus by disabling all digital distractions (see next tip) and working in locations where external distractions (phone calls, noisy colleagues) are less likely to occur.

We also need to plan for how to best utilise our time when our energy is waning by completing what Cal Newport calls 'shallow work'. This might involve triaging your inbox, replying to voicemails or doing basic administrative tasks.

For example, if you're a wolf, then plan to do some administration, or check your inbox in the late morning and then block out a period of time in the afternoon and possibly the night so you can do your challenging and/or creative tasks.

Conversely, if you're a lion, arriving at work at 7am and immediately tackling your inbox is not the best use of your prime energy window. Instead, a more effective strategy is to use the 7-9am window to write a client proposal, conduct data analysis, or prepare an outline of a talk you're delivering.

Bears would be best placed starting their work day around 9am and dive into their deep work (and avoid the pull of their inbox if possible. Sometimes it's better to do a quick triage and looking for any urgent matters in your inbox and then jump straight out.). Bears' shallow work should be scheduled for the afternoon, usually around 2-4pm, when their energy drops and their focused more on a cuppa and a snack.

## YOUR ACTIONS

1. Identify your chronotype [here](#).
2. Map your 'ideal day' to your chronotype, according to when your body prefers to sleep and when your energy and cognition is at its prime.
3. Schedule your more challenging, cognitively-taxing tasks when your energy is at its peak and schedule the less demanding activities and commitments when your energy is at its lowest.

## *2. Disable digital distractions*

**BUILD A FORTRESS  
AROUND YOUR  
FOCUS**

We are living and working in an attention economy. The technologies we use have often been designed to arrest our attention. There are a raft of deliberate design techniques have been deployed to hijack and capture our attention and prey on our human psychological weaknesses.

For example, have you ever stopped to wonder *why* your unread email bubble is red? Red triggers a sense of urgency, danger and importance and the use of metrics (the number telling us just how many unread emails we have) tricks us into

thinking that our email is urgent and important and preys on our psychological need for social reciprocity so we feel compelled to respond.

Whether it's the ping of emails, or the buzz of notifications flashing on our phone, all of these distractions have a significant impact on our performance and compromise our wellbeing too. We need to build a fortress around our focus, especially when we want to undertake 'deep work'.

## SOME SIMPLE SCIENCE-BACKED SOLUTIONS



// **Disable alerts and notifications**- or limit your notifications to critical people (e.g. family, clients or team members), or essential platforms. Do you really need to be getting Instagram notifications at work? Email notifications (even if you can resist the urge to check) can compromise your productivity and divert your attention.



// **Batch notifications**- on some devices and platforms you can now specify when notifications come to you so you can select at a time that suits- maybe you'd like to receive all your Slack notifications in one sitting.



// **Proximity**- this is a two-pronged strategy. First, keep your phone or tablet out of your line of sight. Seeing your device is often a trigger to reach for it, because we've habitualised these behaviours. Pop it in a drawer, in your bag, in another room. I've heard tech executives admitting that even they succumb to the social scroll so they sometimes even go to the lengths of putting their phone in a locked box. The second part of this strategy is to move the apps that are your weakness off your home screen (in a folder on the fifth page called 'My Regrets'). Often we unlock our phone to do something functional (like make a phone call) and the lure of another app captivates our attention.



// **Activate 'Do not disturb'**- you can now customise this feature on most phones, so critical

calls and messages (from your EA, or mother, or children's daycare can still reach you). /You can also enable your calendar to synch with this function, so any personal events in your calendar, or any meetings can automatically trigger 'Do Not Disturb' mode.



// **Go greyscale**- turning your phone or tablet to a grey colour makes it much less psychologically-appealing.



// **Maximise your window**- whether you're using a word processing tool like Word, or you're using Chrome, maximise the window you're using to avoid the other tabs or applications from vying for your attention. (These coloured icons were designed to be seductive and psychologically appealing.)



// **Get some digital restraints**- there are a range of digital tools that can help to sustain your attention. Some of my favourites are Forest, RescueTime and Freedom.



// **Don't nibble on your inbox**- one of the biggest threats to our digital productivity is email and instant messaging apps and communication tools. Dipping in and out of email all day impairs our productivity. You can read more about how email dents your productivity here, or my Tame Your Inbox (simple, science-backed system and strategies to manage emails).

## YOUR ACTIONS

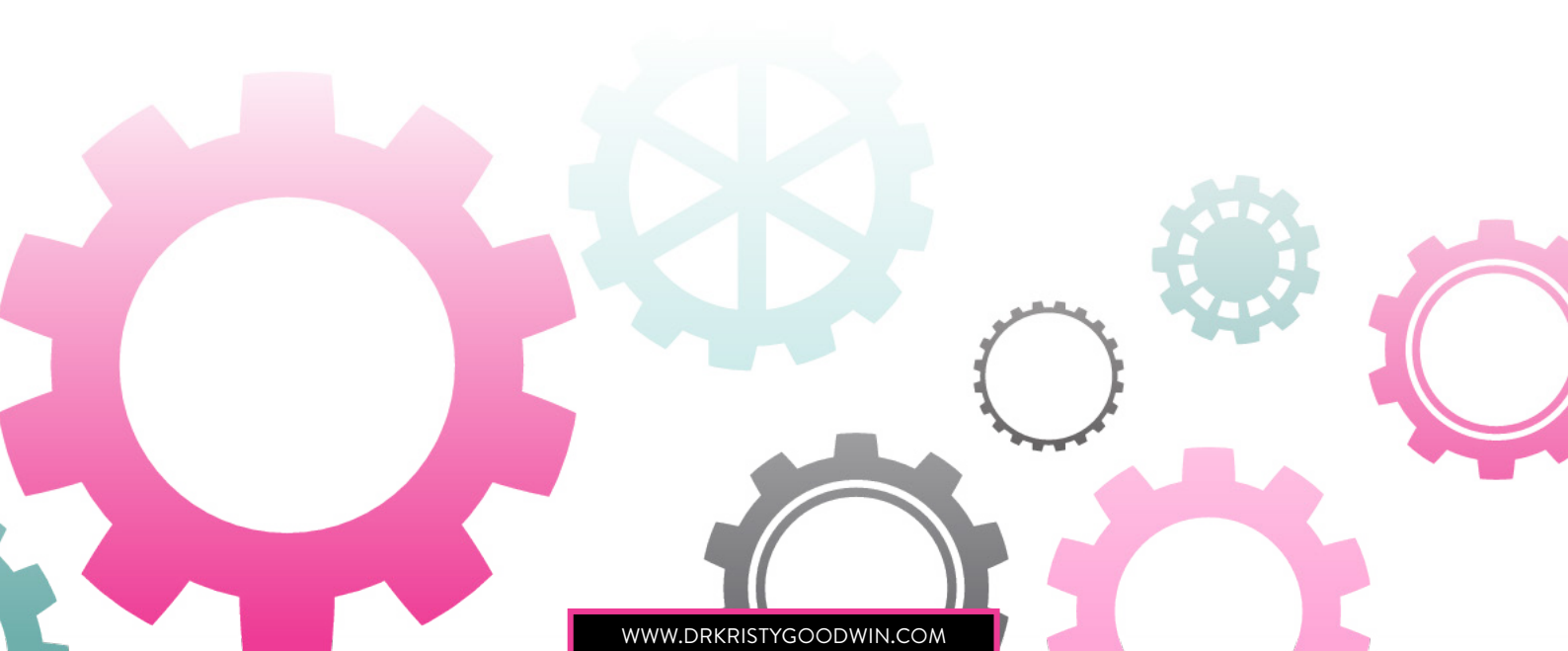
1. Pick two strategies from the list above to implement over the next week.
2. Over time, introduce other strategies. Make small, incremental changes over time and not radical changes to your tech habits, as these won't last!



Our brain isn't capable of completing two tasks simultaneously. Multi-tasking is a myth! When we think we're multi-tasking, often what we're doing is task switching, or continuous partial attention. This places our brains under enormous stress and doesn't allow us to work at optimum levels.

In fact, research confirms that it takes 40% longer to

complete tasks when we multitask, error rates increase and it places unnecessary strain on our brain. For example, when we multitask we release cortisol, the stress hormone, we burn through glucose, which is the energy supply in the brain and we actually send information to the wrong part of the brain (we need it to go to the hippocampus and it goes to the striatum when we multitask).



## STRATEGIES TO MONOTASK

**Triage your 'To Do' list.** We often have rather ambitious To Do lists and revert to multitasking to plough through the list. Instead, have a 'Deep Work' list of tasks and a 'Shallow Work' list of tasks so you can start to plan when you will perform each task. (Remember, to map your tasks to your chronotype from Tip #1).

**Set your deep work time-** often we revert to multitasking because we lack clear objectives, or don't have a clear direction about what we need to be doing. Planning your day in a written diary or calendar can help to keep you accountable and reduces the chances of multi-tasking as you plan when you'll be undertaking specific tasks.

**Nap or take a break-** we're much more likely to revert to multitasking when we're tired or stressed. Why? When we're tired or stressed our prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that helps with self-regulation, switches off. Our brain is often craving dopamine during these times, the pleasurable neurotransmitter so we look for quick, easy wins to help us feel good. So it's often during these states that we find it challenging to manage our impulses and our brain has a natural predisposition for doing 'easy' tasks, or looking for quick wins. We satisfy this need by multitasking. Taking a nap, of no more than 20 minutes (so we don't impact our sleep pressure), or having a break (preferably in nature) is a good way to reorient our focus.

**Clear the clutter-** clutter from your desk and desktop can negatively impact your performance. Often seeing a printed memo sitting on your desk, or an icon on your desktop can tempt you to check it.

**Sprint, don't run a marathon-** our brain needs regular breaks. Work with, not against your biochemistry by taking 5-15 minute breaks every 90 minutes. Research shows that we can shift from full cognitive focus, to psychological fatigue within about 90 minutes. Just like your phone needs to be recharged so do you! Experiment with the amount of time you can stay focused.

**Schedule restoration time-** see tip #5!



### YOUR ACTIONS

1. Set your deep work times.
2. Plan your To Do tasks each day based on your deep work activities and shallow work activities.  
Clean your workspace and desktop.
3. Identify your optimal focused work periods (for most adults it's between 60-90 minutes).



Conference calls, Zoom or WhatsApp have made it far easier for workers to virtually 'meet' across departments, cities and even countries. This means a wider cross-section of employees is typically being invited to meetings. The average employee often feels obliged to attend (because of social reciprocity), fearful of missing important decisions. This squeezes the time available to complete critical 'deep work'.

According to Metcalfe's Law, the number of interactions exponentially increases as the cost of communications goes down. The introduction of email and calendar programs has significantly reduced the cost and administration involved in scheduling meetings. This is referred to as the 'zero cost for inclusion' – it's no longer an onerous task to coordinate meetings and invite attendees, as it can now be performed

with the click of a button. As a result, the number of meetings scheduled in workplaces and the number of attendees at each meeting has increased. Research from Bain & Co reveals that 15% of an organisation's collective time is spent in meetings.

Not only is it the volume of meetings people attend, but it's also the timing. A study from Ohio State University discovered that productivity is compromised not just by the meetings themselves but the anticipation of them. Anticipation of scheduled meetings hampers output one or two hours before they start. According to one study, employees completed 22% less work before a scheduled meeting than they did when there were no meetings on the horizon. We can only imagine the costs to productivity when we consider this statistic in the context of the number of meetings scheduled each day.

## BUSINESS CASE STUDY

To counteract long meetings, which are a source of employee dissatisfaction and compromised productivity, organisations such as Google, Amazon, Apple and Facebook are utilising 'speedy meetings' in their calendar settings. Employees can now have the default meeting setting limited to 50 minutes (instead of 60 minutes) or 25 minutes (instead of 30 minutes).

Based on Parkinson's Law, that work expands to fill the time available, speedy meetings can help promote shorter, sharper meetings. To support this practice, and to discourage 'phubbing' (phone snubbing or checking the phone) in meetings some workplaces are now using large, visible clocks on the wall with a countdown timer.



## REALISTIC SOLUTIONS TO MAXIMISE YOUR MEETINGS



// **Establish company policies**- What protocols are in place for the use of technology in meetings? Can internal meetings only be scheduled on certain days? Or would it be more productive to schedule meetings during afternoons, when most employees aren't engaged in deep work?



// **Use speedy calendars**- set the default meeting time on your calendar to 50 minutes (instead of 60 minutes) and 25 minutes (instead of 30 minutes). Planning your day in a written diary or calendar can help to keep you accountable and reduces the chances of multi-tasking as you plan when you'll be undertaking specific tasks.



// **Use online calendar scheduling tools**- Too often we spend inordinate amounts of time and effort attempting to schedule a meeting time that's convenient for all attendees. The use of calendar scheduling tools can expedite and streamline this process.



// **Show invitee constraint**-we're hard-wired to belong as humans and this is why we find it challenging to decline a meeting invitation. So do your colleagues a favour and only invite

them to meetings where their attendance is really required.



// **Pick up the phone**- rather than scheduling a formal meeting, with multiple attendees, could you instead instigate a phone conversation? Bonus tip- this strategy works very well for taming your email inbox too.



// **Have walking meetings**- boost your physical wellbeing and get a dose of green time too whilst you conduct your meetings.



// **Batch your meetings**- where possible, to stop the decline in productivity because of meeting anticipation, schedule your meetings so they run back-to-back, or have a dedicated day when you perform meetings.



// **Protect your deep work time**- depending on the type of meeting and your involvement, think carefully about what time of the day you're scheduling it. Is it falling during your 'deep work' time? Do you need to be at your cognitive prime for this meeting, or could you schedule it for one of your 'shallow work' periods if it's a less-demanding meeting?

## YOUR ACTIONS

Find an online scheduling tool- Calendly, Acuity Scheduler, Doodle and You Can Book Me are some popular options. Your email tool may offer this functionality.

2. Restrict one of your next meetings in terms of duration (25 or 50 minutes) and/or invitees.

## 5. *Digitally-disconnect*

UNPLUGGED TIME IS CRITICAL FOR  
YOUR PERFORMANCE & WELLBEING.

Our brains were never designed to be switched-on and processing information 24/7, which is the reality many of us find ourselves in, working in a digital workplace. We have ancient brains operating in a high-tech world and our brains haven't evolved sufficiently to cope with the constant demands we now throw at them.

Our brains need unplugged time when they have time to meander (have you ever noticed, you have your best

ideas when you're on holidays or flying with no WiFi, or when you're swimming or running?). Neuroscientists call this mind-wandering mode, which is our default mode of thinking. It is often during this time that we come up with creative ideas, or solve problems that we've spent months agonising over. We must carve out time away from our digital appendages. We need, more than ever, to carve out time for white space where our brains can roam. It has benefits for our productivity and wellbeing.

### BUSINESS CASE STUDY

It is reported at one point in time that Google employees have a '20% policy', where they were encouraged to use 20% of their time working on projects outside their regular tasks and duties that they thought would benefit Google. It is believed that these 'side projects' promote innovation. Gmail, Google Maps,

AdSense and Slack are believed to have come from the Google 20% policy. Recognising the importance of unstructured time on employee output highlights the tangible benefits for both the employee and employer.

## REALISTIC SOLUTIONS TO MAXIMISE YOUR MEETINGS



**// Digital-free dawn-** When we reach for our digital devices upon waking, we activate our limbic system which is our body's primitive (but very effective) threat alert system (otherwise known as the fight, flight or flee response). When we experience a stressful event, which our brain may perceive when we're checking our inboxes or reading colleagues' LinkedIn updates, the amygdala, an area of our brain that helps with our emotional processing, sends a distress signal and this activates the sympathetic nervous system and cause us to feel anxious or stressed. Also, when we wake up and shift between that subconscious and conscious state and our brain is switching from delta (deep sleep) to theta which is when the brain is malleable, creative and ripe for problem solving. Opening the laptop lid, or firing up our phone first thing in the morning can really jolt our brains and cause us to feel unnecessarily stressful. This isn't how high-performers set up their day, as it isn't an optimal psychological state.



**// Establish a digital bedtime-** avoid using technologies in the 60-90 minutes before you fall asleep. Not only can your tech activity hyper-arouse your brain (especially if you're dealing with a stressful email) and delay the onset of sleep, but so too can the blue light that most of our devices emit (as well as our energy-efficient lights). Blue light impairs the body's production of melatonin, the sleep hormone, which can also delay and possibly disrupt our sleep.



**// Identify your no-go tech zones-** what

places and spaces in your workplace and at home, are tech-free? Where can you go for some respite, so you can either do some deep work, free from distractions, or just have a break from the constant buzz and ping of the digital world? Are meeting rooms a place where colleagues don't check their phones? At home, I strongly suggest bedrooms (just seeing your phone on the bedside table can be a mental trigger to think about your bulging inbox) and meal areas as the bare minimum.



**// Create whitespace in your day-** carve out and protect time to enter the mind-wandering state. This can promote ideation, or creative ideas that otherwise wouldn't occur had you been tethered to your device. Can you do a coffee-run, or a run without any devices? Can you use the commute home to listen to music or have some silence, and use the 'Do Not Disturb' option?



**// Ensure you get sufficient 'green time' (i.e. time in nature)-** time in natural sunlight, especially between 8am-12pm can help to regulate your circadian rhythm (which will help you to sleep). Green time also helps to calm your nervous system which is often hyper-aroused when we're using digital devices. Time in nature may also help to ward off myopia (near-sightedness). It is not yet known whether it's the Vitamin D that helps with the elongation of the myopic nerve and therefore stops myopic progression, or whether it's that when you're outside, you tend to look at things in the distance. Aim for around 90 minutes/day.

# DR KRISTY GOODWIN

## YOUR ACTIONS

1. Remove your phone from your bedroom.
2. Establish a new evening routine where you have some disconnected time (even 30 minutes will help).
3. Plan some whitespace in your calendar (& protect it like any other appointment).
4. Schedule some time in nature.

## *And if we haven't met...*

Having personally experienced how our always-on digital culture is compromising people's wellbeing and is counter to optimal and sustainable performance, award-winning researcher and speaker Dr Kristy Goodwin is on a mission to promote employee wellbeing and bolster workplace productivity in an always-on digital world.

As one of Australia's digital wellbeing and productivity experts, she shares practical brain-based hacks to tame tech habits and the latest evidence-based strategies to decode the neurobiology of peak performance in the technological era.

Senior business leaders and HR executives from the country's top organisations engage Dr Kristy to help them promote employee digital wellbeing and performance. Her roster of clients includes Apple, AMP, Ernst and Young, Qantas, Deutsche Bank, Bank of Queensland, Challenger, Westpac, DLA Piper, Westpac, McDonald's, Westfield, Randstad, the Reserve Bank of Australia, State Street, National Broadband Network and Foxtel.



*Want to know how Kristy can help your employees thrive in the digital world? Kristy is a speaker and consultant working with both big and small organisations to help their staff with digital wellbeing and productivity strategies.*

**LEARN MORE**



If you want to put an end to constantly feeling stressed, overwhelmed and distracted the best place to start is...with a good old-fashioned book. Dear Digital...We Need to Talk in fact!

*Dominate your digital distractions and stop screens from adding to your stress.*



Learn brain-based strategies to tame your toxic tech-habits and thrive in the digital world. And no, don't worry. You don't need to cancel your Netflix subscription or take Slack off your phone.

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