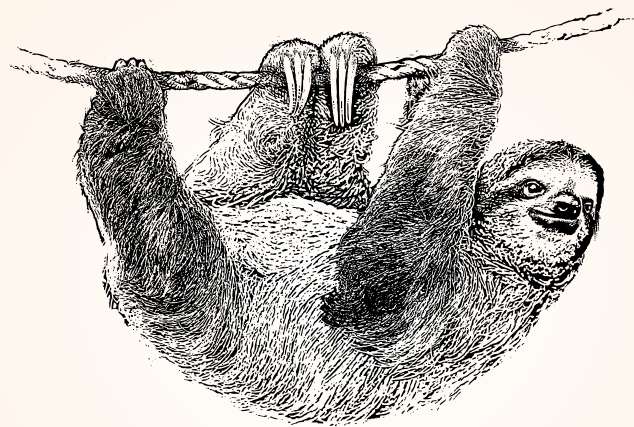


Do Nothing

*How to Break Away from Overworking,
Overdoing, and Underliving*



Celeste Headlee

National Bestselling Author of *We Need to Talk*

Book Club Kit

Do you need to *Do Nothing*?

Take this quiz to discover whether you truly need to take a break.

Answer each question True or False and choose the answer that applies to you more often than not.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | I often consider how I can be more efficient at a task. |
| T | F | I multitask often but do not produce as much as I think. |
| T | F | I am frequently fatigued. |
| T | F | I text people because it is a more efficient form of communication. |
| T | F | There is never enough time in the day. |
| T | F | My cramped schedule makes me feel important. |
| T | F | I work over 40 hours a week. |
| T | F | I believe that I can rise to riches through working harder. |
| T | F | I frequently complain about how “busy” I am. |
| T | F | My office feels like a second home to me. |
| T | F | Every moment of my day is a chance to be better and do more. |
| T | F | My cell phone is nearly always within arm’s reach. |
| T | F | I answer work emails outside of my required work hours. |
| T | F | I frequently ask myself why I do not have time to do it all. |

If you answered mostly **True**, you are in desperate need of a break.

If your answers are roughly equal between **True** and **False**, we still recommend you relax.

If you answered **False** to most of these questions, you have already done the important work of freeing yourself from the Cult of Efficiency. We applaud you. Note: this is an informal quiz based on the concepts and research presented in *Do Nothing*. It is not based in science, but chances are everyone will benefit from a little more leisure time.

The *Do Nothing* Manifesto

How to Break Away from the Cult of Efficiency

I.

Do less, not more.

7.

Overwork reduces productivity.
We don't and shouldn't live to work.

2.

Free time does not need
to be filled.

8.

Leave space for rest
and contentment.

3.

Celebrate your humanness,
both at work and in idleness.

9.

Make joy a goal.

4.

Money does not equate
to happiness.

10.

Embrace play in daily routines
and activities.

5.

Not everything needs to be slower,
but not everything needs to be fast.

11.

Perform one act of kindness
and small, selfless acts daily.

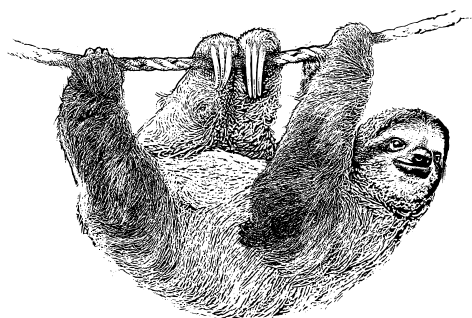
6.

Habits, not circumstances, create
stress. We can change our habits.

12.

When we reclaim our time,
we reclaim our humanity.

Break free of the Cult of Efficiency and join the Do Nothing Revolution.
Connect with Celeste Headlee at @CelesteHeadlee with #DoNothingRevolution.



Discussion Questions

1. Studies have concluded that women may be better at multitasking than men. Are there examples from your life where you would agree/disagree with this? Do you think multitasking makes a person—man or woman—more or less productive?
2. Why do you think some women refer to after-work hours as “arsenic hours?” Do you think the “cult of efficiency” affects women more—either in the workplace or at home? In what ways?
3. The cult of efficiency relies on a belief that following a rigorous schedule of activities will improve your life. In what ways do we as a society, as women, or as parents, try to reinforce that? What are some consequences of this belief?
4. For most of the 300,000 years that Homo sapiens has been walking upright, we did not work 40 hours a week—and we certainly didn’t work more than 300 days a year. Our working habits changed dramatically a little more than two centuries ago, thanks to the industrial age, bringing about the modern construct of “work hours” and punching the clock. What do you think of Celeste Headlee’s theory on the steam engine and the shift in thinking about the very nature of how one spends one’s time?
5. What sort of activities did you engage in when you were younger? What hobbies did you enjoy? Can you recall the moment when the principle “time is money” crept into your life and you abandoned such fun, creative pursuits?
6. What is your concept of the work-life balance? What ways have you blurred the lines between work and home?
7. Productivity rose in most countries in the 1990s and early 2000s. When productivity

Discussion Questions

rises, companies can (1) choose to produce more, or (2) allow employees to work fewer hours. The author of *The Overworked American*, Juliet Schor, writes: “Every worker in the United States could now be taking every other year off from work—without pay.” If you could spend 365 days in a row not getting up to go to work or answering work emails, and not worry about losing your position or opportunities for advancement, how would you spend your time?

8. Some animal brains can multitask, like the pigeon’s, but the human mind falls short on this one specific skill. Research shows that people who think of themselves as “heavy multitaskers” are worse at distinguishing between useful information and irrelevant details. What sorts of jobs do you multitask in a given day? If you were to do one thing at a time, how would you prioritize?
9. Bertrand Russell talked about the “cult of efficiency” back in 1932. What does today’s cult of efficiency look like? Do you feel it enhances or inhibits productivity? What does “efficiency” look like to you? What seems to embody “inefficiency” in your life?
10. What did “idleness” mean to you before reading this book? Has your definition changed? What is it now? Are there areas of your life where you could slow down?
11. How would you describe your work ethic? Do you believe our current work habits are stripping away our humanity? What does a “natural environment” for humankind look like for you?
12. Do you believe “time is money?” Do you see a correlation between the more money you earn and the less time you seem to have?
13. When someone asks “how are you?,” do you ever say “busy” instead of another answer? Are you as “busy” as you feel?

Discussion Questions

- I4. The authors says, “Our attention is now nearly always divided, because we seem to be always working on something. Our hobbies have become goals. Our homes have become offices and our free time is not free.” While it doesn’t necessarily mean all of the changes have been bad or harmful, the question we must answer is: Where is the line? How are we helping ourselves, and how are we hurting?
- I5. Do you think over-parenting has drawbacks? If you have children, do you see ways of parenting that make them less—or more—self-reliant?
- I6. Do you live to work? Do you feel you can find meaning outside of your job? What do you think of when someone asks you “What do you do?” Could you get the same amount of work done in fewer hours?
- I7. Talk about the relationship between comparison and perfectionism. How does one beget the other? What factors contribute to our tendency to compare ourselves to others? And what does “perfect” mean to you?
- I8. After reading this book, are you reconsidering your life and the ways you spend your time? In what ways do you plan on challenging yourself and changing up your routine?

Author Q&A



When did you first realize you needed to Do Nothing?

The aha! moment for me happened while I was lying in bed, sick with bronchitis for the second time in a matter of months. For most of my life, I've rarely been ill and yet I seemed to go from one sickness to another in 2015 and 2016. What's more, I was more stressed and frantic than I'd been while earning much less money. I wondered what the heck was going on and decided to figure out what was causing those feelings of being overwhelmed and overloaded.

What personal significance does the subject have for you?

Not only does this slavish devotion to long hours and efficiency hurt me and my family and my friends, I found that most of my friends and family were also suffering from it! The obsession with productivity and hard work is everywhere and seemed as toxic and mad as Ahab's pursuit of the white whale.

What do you hope readers will gain after reading this book?

I want to help other people break free of the productivity prison. I'd love to help them step off the treadmill that's forcing them to run constantly without moving forward. The emphasis on long work hours is so ingrained at this point that it will require real cultural change to free ourselves. I hope this book starts a conversation that becomes a movement aimed at bringing some sanity back to our offices and homes.

What are the advantages to leisure time?

The advantages are better health, both physical and mental, along with better relationships, more creativity, less stress, better sleep, and a whole host of other

Author Q&A

possible improvements. Human beings function best when we alternate focused work with idle time. We pulse between productivity and down time, so gritting your teeth and forcing yourself to keep working is literally counterproductive. You will accomplish more if you take a break.

What are some of your recommended ways to Do Nothing?

The first thing I recommend is to stop letting your tech distract you. If you are talking to someone, turn away from your computer and put your phone out of sight. In meetings, take notes on paper and don't bring your laptop or phone. That's a simple way to help your brain relax and focus. Secondly, get into the habit of doing one thing at a time. No more multitasking! If you are writing a memo and you need to check your email, stop the first task, check email, then close your inbox and go back to the memo. One thing at a time.

You talk about our obsession with finding the best method of doing everything.

How do you accept "good enough"?

The best method of doing everything isn't always going to yield the best results. Constantly seeking a better way or strategy creates unnecessary stress and pressure, which leads to mistakes and anxiety. If you choose the simplest method, you're more likely to get it done well than if you choose something more complicated. Don't worry about how your dinner looks, focus on how it tastes. Don't waste time poring over page after page of shoes online, go to an actual store and try some on. You're much more likely to find a good-fitting pair that way and won't have to waste time (and the earth's precious resources) sending items back.

