

"IGNORE THIS BOOK AT YOUR OWN PERIL." —SETH GODIN

# REWORK



JASON FRIED & DAVID HEINEMEIER HANSSON

Founders of **37signals**



## Workaholism

Our culture celebrates the idea of the workaholic. We hear about people burning the midnight oil. They pull all-nighters and sleep at the office. It's considered a badge of honor to kill yourself over a project. No amount of work is too much work.

Not only is this workaholism unnecessary, it's stupid. Working more doesn't mean you care more or get more done. It just means you work more.

Workaholics wind up creating more problems than they solve. First off, working like that just isn't sustainable over time. When the burnout crash comes—and it will—it'll hit that much harder.

Workaholics miss the point, too. They try to fix problems by throwing sheer hours at them. They try to make up for intellectual laziness with brute force. This results in inelegant solutions.

They even create crises. They don't look for ways to be more efficient because they actually *like* working overtime. They enjoy feeling like heroes. They create problems (often unwittingly) just so they can get off on working more.

Workaholics make the people who don't stay late feel inadequate for “merely” working reasonable hours. That leads to guilt and poor morale all around. Plus, it

leads to an ass-in-seat mentality—people stay late out of obligation, even if they aren't really being productive.

If all you do is work, you're unlikely to have sound judgments. Your values and decision making wind up skewed. You stop being able to decide what's worth extra effort and what's not. And you wind up just plain tired. No one makes sharp decisions when tired.

In the end, workaholics don't actually accomplish more than nonworkaholics. They may claim to be perfectionists, but that just means they're wasting time fixating on inconsequential details instead of moving on to the next task.

Workaholics aren't heroes. They don't save the day, they just use it up. The real hero is already home because she figured out a faster way to get things done.



## Meetings are toxic

The worst interruptions of all are meetings. Here's why:

- They're usually about words and abstract concepts, not real things.
- They usually convey an abysmally small amount of information per minute.
- They drift off-subject easier than a Chicago cab in a snowstorm.
- They require thorough preparation that most people don't have time for.
- They frequently have agendas so vague that nobody is really sure of the goal.
- They often include at least one moron who inevitably gets his turn to waste everyone's time with nonsense.
- Meetings procreate. One meeting leads to another meeting leads to another . . .

It's also unfortunate that meetings are typically scheduled like TV shows. You set aside thirty minutes or an hour because that's how scheduling software works (you'll never see anyone schedule a seven-minute meeting with Outlook). Too bad. If it only takes seven minutes to accomplish a meeting's goal, then that's all

the time you should spend. Don't stretch seven into thirty.

When you think about it, the true cost of meetings is staggering. Let's say you're going to schedule a meeting that lasts one hour, and you invite ten people to attend. That's actually a ten-hour meeting, not a one-hour meeting. You're trading ten hours of productivity for one hour of meeting time. And it's probably more like fifteen hours, because there are mental switching costs that come with stopping what you're doing, going somewhere else to meet, and then resuming what you were doing beforehand.

Is it ever OK to trade ten or fifteen hours of productivity for one hour of meeting? Sometimes, maybe. But that's a pretty hefty price to pay. Judged on a pure cost basis, meetings of this size quickly become liabilities, not assets. Think about the time you're actually losing and ask yourself if it's really worth it.

If you decide you absolutely *must* get together, try to make your meeting a productive one by sticking to these simple rules:

- Set a timer. When it rings, meeting's over. Period.
- Invite as few people as possible.
- Always have a clear agenda.
- Begin with a specific problem.

- Meet at the site of the problem instead of a conference room. Point to real things and suggest real changes.
- End with a solution and make someone responsible for implementing it.





## Pick a fight

If you think a competitor sucks, say so. When you do that, you'll find that others who agree with you will rally to your side. Being the anti-\_\_\_\_\_ is a great way to differentiate yourself and attract followers.

For example, Dunkin' Donuts likes to position itself as the anti-Starbucks. Its ads mock Starbucks for using "Fritalian" terms instead of small, medium, and large. Another Dunkin' campaign is centered on a taste test in which it beat Starbucks. There's even a site called [DunkinBeatStarbucks.com](http://DunkinBeatStarbucks.com) where visitors can send e-cards with statements like "Friends don't let friends drink Starbucks."

Audi is another example. It's been taking on the old guard of car manufacturers. It puts "old luxury" brands like Rolls-Royce and Mercedes "on notice" in ads touting Audi as the fresh luxury alternative. Audi takes on Lexus's automatic parking systems with ads that say Audi drivers know how to park their own cars. Another ad gives a side-by-side comparison of BMW and Audi owners: The BMW owner uses the rearview mirror to adjust his hair while the Audi driver uses the mirror to see what's behind him.

Apple jabs at Microsoft with ads that compare Mac and PC owners, and 7UP bills itself as the Uncola.

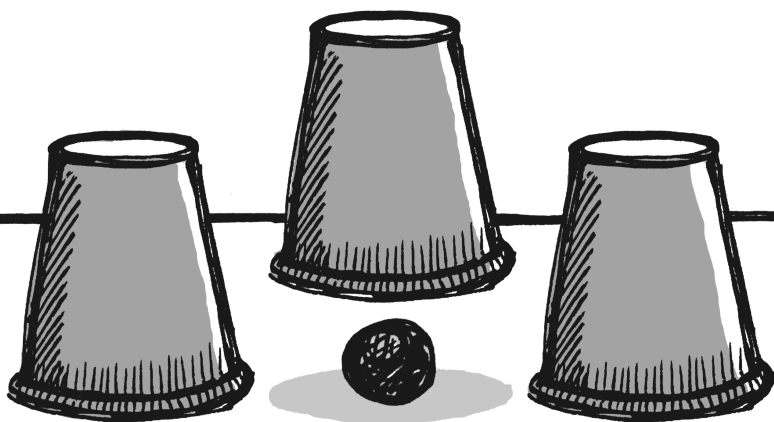
Under Armour positions itself as Nike for a new generation.

All these examples show the power and direction you can gain by having a target in your sights. Who do you want to take a shot at?

You can even pit yourself as the opponent of an entire industry. Dyson's Airblade starts with the premise that the hand-dryer industry is a failure and then sells itself as faster and more hygienic than the others. I Can't Believe It's Not Butter puts its enemy right there in its product name.

Having an enemy gives you a great story to tell customers, too. Taking a stand always stands out. People get stoked by conflict. They take sides. Passions are ignited. And that's a good way to get people to take notice.

# PLANNING IS GUESSING



## Planning is guessing

Unless you're a fortune-teller, long-term business planning is a fantasy. There are just too many factors that are out of your hands: market conditions, competitors, customers, the economy, etc. Writing a plan makes you feel in control of things you can't actually control.

Why don't we just call plans what they really are: guesses. Start referring to your business plans as business guesses, your financial plans as financial guesses, and your strategic plans as strategic guesses. Now you can stop worrying about them as much. They just aren't worth the stress.

When you turn guesses into plans, you enter a danger zone. Plans let the past drive the future. They put blinders on you. "This is where we're going because, well, that's where we said we were going." And that's the problem: Plans are inconsistent with improvisation.

And you have to be able to improvise. You have to be able to pick up opportunities that come along. Sometimes you need to say, "We're going in a new direction because that's what makes sense *today*."

The timing of long-range plans is screwed up too. You have the most information when you're doing something, not *before* you've done it. Yet when do you write a plan? Usually it's before you've even begun. That's the worst time to make a big decision.

Now this isn't to say you shouldn't think about the future or contemplate how you might attack upcoming obstacles. That's a worthwhile exercise. Just don't feel you need to write it down or obsess about it. If you write a big plan, you'll most likely never look at it anyway. Plans more than a few pages long just wind up as fossils in your file cabinet.

Give up on the guesswork. Decide what you're going to do this week, not this year. Figure out the next most important thing and do that. Make decisions right before you do something, not far in advance.

It's OK to wing it. Just get on the plane and go. You can pick up a nicer shirt, shaving cream, and a toothbrush once you get there.

Working without a plan may seem scary. But blindly following a plan that has no relationship with reality is even scarier.



**UNDERDO**  
*your*  
**COMPETITION**

## Underdo your competition

Conventional wisdom says that to beat your competitors, you need to one-up them. If they have four features, you need five (or fifteen, or twenty-five). If they're spending \$20,000, you need to spend \$30,000. If they have fifty employees, you need a hundred.

This sort of one-upping, Cold War mentality is a dead end. When you get suckered into an arms race, you wind up in a never-ending battle that costs you massive amounts of money, time, and drive. And it forces you to constantly be on the defensive, too. Defensive companies can't think ahead; they can only think behind. They don't lead; they follow.

So what do you do instead? Do less than your competitors to beat them. Solve the simple problems and leave the hairy, difficult, nasty problems to the competition. Instead of one-upping, try one-downing. Instead of outdoing, try underdoing.

The bicycle world provides a great example. For years, major bicycle brands focused on the latest in high-tech equipment: mountain bikes with suspension and ultrastrong disc brakes, or lightweight titanium road bikes with carbon-fiber everything. And it was assumed that bikes should have multiple gears: three, ten, or twenty-one.



But recently, fixed-gear bicycles have boomed in popularity, despite being as low-tech as you can get. These bikes have just one gear. Some models don't have brakes. The advantage: They're simpler, lighter, cheaper, and don't require as much maintenance.

Another great example of a product that is succeeding by underdoing the competition: the Flip—an ultrasimple, point-and-shoot, compact camcorder that's taken a significant percentage of the market in a short time. Look at all the things the Flip does *not* deliver:

- No big screen (and the tiny screen doesn't swing out for self-portraits either)
- No photo-taking ability
- No tapes or discs (you have to offload the videos to a computer)
- No menus
- No settings
- No video light
- No viewfinder
- No special effects
- No headphone jack
- No lens cap
- No memory card
- No optical zoom

The Flip wins fans because it only does a few simple things and it does them well. It's easy and fun to use. It goes places a bigger camera would never go and gets used by people who would never use a fancier camera.

Don't shy away from the fact that your product or service does less. Highlight it. Be proud of it. Sell it as aggressively as competitors sell their extensive feature lists.

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