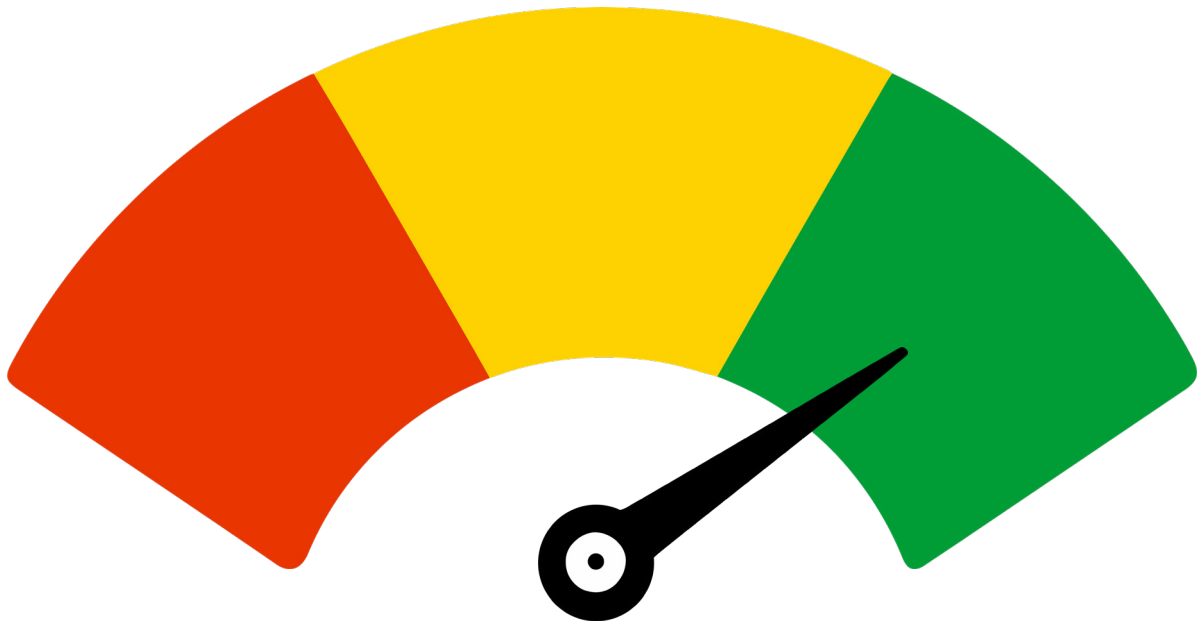


APPLICATION GUIDE

AT YOUR BEST



COURSE

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THE GREY ZONE... NEVER REALLY ON. NEVER REALLY OFF.

The biggest threat to leveraging your Green, Red and Yellow Zones is the temptation to work intermittently and consistently, which would turn your entire day into a grey zone...that feeling like you're never really on and never really off.

The rise of smart devices means that while you used to go to the office, now the office goes to you. You can work any time, anywhere...and many people do.

If you work from home, you can easily end up throwing in a load of laundry, cooking or watching videos, wasting your green or yellow zone.

If you're in the office, you can just as easily scroll through Amazon to buy something personal or lose an hour on Instagram, not really working when you're supposed to be working.

Then you come home, and rather than being fully present with your family and focused when talking with your kids, you're the person who's always saying "just let me send this one more email" or you're off thinking about the problem you're trying to solve at work rather than helping your daughter with her science homework.

That's the grey zone...you're never really on and never really off.

The lack of structure in modern life combined with productivity shame (the feeling like you've never done enough) can lead you to feel like you need to be working all the time.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Where have you experienced the Grey Zone in your life—never really being on and never really being off? Make a list of times you lose focus and work and end up doing personal things. Are there any ways in which that is counterproductive?
2. In addition, monitor yourself for seven days during your personal time (at home) and see how often you engage in work when you're supposed to be off. Keep track even of small things, like reading work texts or notifications and any and all responses you make. What are you learning about your patterns? In what ways are your patterns counterproductive?
3. To what extent do you struggle with the feeling that you never get enough done? Sometimes this is a work issue. At other times, it can be related to your childhood or arise from deeper, psychological issues. If you struggle with this aspect of productivity shame, why is it an issue for you?
4. Similarly, productivity shame surfaces as the feeling that you're not allowed to do unproductive things. If that describes you, why do you feel that way? Try something like making yourself sit in complete silence while watching the sun set, or sitting in a park with no technology nearby, and watch nature or people for 45 minutes. Train yourself to enjoy the things around you, rather than feeling like you have to use every moment to produce something.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

5. Remember, if you don't declare a finish line, your body will. What is a reasonable finish line for you? How will you mark it every day to escape the grey zone? Ideas include:

- Doing your personal things at work during designated times (lunch or a coffee break).
- Closing your laptop for the final time at home and storing it away.
- Taking the last mile of your drive home a little more slowly and reminding yourself that you're home now and no longer at work.
- Putting your other devices (phone, tablet) away in a designated spot so you can be fully present at home.

09

MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

Most of what you do as a leader is make decisions. In the era of knowledge workers, life is a thousand decisions. And we're not great at it.

In this session you looked at two key challenges every leader has to overcome to make better decisions:

Decision Fatigue

Decision Bottlenecks

Leveraging your Green Zone to do your most important thinking is critical to avoid making decisions in your Red Zone.

A simple way to think of it is this: Don't let fatigue make your decisions for you.

This happens to professionals from medical doctors to parole board officials. A study of 1100 parole board decisions in Israel revealed that prisoners who appeared in the morning

were granted parole 70% of the time. Those who appeared in the late afternoon received parole 10% of the time. The only variable? Time of day.

As a leader, you can't let your exhaustion and fatigue make your decisions for you.

So how do you avoid decision fatigue?

Pre-deciding certain decisions and automating other decisions is a great place to start.

You can automate decisions by doing the same thing every day:

- Automating your wardrobe by wearing the same thing every day, or even picking out your clothes the night before helps.
- Eating the same thing for breakfast or lunch every day is another way to conserve energy, time and decisions.

- Automating your exercise routines helps to free up brain power and even exercise patterns. Running or cycling the same route or doing a familiar routine at the gym frees up mental energy.
- Make categorical decisions about what you will or won't do, from breakfast meetings to deciding you don't do sales on products. .
- Automate your finances (put a % into savings every month)
- Automate check ins with key friends (Coffee with Josh every Friday afternoon at one)

A second strategy to help you make better decisions is to stop being the decision bottle neck in your organization. Many CEOs and senior executives struggle with this.

A better rule is to let your team make almost all of the decisions. A simple principle to guide your team is this: if you're the leader, you're the decision maker.

If you free up a team member to make the decision, they are free to consult with whoever they wish (another staff member, outside consultant or volunteers), but make it clear they don't need permission from anyone. If they're the leader, then it's their job to lead.

Organizations that make decisions in teams often face delays, frustrations and suffer from a lack of clarity. (Think of a committee or team system that grinds everything meaningful to a screeching halt.)

The exceptions to a team member being the sole decision maker are if the decision

- requires spending that moves their total budget number higher than budgeted
- impacts or changes the mission, vision, strategy or values of your organization
- impacts or effects other organizational areas, both negatively and positively

In the case of the first two scenarios, permission would be required from a more senior leader or CEO. In the case of a decision that impacts other areas, a consultation with those areas is advised, and a joint decision might be a better approach depending on the magnitude of the impact.

When a team member makes the decision, he or she is also accountable and responsible for the decision, which really increases ownership and engagement.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What decisions have you already automated before starting this course? How have those decisions helped you?
2. What decisions do you make on a regular basis that you can automate? To get a better answer for this question, discuss this with people close to you at work and at home and, based on what you learn, automate at least five decisions that will reduce decision fatigue for you.
3. To what extent does your organization struggle with decision-making bottlenecks? Where is the problem? Do you struggle with being a bottleneck, and if so, why?
4. When it comes to delegating decisions, clarity is essential. What about your mission, vision, strategy and values needs to be clarified? Do the hard work of clarifying those things now (writing them down helps) to save you and your team many hours in the future.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

5. If you hesitate when letting others make decisions, ask yourself why. Chances are, your hesitancy is based either on a lack of clarity or a need you feel to control things. If the issue is clarity, spend more time clarifying. If it's control, do some deeper work (perhaps with a trained coach or therapist) to figure out how to let go. If you can't let go, you won't grow.

10 OPTIMIZE YOUR WORKFLOW

Whether you realize it or not, you have a workflow system. It's invisible, and, surprisingly, it's probably highly inefficient.

The principle behind an effective workflow system is simple: clarifying how you do things will make everyone better at the things you do. And it will free up significant more time for you to be efficient and effective.

So much of the workflow in a typical in-person office is "unplanned."

Got a question...send an email. Unclear about something, knock on your colleagues door or stop by her desk. When you're in the lunchroom and you see your finance director, you ask about the budget deadline and clarify things. Everything from elevator conversations, water cooler conversations, instant messaging and even in meetings after the meeting is how things get done.

As work has moved online, you now have document and project management software like Asana, Trello, BaseCamp, MS Office, Google Drive, Slack and of course email. But most organizations don't have a crystal clear sense of what gets used when, and how it gets used.

The average office workflow system is chaos, random meetings, messages, texts, interruptions, knocks at the door, emails, Slack messages and whatever the sender decides to do to get your attention.

The key is to give each app or channel a clear role and stick to it. And then frame exactly how and when communication will happen.

That means assigning a clearly defined purpose for

- Meetings
- Apps and messaging systems; and
- Email

Leading a remote team has many of the same dynamics as leading an in-person team, except it forces you to become both more efficient and effective. If you have no workflow system, your remote team will descend into chaos

even more quickly than a fully in-person team because you don't have the relational glue to navigate the challenges or the physical proximity to solve problems quickly.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What workflow system do you currently have for your office? Every office has one. So write down the invisible script you actually use for your workflow.

2. Be honest: how effective is your current workflow system? How efficient is it? How is it neither effective or efficient? To what extent is your workflow system characterized by chaos, random meetings, messages, texts, interruptions, knocks at the door, emails, Slack messages and whatever the sender decides to do to get your attention?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

3. Start mapping out a better workflow system for your office. Using the framework shared in this session, use these questions to develop it:

What can wait for a weekly meeting?

- Where will you park issues so you don't lose track of them?
- Which weekly meetings will deal with which issues?

What needs to be settled today?

- Which apps/channels will you use for communication?
- What will the expected response time be?

What issues need to be resolved immediately?

- Which app/method will you use for communication?
- What will the expected response time be?

4. What other processes do you need to establish to make sure the workflow in your office is efficient and effective?

11

RETHINK (AND RESCHEDULE) YOUR MEETINGS

We've touched on meetings in a few sessions of the Masterclass but in this session I want to help you do a deeper dive into how to optimize your meetings.

The reality is that many leaders could spend 80-100% of their time in meetings. It wouldn't be that hard.

The only problem is that for most of us, being in a meeting often means our work doesn't get done.

Meetings are necessary to get things done, because work gets done through people.

But here's the tension.

We live in meetings, and our productivity dies in them. Meetings are a huge distraction in a world where leaders often simply need to get work done.

With that said, here are the five simple steps that will move you toward better meetings.

1. Do a Meeting Audit
2. Assess the time and purpose
3. Trim your meetings
4. Align Your Meetings to maximize Your Green, Yellow and Red Zones
5. Propose a meeting free day (or two)

Meetings expand to fill the time you've set aside for them. So just set aside less time. Having been through most of the Masterclass already, you'll always understand this final point. Just because there's nothing on the calendar doesn't mean you're open.

A wonderful companion for your meeting free day is the idea of a meeting cap. I find that if I have fewer than 12 meetings a week, we don't accomplish enough as a team and I don't get enough input as CEO.

If I have more than 15, I start to feel overwhelmed and I feel like I don't have enough time to get my work done.

Your meeting cap might be higher. It might be lower. When you're at your max, meetings can easily become counterproductive.

Then, when you look at your week and you have one or two open days and 12-15 meetings scheduled for the other days, you'll know with confidence that

even though you have 'open space' in your calendar, you're done. You're full.

And you'll push the meeting request into another week or decide not to take the meeting at all.

So, with those five steps, you're on your way to rethinking and rescheduling your meetings for optimal performance at work, which of course, leads to a much better personal life.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What do you love most about meetings? What do you most dislike? Why?

2. What would your team members say about the meetings you call if they told the truth?

3. Start by doing a meeting audit.

- Begin by reviewing your standing meetings, meetings that happen every week or biweekly or monthly.
- Go back over the last two months and count up how many additional meetings you had—you're looking for one-off and ad hoc meetings that are not recurring. Find the average.
- Use these two averages to determine your current meeting load.
- Finally, calculate the time you spend in them. Not the scheduled time, but actual time, because meetings can run long.

4. Use your meeting audit results to assess the time invested and purpose to see if the time and energy invested merit the returns you're getting from those meetings.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

5. Which meetings can be cut altogether or trimmed? Are there any ninety minute meetings that could be an hour, or hour long meetings that could be a half hour? Can you convert others to stand up meetings or check-ins? Consider adjusting your default time for a new meeting to a shorter duration as well (say, 30 minutes).

6. For the meetings that survived, reshuffle them so they ideally fit with the most strategic use of your Green or Yellow Zone. Run your team through the Energy Clock exercise in Session Four to move key meetings out of your Red Zone and avoid wasting peoples' Green Zones (unless that meeting is strategic enough to warrant holding it in multiple peoples' Green Zones).

7. Which meetings can be cut altogether or trimmed? Are there any ninety minute meetings that could be an hour, or hour long meetings that could be a half hour? Can you convert others to stand up meetings or check-ins? Consider adjusting your default time for a new meeting to a shorter duration as well (say, 30 minutes).

12

MASTER INBOX ZERO

So you just love email, right?

Kidding.

Of course, you don't. Few people do.

We've gotten a lot more efficient and effective already, but there remains the challenge of the ever present inbox.

If you have figured out your optimal workflow system as we outlined in Session 10, then you've already largely eliminated internal email with coworkers and team members.

But that won't get your inbox down to zero.

There are three simple steps to get to inbox zero in less than thirty minutes and stay there.

STEP 1: DEAL WITH ALL YOUR UNREAD EMAILS, OR DELETE THEM

I know this sounds draconian, but take 30 minutes and deal with ALL your unread emails, or delete them.

If you have a dozen emails lingering, 30 minutes is likely way more than you need to get to inbox zero. But just set it aside anyway. Maybe you need to build a task management system too (as I shared, I use Asana, but there are hundreds of task management systems out there.)

([Here's a list](#) of some current task management apps).

So what if you're the guy or woman with a million unread emails?

I've never been there, but here's my suggestion. Pick an arbitrary date (maybe two weeks or a month at the most) and deal with all those.

Then archive or delete the rest.

What, you say, how can I do that?
Those people are relying on me...there's critical data in there.

Actually, that's not true. Some of those people who sent unread emails have forgotten you. Some may have even died, who knows?

And that email from 2019 you never looked at, do you really think that's still a live issue?

Nope. It's not.

If you're terrified of losing data, mark them all as read and batch-archive them so they're searchable. Then move on with your life.

STEP 2: LIMIT READING EMAIL TO A FEW TIMES A DAY

Ironically, one of the fastest ways to get a cluttered inbox is to check email

repeatedly throughout the day.

Maybe you're in line at your fave local coffee shop and you check just to see who's emailed you. But, of course, you don't have time to deal with it, so you just tap on a few and move on.

But now you're spending mental energy on problems you can't solve right now. Bad idea.

So, just resolve to look at your email a few times a day, and set aside 10 minutes (or 30..depending on your email workload) to deal with it.

3 SIMPLE RULES TO STAY AT INBOX ZERO

- Touch it once
- Answer Immediately
- Stop using email to schedule things or solve complex problems

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. This session has been almost all application, so this guide will be shorter. First... set aside a day on the calendar within the next seven days to get to inbox zero. Go ahead...put it on the calendar. When you arrive at that day, pick up at question two or move ahead and do it now.

2. Pick an arbitrary date at which you will begin archiving (or deleting) all your unread or undealt with email. 30 days will work best in most situations. By archiving these emails you'll still have them for future reference and replies, but they won't clog up your inbox (and mind). Don't worry about categorizing them. Most email apps have excellent search capabilities and a quick keyword or sender search will solve that for you. Archive all those emails now.

3. Work through the last 30 days of email remaining, and either reply now, or, if further work is required, assign yourself a task in your task management system where you can come back to them later. Now archive or delete all of those.

4. Voila. You're at inbox zero. Now limit reading email to a few strategic windows a day, and follow these three rules to stay at Inbox Zero:

- Touch it once
- Answer Immediately
- Stop using email to schedule things or solve complex problems

13

RESIST RESPONDING TO EVERY EMERGENCY

If you look deeply, you'll see in the book version of *At Your Best*, among time, energy and priorities, realizing your priorities became the longest section of the book.

Why? Well, leveraging your energy is actually the superpower of the Thrive Cycle. It's what, more than anything, will produce your biggest results.

However, the biggest threat to leveraging your energy and focusing your time is actually all the attempts to hijack your priorities that happen every week, every hour and sometimes, it seems every minute. That's just the way life works. As you know, nobody will ever ask you to accomplish your priorities. They will only ask you to accomplish yours.

In this season of the *At Your Best* Course, I want to give you something I didn't cover in the book or video series so far: a strategy on how to respond to emergencies.

As you might suspect, one of the most perplexing problems leaders face is how to handle emergencies—the crises that come up in the lives of people that look to you to help solve.

The challenge in many organizations is that more people, more locations and more growth = more crises.

This dynamic stresses many leaders out, and it's hard to know what to do. You're working on some long-term planning and your phone buzzes, telling you that marketing needs your help right now or there's a serious disagreement between two senior leaders on your team, or that there's a very irate client outside demanding to see you.

What do you do?

Responding to every emergency just doesn't scale.

The good news is that caring for people, clients and customers is something that can be scaled to help you serve and reach hundreds, and even thousands, of people.

But what do you do in the meantime with the seemingly endless emergencies?

One step you can take is to decide whether something is actually an emergency. Just because it's an emergency to them doesn't mean it has to be an emergency for you.

Here are three strategies that will help.

Don't respond to everything that comes your way right away.

Don't feel obligated to deal with every 'crisis'.

Don't solve every problem that comes to you.

Deciding what you won't do and how you'll handle 'crises' frees up time for things you need to do and want to do instead.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Do you tend to respond instantly to emergencies? If you were being totally honest with yourself, why do you do that? Usually, most people discover that they feel guilty if they don't, or they don't want to let people down, or they like being needed. At the most honest level, why do you keep letting other people's priorities hijack yours?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

2. What's at stake if you keep responding to every 'emergency' that comes your way? Who gets hurt? What will happen to future growth?

3. What is the difference in your mind between something that is an actual emergency as opposed to something that 'presents' as an emergency (but was a long time coming?).

4. Review the three strategies below to deal with apparent 'emergencies'. Which will be the hardest for you? Why?

- Don't respond to everything that comes your way right away.
- Don't feel obligated to deal with every 'crisis'.
- Don't solve every problem that comes to you.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

5. **Create an Emergency Triage List.** In the left column, make a list of emergencies you will no longer respond to at all. In the middle, make a list of emergencies you will respond to later, on your schedule. Finally, on the right, make a list of situations that you will respond to as emergencies. Keep adjusting this list over the next few months as you experiment with what's working and what's not.

Emergencies I will no longer respond to	Emergencies I will respond to on my schedule	Situations I will respond to as emergencies

14

CRAFT MEANINGFUL TIME OFF

It's been quite a journey through this Course, but I hope you have a framework now for living in a way today that will help you thrive tomorrow.

You're either on your way to reclaiming more than 1000 productive hours in a year, or you're there.

You even know that time off won't heal you if the problem is how you spend your time on, but you've fixed that. You've found a sustainable pace.

And if that's the case, guess what will happen next? You might get to the place where you feel so good you don't need or want to take a day off or a vacation. And if you're a little driven and have workaholic tendencies like I do, that might even feel rewarding.

But in this final session I want to give you some strategies on how to do it well.

Here are four strategies that craft meaningful time off:

1. Rest - Sleep is a secret leadership weapon no one is talking about.
2. Use Distraction to Stop Working - Ask yourself: What will distract you?
3. Hobbies - Guess what? Work is not a hobby, even if you love what you do.
4. Frequency - To really rest and recalibrate, you need to take at least a week off.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Sleep scientist Matthew Walker says “Human beings are the only species that deliberately deprive themselves of sleep for no apparent gain.” Do you deprive yourself of sleep? What’s that costing you?

2. What changes could you make to your sleep strategy, routine or even physical bedroom to make sleep easier, longer and more renewing?

3. Until now in the At Your Best book and course, distraction has been a negative term. However, distracting with something good when you’re taking time off can keep you from opening your laptop or getting back to work on your phone. What positive activities and pursuits can you embrace during your ‘off time’ to keep you from the temptation to keep working?

4. A simple question that could bring you years of enjoyment: what hobby could you embrace or pursue more deeply to enrich your life and your time off? Far too many leaders have no hobby, so experiment and find something you love.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(CONTINUED)

5. What's your plan for your next meaningful period of time off? Some recommendations:

- Lengthen it. Take your usual amount of vacation and add a minimum of 30-50% if you can. Turn a week into ten days, or two weeks into three weeks off.
- Avoid working vacations. For the most part, working vacations don't work.
- For those times you can't get away or have very limited time off, change things up every 4-6 weeks. Work from a coffee shop or backyard if you can, or get permission to vary things even a little. A change makes a great substitute for a break.