

THE BIG IDEAS

The 15 Secrets

Here's the quick take.

Two Awesome Hours

In the morning. Use them wisely.

The 80/20 Mindset

Meet Vilfredo Pareto.

Touch It Once

And watch your productivity soar.

Energy

Is EVERYTHING.

15 Secrets Successful People Know About Time Management

The Productivity Habits of 7 Billionaires, 13 Olympic Athletes, 29 Straight-A Students, and 239 Entrepreneurs

BY KEVIN KRUSE · THE KRUSE GROUP © 2015 · 202 PAGES

"My curiosity soon turned into a quest, and I did original survey research of working professionals, looking for correlations between specific time management practices and productivity, stress, and happiness. I funded a study of thousands of working professionals and we found no correlation between time management training and higher levels of productivity or reduced stress. Zero!

I then interviewed hundreds of highly successful people including Mark Cuban and other billionaires, famous entrepreneurs, gold medal Olympians like Shannon Miller, and straight-A students.

What I discovered is that highly successful people don't prioritize tasks on a to-do list, or follow some complex five-step system, or refer to logic tree diagrams to make decisions.

Actually, highly successful people don't think about time much at all. Instead, they think about values, priorities, and *consistent habits*.

While no two people manage time exactly the same way, there are common themes. And if you really try them, you might find that just one of their 'secrets' has the power to transform your career and your life."

~ Kevin Kruse from *15 Secrets Successful People Know About Time Management*

Kevin Kruse is a *Forbes* Leadership columnist and successful entrepreneur.

He's built and sold several multimillion dollar technology companies, winning both Inc 500 and Best Place to Work awards along the way. He's also written a number of bestselling books.

I got this book after a long-time student and Heroic Coach connected me with Kevin.

Apparently my new friend was being interviewed by Kevin about his new book on creativity for a *Forbes* article. At the end of their chat, my new friend told Kevin that he should check out Heroic. And, apparently, he had JUST signed up for Heroic the day before. (Awesome.)

This book, as per the sub-title and intro quote, is all about the top productivity habits of some of the world's most productive and successful people. It's written in a straight-forward, conversational style. There's a reason it has over 1,400 reviews—it's fantastic. (Get a copy [here](#).)

It's packed with Big Ideas. I'm excited to share some of my favorites so let's jump straight in!

THE 15 SECRETS

"If you're like most people who want to improve their time management, you probably want a list of tips, tools, and systems that will increase your productivity and add hours to your week.

Yet the single most important thing when it comes to time and productivity isn't a tactic or a trick—it's a shift in mindset.

"Always try to spend as much time as possible using your unique strengths on your highest leverage activities."

~ Kevin Kruse

"Don't let the fear of the time it will take to accomplish something stand in the way of your doing it. The time will pass anyway; we might just as well put that passing time to the best possible use."

~ Jim Rohn

Self-made millionaires, professional athletes, straight-A students, and other highly successful people, think about time differently. They experience time differently."

That's from the very first chapter on the first secret called "The Power of 1440" that's all about remembering the power of those 1,440 minutes we each get every single day.

Before we drill into a few of my favorite Ideas, let's take a super-quick look at each of the 15 secrets and a question Kevin poses to help us move from Theory to Practice!

SECRET #1: Time is your most valuable resource. *How would your life change if each and every day you truly felt your 1,440 minutes?*

SECRET #2: Identify your Most Important Task (MIT) and work on it each day before doing anything else. *So, what's your one thing? What's your MIT?*

SECRET #3: Work from your calendar, not a to-do list. *How much less stress would you feel if you could rip up your to-do list and work from your calendar?*

SECRET #4: Procrastination can be overcome if you figure out how to beat your future self, who cannot be trusted to do the right thing. *You know what needs to get done this week; how will you ensure you don't put it off?*

SECRET #5: Accept the fact that there will always be more to do and more that can be done. *How much better will you feel when you finally accept the fact that you can't do it all, because there will always be more that can be done?*

SECRET #6: Always carry a notebook. *How much less stress will you feel when you begin to dump everything important into your notebook?*

SECRET #7: Email is a great way for other people to put their priorities into your life; control your inbox. *Are you ready to commit to checking email no more than three times a day?*

SECRET #8: Schedule and attend meetings as a last resort, when all other forms of communication won't work. *Look at the meetings on your calendar for the week ahead. How can you eliminate them or reduce their allotted time?*

SECRET #9: Say no to everything that doesn't support your immediate goals. *Which meetings, calls, and projects will you say no to in the upcoming weeks?*

SECRET #10: Eighty percent of outcomes are generated by twenty percent of activities. *What 20 percent of your time generates 80 percent of your value?*

SECRET #11: Focus your time only on things that utilize your unique strengths and passions. *What are you going to outsource starting next week?*

SECRET #12: Batch your work with recurring themes for different days of the week. *How much more productive would you be, how much less stress would you feel, if your days were organized to maximize your effectiveness?*

SECRET #13: If a task can be completed in less than five minutes, then do it immediately. *How much time will you gain when you aren't returning over and over again to 'touch' the same items? Touch it once, touch it once, touch it once.*

SECRET #14: Invest the first 60 minutes of each day in ritual that strengthen your mind, body and spirit. *What time will you set for your alarm clock, for tomorrow morning, so you'll have time for your morning ritual?*

SECRET #15: Productivity is about energy and focus, not time. *How will you increase your energy tomorrow?*

Those are the 15 secrets. Quick check in...

What's the #1 idea that YOU think would be the most high-leverage thing to practice? Is Today a good day to move from Theory to Practice to Mastery and DOMINATE that, Hero?

TWO AWESOME HOURS IN THE MORNING

"Highly successful people design an empowering and energizing morning routine and stick with it."

~ Kevin Kruse

"After identifying your MIT [Most Important Task], you need to turn it into a calendar item and book it as early in your day as possible.

Dan Ariely, a Duke University professor of psychology and behavioral economics, suggests that most people are most productive and have the highest cognitive functioning in the first two hours after they're fully awake. In a Reddit Ask Me Anything, Ariely wrote:

One of the saddest mistakes in time management is the propensity of people to spend the two most productive hours of their day on things that don't require high cognitive capacity (like social media). If we could salvage those precious hours, most of us would be much more successful in accomplishing what we truly want.

Why do we do this? Why do we spend our best hours on our least important tasks?

Many of us jump into our day trying to take care of all the quick and easy things. Responding to all those overnight emails, sorting our stack of mail, signing off on purchase orders.... it all feels so productive! *Look, it's only 11:00 in the morning, and I must have done 50 things."*

When I read that I immediately thought of another Ariely gem, some *Dilbert* wisdom, and one of the most powerful things my old coach [Steve Chandler](#) taught me.

We talk about this Dan Ariely wisdom in our Notes on [Manage Your Day to Day](#) where he says: "So if your e-mail is running and it is telling you that a message is waiting for you, that's going to be very hard to resist. In your mind, you'll keep thinking about what exciting things are waiting for you. Now, if you never opened your e-mail, you would do much better.

It would probably be best if managers went to the IT department and asked them that e-mail not be distributed between eight and eleven every morning. The idea that the best way to communicate with people is 24/7 is not really an idea about maximizing productivity."

In that same Idea, we quote Mark McGuinness who tells us: "The most important change you can make in your working habits is to switch to creative work first, reactive work second. This means blocking off a large chunk of time every day for creative work on your own priorities, with the phone and email off."

Which leads us to some of the most powerful wisdom Steve Chandler ever gave me in the few years we worked together. He told me that the words "creative" and "reactive" have the exact same letters in them but OH the difference the order of those letters makes!

Note: I've hit "Creative Before Reactive" every day but 3 times in the 330 days since we launched the [Heroic app](#). And you know what I did every single one of those times? What I decided was the most important task or my WIN (What's Important Now!) for the day.

This is, combined with my Energy practice (which is Kevin's 15th Secret), my #1 practice that most allows me to cultivate my Heroic Productivity. You couldn't PAY me to blow my brain up with not-most-important stuff in the morning. Period.

Scott Adams echoes this wisdom in [How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big](#). He tells us: "One of the most important tricks for maximizing your productivity involves matching your mental state to the task. For example, when I first wake up, my brain is relaxed and creative. The thought of writing a comic is fun, and it's relatively easy because my brain is in exactly the right mode for that task. I know from experience that trying to be creative in the midafternoon is a waste of time. By 2:00 P.M. all I can do is regurgitate the ideas I've seen elsewhere. At 6:00 A.M. I'm a creator, and by 2:00 P.M. I'm a copier.

"The difference between successful people and unsuccessful people is that successful people say 'no' to almost everything."

~ Warren Buffett

Everyone is different, but you'll discover that most writers work either early in the morning or past midnight. That's when the creative writing juices flow most easily."

All of which begs the question...

What do YOU do with the best two hours of YOUR day?

Pro tip: Activate your Soul Force by Focusing your Energy on WIN, Hero!

THE 80/20 MINDSET

*"One always has enough time,
if one will apply it well."*

~ Goethe

"The important takeaway from this chapter on the Pareto principle is not to run around with a calculator and actually do the math to figure out 80 percent and 20 percent calculations in different areas of your life.

It's more important to have a mindset of identifying the few things and activities that will give you outsized returns. You want to:

- Look for shortcuts.
- Do the most important things exceptionally well, and the rest just 'good enough' or not at all.
- Develop your skills to be exceptional in a few targeted areas; don't try to master everything.
- Realize that you can work less, stress less, and increase your happiness by figuring out the 20 percent of goals and activities that are most important to you."

That's from Secret #10.

Remember: 80% of outcomes are generated by 20% of activities.

We talked about this WAY BACK in the day in one of our very first PhilosophersNotes on Richard Koch's great book, [*The 80/20 Principle*](#).

First, the fascinating origin story and quick math...

In 1897 Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, was studying wealth and income distribution in 19th century England. He discovered that the majority of land and income was controlled by a minority of the population.

In fact, 20% of the population controlled 80% of the wealth and income. On further analysis, mythical lore says that he found that this principle held true not only in different countries and different time periods, but also in contexts such as his garden—where he discovered that 20% of his peapods yielded 80% of the peas that were harvested!

Since our pal Vilfredo identified the trend, many researchers have been busy pointing out some additional modern applications including these fun facts: 20% of motorists account for 80% of accidents, 20% of your carpet probably gets 80% of the wear, 20% of streets account for 80% of the traffic, 20% of clients usually account for 80% of profits, 20% of clothes in your closet are worn 80% of the time and 20% of beer drinkers drink 80% of the beer.

The moral of the math?

As Koch tells us: "20% of what we do leads to 80% of the results; but 80% of what we do leads to only 20%. We are wasting 80% of our time on low-value outcomes."

His advice?

He tells us that: "The few things that work fantastically well should be identified, cultivated, nurtured, and multiplied."

And: "What is the 20 percent of your time when you achieve 80 percent of your results? Do more of it! What is the 80 percent of your time when you achieve little? Do less of it!"

TOUCH IT ONCE

"The key is in not spending time, but in investing it."

~ Stephen Covey

"Highly successful people take immediate action on almost every item they encounter. They know that to be efficient, they want to expend the least possible amount of time and mental energy processing things. In short, they practice a 'touch it once' mentality. ...

I actually think the 'touch it once' rule is so important I recommend you immediately take action on something if it will take *five minutes or less* to complete. As long as it won't interfere with a pre-scheduled task, you are generally better off taking immediate action than having to come back to it in the future."

That's from the chapter on Secret #13.

Kevin tells us: *"If a task can be completed in less than five minutes, do it immediately."*

Roy Baumeister is one of the most cited psychologists in history. He literally wrote the book on [Willpower](#).

Here's how he puts it: *"The Two-Minute Rule: If something will take less than two minutes, don't put it on a list. Get it out of the way immediately."*

Brian Tracy echoes the wisdom on "touching it once."

He calls it "single handling."

Here's how he puts it in HIS great book on time management called [Eat That Frog](#): *"Every great achievement of humankind has been preceded by a long period of hard, concentrated work until the job was done. Single handling requires that once you begin a task, you keep working at it, without diversion or distraction, until the job is 100 percent complete. You keep urging yourself onward by repeating the words, 'Back to work!' over and over whenever you are tempted to stop or do something else.*

By concentrating single-mindedly on your most important task, you can reduce the time required to complete it by 50 percent or more...

The truth is that once you have decided on your number one task, anything else that you do other than that is a relative waste of time."

Plus, he says: *"Your ability to select your most important task, to begin it, and then to concentrate on it single-mindedly until it is complete is the key to high levels of performance and personal productivity."*

How are YOU doing with that?

Pro tip...

Decide what your most important WIN is and DOMINATE it from start to finish!

ENERGY IS EVERYTHING

"Would you like to know the *real* secret to completing twelve hours of work in just an eight-hour day?

You Can't Get More Time, Only More Energy

What if the ultimate time management secret isn't about time at all? You can't 'manage' time—no matter what you do, you will have the same 24 hours tomorrow that you had today. When people talk about 'time management,' what they really want is to get more stuff done with less stress. And the real secret behind this is that you need to maximize your energy.

I saved this secret for the end because I didn't think you'd even read it or care about it if I put it up front. But it's the most important secret of all."

"Rest is perhaps the most overlooked and undervalued aspect of time management. ... Rest, therefore, becomes part of training rather than the absence of training."

~ Chris Carmichael

"Live each day as if it be your last."

~ Marcus Aurelius

ENERGY.

That, my dear Heroic friend, is THE secret to time management and to everything else you want to optimize in your life—which is why our Soul Force equation BEGINS with your Energy then we Focus it on What's Important Now.

KNOW THIS: There's only ONE possible way we can more consistently show up in our Work and in our Love with Heroic levels of Productivity and Connection and that's by getting ourselves Heroically ENERGIZED.

As we've discussed (see our Notes on [7 Habits](#) and our [Mastery Series Module](#) on Energy!), renewing ourselves and "sharpening our saws" was Stephen Covey's 7th Habit of Highly Effective People. I say let's move that up to the first position and create CHAIN SAW.

Kevin leans heavily on Tony Schwartz and Jim Loehr's wisdom from their great book [The Power of Full Engagement](#) to make his point in this final and most important "secret."

They tell us: *"Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance."* And: *"Energy is simply the capacity to do work. Our most fundamental need as human beings is to spend and recover energy."*

Ask them the next logical question....

HOW do we develop our Energy?

They tell us: *"All great performers rely on positive rituals to manage their energy and regulate their behavior."* And: *"The more exacting the challenge and the greater the pressure, the more rigorous our rituals need to be."*

And: *"Creating positive rituals is the most powerful means we have found to effectively manage energy in the service of full engagement."* Plus: *"The more scheduled and systematic these rituals became, the more renewal they provided."*

And, that, my dear Hero, is precisely why I hit 101 Heroic Targets every.single.day.

It's time to activate our Soul Force and get our Energy Focused on What's Important Now. Not once in a while or when we *feel* like it, but CONSISTENTLY—all day, every day, ESPECIALLY Today.

Day 1. All in.

LET'S GO, Hero!

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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you'll probably like...

[The Power of Full Engagement, The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People, Eat That Frog, Solving the Procrastination Equation, Time Warrior](#)

About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.