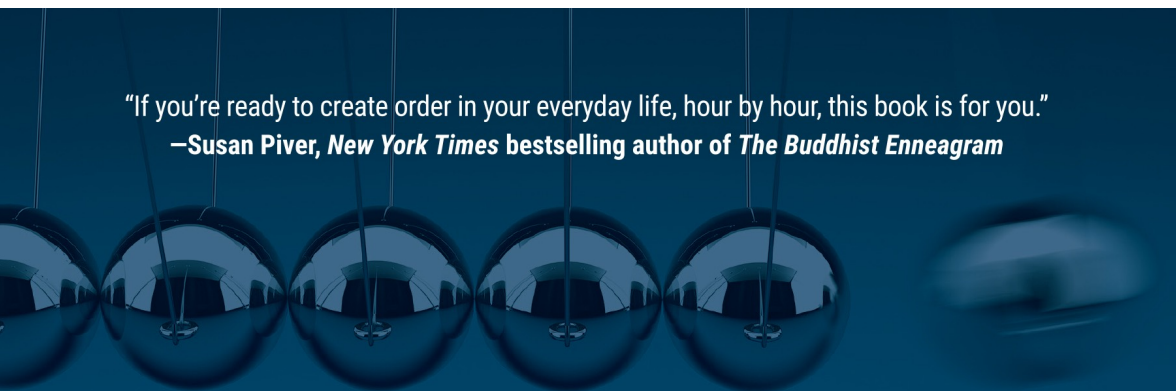




"If you're ready to create order in your everyday life, hour by hour, this book is for you."

—Susan Piver, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Buddhist Enneagram*

CALLING BS* ON BUSY

Ditch the time management myth
and quickly achieve your goals

ANDREW MELLEN

Wall Street Journal best-selling author of *Unstuff Your Life!*

Advance Praise for *Calling BS On Busy*

“My mother always said, ‘If it’s important to you, you’ll find the time. If it’s not, you’ll find an excuse.’ Time is the only commodity in life that *is* fair. We are all given 24 hours every day, and if you’re using the ‘I’m too busy’ excuse, then either you really don’t want to do it or you need to read Andrew’s book. You will be given a roadmap to success that will change your relationship with time so you can finally get things done!”

—Chef AJ, bestselling author and host of the daily YouTube show *Chef AJ LIVE!*

“Andrew has shown me, as a journalist who is always looking for more hours in a day, how to boldly create order and happiness. He is honest, up-front and forever the source I turn to when it comes to clarity and time management!”

—Tamsen Fadal, Emmy-award-winning journalist and author

“Andrew Mellen previously asked Americans to examine their emotional relationship to stuff—and now he is working his magic with time. Successful, happy people have plenty of leisure time because they know how to spend it wisely. This book is a rallying cry for people to take back control of their time *and* their lives. It could not have come at a more opportune moment in our culture, as people around the world re-evaluate their relationship to both work and money.”

—Quentin Fottrell, *MarketWatch*’s Managing Editor–Personal Finance and The Moneyist columnist

“Nothing breaks my heart like hearing that a new acquaintance ‘would love to travel but just can never find the time’ (something I hear all the time when I’m introduced as a travel expert). Andrew Mellen’s superb new book calls BS on that excuse, and gives actionable, straightforward smart advice on how to make time work for you . . . rather than the other way around. Read this book and you’ll

be able to find that, yes, you do have time to travel, and to do the other meaningful, non-work-related activities in your life. Small shifts in outlook can create a bonanza of free time. And what could be better than that?"

—Pauline Frommer, Co-President of the Frommer's guidebooks and Frommers.com

"*Calling BS on Busy* is an invaluable resource to help you make progress toward achieving your aspirations. Andrew Mellen provides countless insightful ideas, such as disabling distracting social media platforms and curbing time-thieving procrastination habits. As a photo archivist, I wish all those who have collected photo memories over the years, tucked away in albums and boxes, gathering dust, would make use of his uncluttering advice and digitally preserve their treasured photo memories. This clever book will be one you find yourself coming back to again and again."

—Mitch Goldstone, CEO, ScanMyPhotos.com

"Andrew Mellen has been assisting my organization for years with his no-nonsense and humorous approach to efficiency. Andrew's latest book not only is entertaining and engaging but will provide the reader with new insight, which will undoubtedly change their concept of time management."

—Marcia Griffin, CEO and founder, HomeFree-USA

"As a couples therapist for the last 20 years, I've helped fix thousands of relationships. And I can honestly say when it comes to working on your relationship with 'time,' there's no better expert than Andrew Mellen."

—Ian Kerner, *New York Times* bestselling author of *She Comes First* and TED 2021 speaker

“From the very first page, I was laughing and learning. As someone who has read a lot of books about ‘time management,’ I was stunned by how fast Andrew could shift my story about time. This is the book we all need. Loved it!”

—Jennifer Loudon, national bestselling author of *Why Bother? Discover the Desire for What’s Next* and *The Woman’s Comfort Book*

“*Calling BS on Busy* is the book we all need right now. Andrew Mellen explodes every time-worn, overly complicated approach to time management—and in their place, he lays out practical, empowering methods that actually work. Armed with his signature wit and vivid, compelling examples, he’s written a wonderfully accessible guide that pulled me through its pages, gave me tools I could instantly employ, and will forever change how I think about time. Mind blown!”

—Michael MacLennan, TV writer and creator of *Bomb Girls* and Netflix’s *Tiny Pretty Things*

“Most people have no idea how important every choice about time is to the quality of their lives. To truly understand that impact, you must read this book. I love how Mellen guides the reader to fully participate, inviting them to bring both heart and spirit into their work and live their best life. Uniquely and cleverly done.”

—Peggy McColl, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Your Destiny Switch*

“With this book you will finally be free from the mindset issues that plague even the highest performers. Mellen puts you back in the driver’s seat of life and has you enjoying the entire ride!”

—Mike Michalowicz, author of *Profit First* and *Clockwork*

“As someone who does creative work, I fear that time management systems will kill inspiration—but what I found with Andrew Mellen’s new book was the opposite. It showed me how to liberate it. Beware: he will not accept any of your excuses! Which is actually doing you a huge favor. If you’re ready to create order in your everyday life, hour by hour, this book is for you.”

—Susan Piver, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Four Noble Truths of Love* and *The Buddhist Enneagram*

“Andrew Mellen calls BS on anyone wanting better time management. In *Calling BS on Busy* he writes in an engaging, entertaining, and truly honest way about how we view time, how we waste time, and why we blame a clock for our own behaviors! Refreshing and probing, it is a book for anyone who needs more time.”

—Sharon Salzberg, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Lovingkindness* and *Real Happiness*

“When asked what’s most important in someone’s life, they’ll often cite relationships. And yet so many of us prioritize other things. Andrew’s book is a wake-up call to those pressing snooze on their lives and who miss important events, relationships and experiences in favor of being ‘too busy.’ With tough love and actionable steps, this book guides readers to use their time wisely and in a way that ultimately serves their deepest values.”

—Andrea Syrtash, relationship expert and author of *He’s Just Not Your Type (And That’s A Good Thing)*

“If you struggle with ADHD like me, this step-by-step approach provides an invaluable toolkit that can help reframe the way you think about time management. With his easy-to-follow instructions and tips, you’ll be able to take control of your days and achieve much more than you ever thought possible.”

—Sharon Vinderine, CEO of Parent Tested Parent Approved and television lifestyle expert

“We all know that wasted time is one of the worst kinds of clutter. Add in negative self-talk and excuses, and is it any wonder so many of us are overwhelmed and constantly complaining about being too busy?! That’s where Andrew Mellen’s new book is so smart—it immediately blows up the lies we tell ourselves and then lovingly (and fiercely) replaces them with instantly actionable strategies and steps you can take now to get those hours back and more. Read this book and change your entire relationship with time today!”

—Peter Walsh, professional organizer and *New York Times* bestselling author of *It’s All Too Much*

“In Zen, busy-ness is viewed as a form of mind-less-ness rather than mind-full-ness. Andrew Mellen wisely speaks to how our relationship with our own minds and internal narratives determines our relationship not only with time but with the world around us. By changing the way we think and act in regard to time, we discover a greater sense of ease and freedom inside and out. *Calling BS on Busy* offers no-nonsense, values-based, and simple yet transformative tools and practices for bringing us into the present moment with clear intention, gratitude, and abundance. And it does so with a healthy dose of humor!”

—Tenzen David Zimmerman, Central Abbot, San Francisco Zen Center

CALLING
BS_{ON}
BUSY

CALLING BS_{ON} BUSY

A practical guide to ditching the time management myth and quickly achieving your goals

Andrew Mellen

*Author of Wall Street Journal bestseller *Unstuff Your Life!**



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Introduction

Thank you for picking up this book. May I pay you back with a no-bullsh*t piece of honesty right away, please?

Time management is a myth.

Sorry! It would be great if you could just wrestle time to the ground and force it to behave. I want that so much for you . . . almost as much as I want it for myself.

But, unfortunately, neither of us will win that fight.

We might as well rip the Band-Aid off and get right to it.

Your time is precious and if you're going to invest any of it in reading this book, you should get some serious ROI right from the get-go.

So here's the big takeaway: time management doesn't exist.

No one can teach you how to manage time—no one. Not David Allen, Brian Tracy, Ken Blanchard, Stephen Covey, or *insert name of time management guru here*. What you *can* learn is how to manage *yourself* in relation to time.

So this is really more of a relationship book.

The good news is, you won't find a bunch of unicorns, heart emojis, or affirmations here to inspire you to fall in love with time. You also won't find a bunch of complicated systems that take more time to set up and run than they ever save.

No doubt you've felt at times like time is cruel, but the truth is that time is indifferent to you—which may feel worse than if time were actually out to get you.

Time does exactly what time does—tick on, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. Either you have to get on board with that concept, or you are going to Don Quixote yourself into some serious anger and frustration.

That's one of the reasons I wrote this book.

Because in the 26+ years that I've been speaking, teaching, and coaching, I've seen an incredibly large number of people, including some of my friends, colleagues, and mentors, trying to win an unwinnable fight.

All that grief, anger, and disappointment ends up self-directed—like if you were only better or smarter, you'd crack this code.

But the problem is, there is no time “code” to crack. The problem is you.

Or, more specifically, *how you think about, feel about, and interact with time.*

Everything in this book is about managing your own actions, not about managing time.

Also, this book is not going to teach you how to get other people to better manage *their* time.

If they have a problem, get them their own copy of this book. You won't find passive-aggressive techniques you can use to subtly manipulate other people into changing their behaviors—when have you ever seen that work anyway?

So . . . what gives me the right to be the big buzz-kill smart-ass who's trying to blow up the concept of time management?

Well, according to the media, I'm the most organized man in America. I've already written a *Wall Street Journal* (and Audible) best-selling book, *Unstuff Your Life!*.

And as an author, educator, speaker, and organizational evangelist, I've spent decades working with individuals and companies around the world, helping them become more organized, effective, and efficient.

Just like we do with clutter, when solving productivity issues, we look for bottlenecks and points of friction in our clients' lives and businesses and remove them as quickly as possible.

Those clients run the gamut from formerly crazy-busy CEOs to seriously overworked executive assistants, and from award-winning authors, designers, and filmmakers to stay-at-home parents and homemakers. (These last two don't get many awards, but they should.)

From solopreneurs to Fortune 50 companies, and from tiny nonprofits to megachurches, what does every one of these clients have in common? A belief that there is too much to do, and not enough time to do it.

If you read that and think, "But Andrew, that's *my* problem, too! I have too much to do and not enough time!" this book is for you.

Because you, too, are laboring under the faulty belief that you are exceptional or even unique . . . and sadly, you are not. *When it comes to time, that is.*

Almost every productivity client I've ever had has shown up with some version of tear-your-hair-out anxiety or depression or mania, convinced that *they* are the *worst* time manager in human history.

While that is not true, what these clients may all have in common is a secret inner drama queen.

So, whether they are

- chronically late procrastinators and poor planners
- conflict-averse people pleasers
- creative daydreamers and artists
- captains of industry surrounded by “incompetent” teams
- competitive athletes or entrepreneurs looking for a secret edge
- committee-rich volunteers, socialites, or philanthropists
- competent but overwhelmed first responders at the end of their ropes, or
- someone just like you,

they all come to me with a version of the same story.

No one else has *their* problems, and if we did, we would understand exactly why they can't show up on time, meet deadlines, get enough rest, or accomplish any other time-specific thing.

By the time my clients are finished working with me, each of those stories is dismantled as the fiction it is.

Sure, there's a kernel of truth in most of their stories—there are demands on their time. But the story is almost always worse than the reality.

And, of course, some teams do suck. Some employees and colleagues are awful. Some life circumstances are intense and seemingly relentless.

But . . . mostly they just are what they are.

The real problems are more likely an unhealthy corporate culture, bad work habits, no SOPs (standard operating procedures), wobbly or absent accountability, unclear communication, hidden agendas, personality conflicts, or an unwillingness to say no. Time has little or nothing to do with any of those things.

So when we look at who's responsible for creating or maintaining these faulty conditions, we quickly see that they—my clients—are.

That's why we blow up their stories. We *must* get to the root cause of where this narrative comes from so we can wipe the slate clean and build from the ground up.

And that new foundation is built on one's core values—those things that matter so much to you that you'd rather die than surrender them.

From there, we construct a morning routine that ensures shit gets done.

And we're talking about the important stuff that makes a difference in our lives—not ridiculous busywork that matters to no one, or frivolous time wasters like posting your latest breakfast burrito on Instagram.

These people (re)discover their priorities and, more importantly, how to make daily choices based on those priorities instead of kicking them down the road for “later.” *You know, when you have more time.*

They learn about the 8 Deadly Time Thieves and how to neutralize them. In order, they are Interruptions, Multitasking, Overcommitting, Poor Planning, Email, Meetings, Social Media, and Procrastination.

As a result, they start sleeping better, have more confidence, and feel in control of their lives.

They may not be able to control a pandemic, but they now get the important things done first—when it matters. And after that, they don't waste time worrying about things they can't control.

Sound impossible? It isn't.

Imagine starting each day with clarity about what you need to do and how and when you'll do it.

Imagine being on time for every appointment, getting enough sleep, and feeling in control of your life.

Imagine never again feeling like you're being dragged behind your day like it's a 100-pound dog chasing a squirrel up and down a tree.

You, too, can become the captain of your days, weeks, months, and years. I've seen it happen thousands of times, at every income level and job title, and in every country.

Of course, there is work to be done to get those results.

Reading this book is a great start, and it will definitely help with your mindset . . . but the real work begins when you put the book down and start changing your behavior.

That's when things really take off.

Here's a fact: even though I may not know you yet, I want the best for you and I want you to succeed. So I will coach you and cheer you on from these pages. And I'll make it super clear what you need to do to change your mindset and conquer each time thief.

I'll show you again and again that lying to yourself about how busy you are is undermining every other thing you do, from the moment you open your eyes until your head hits the pillow at night.

And if you want these results, you'll take the suggestions and implement them.

Hopefully you already feel somewhere deep inside of you that you and the people you love are worth fighting for and that things can change—even if you don't yet know how.

And that's a great place to begin. From there, we can go anywhere . . . so let's start with this concept first.

THE CLOCK IS NOT YOUR PROBLEM

Have you ever felt like everyone else has more time than you do?

Sure, *they* can read 50+ books a year, exercise 7 days a week, finish work in time to cook a gourmet meal and still enjoy date night out with their spouse. That's because they don't have your life, your job, your responsibilities, your kids, your house, your . . . *fill in the blank here*, right?

If they did, just like you, they would *not* have time for all those activities.

Now, in rare instances, your time *is* all spoken for. You'll meet one of my clients whose life really is that full.

But for most of us, it's bullsh*t.

We all get the same 60 minutes an hour, 24 hours a day, and 8,760 hours a year. No more, no less. So the clock *can't* be your problem, because it's ticking the same way for all of us.

The reason your colleague gets *so* much more done than you do, even with a new baby at home and hours spent volunteering at the local animal shelter, isn't *time*. It's how they *spend* their time.

In other words: *you* are your problem, not the clock.

If that upsets you, sit with it for a moment. It's not going to kill you, and it just might set you free from every other piece of bullsh*t you've fed yourself over the years.

But don't wallow.

This isn't an invitation to fall down the rabbit hole of feeling sorry for yourself and start a litany of every reason why you're such a loser that this book will work for everyone *except* you. That's just more bullsh*t.

Remember, you're not special . . . not in the ways you think you are. The good news is, you're probably quite special in ways you haven't even seen yet.

Feeling shame over past mistakes is not your ticket out. Taking responsibility for where you are and making new choices is.

Because here's a news flash: you aren't broken, and you are *not* the worst. What ails you is entirely fixable.

We'll talk more in the next chapter about why some of us *like* to feel broken—how feeling damaged enables us to bail on ourselves in big and small ways. But for now, all you need to know is that you are your problem—and you can change.

You don't have to sit on a cushion lotus-style or become a vegan or run an Ironman to do it, either. Although once you read this book, you may discover you have the desire—not to mention the time—to do any or all of those things.

But first, we need to look at the 200 lies you tell yourself every day.¹

THE POWER OF STORY

If you read my first book, *Unstuff Your Life!*, you know that I talk a lot about story. Specifically, the stories we tell ourselves—and choose to believe as fact. Story is just as influential when it comes to time as it is to organization, so we'll be talking about it a lot here, too.

There's also a bit of math, but simple math, like the kind that lets you count your change back from a dollar—we're not talking calculus or trigonometry.

Change your relationship with story and with math, and time management becomes incredibly easy.

Oh, and this book's aim is not to turn you into a hyperproductive, robotic, soulless tasking machine—unless that is *your* goal, too. Otherwise, you're going to remain surprisingly human.

You're going to learn how to live your best life—whatever that means to you—and to participate fully, show up fiercely, and bring your whole heart and spirit to whatever you're engaged in at any given moment.

And that includes your relationships with the two key players in this book: time and the clock.

You can certainly use these techniques to conquer the world and become the next Rhianna, but as fabulous as she is, why would you want to when you can just be the best version of you?

These methods can also improve the quality of your life, reduce stress, and help you use your time effectively. You can live a life you're proud of, and one that impacts others on any scale you choose.

You don't have to use these techniques to cure cancer. It can be enough to just be a good parent, partner, or friend. Show up fully, love expansively, and pick up after yourself—none of which are that complicated.

SPEAKING OF LIFE AND LOVE . . .

I don't want to be morbid, but you are going to die. I don't know when—I'm not psychic—but we're all getting kicked off the island at some point.

Since none of us knows exactly when that's going to happen, I don't want you (or anyone else) getting to the end of this experience thinking, "Crap! I want a do-over. This is not how I wanted this to play out . . ."

That would suck. So let's avoid that and create a different outcome instead.

First, we need to acknowledge that there are things you need to do to keep life moving forward, and not all of them spark joy.

The basic administration of your life and your family probably requires going to the grocery store, paying bills, mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, doing laundry, and lots of other stuff that isn't especially fulfilling . . . just necessary.

If you can afford to delegate some or all of those tasks, you're ahead of the game. For the rest of us, those tasks need to be streamlined and completed as efficiently as possible.

You could also strip all those things out of your life and become a digital nomad or minimalist, or move into a tiny house.

Any of these choices will definitely reduce the external demands on your time. But they're not required—you can have a simple streamlined life with plenty of possessions and domestic commitments.

Then there's work. If you're trading time for money, that too needs to become far more efficient than it probably is right now.

There's also what we think of as “free” time—the time we spend with family, on vacation, at parties, on our phones, or enjoying dinner with friends.

In each of these categories, you have agency . . . even if you don't currently *feel* like you do.

And that's what this book is going to teach you—how to leverage every minute in each category so that you're using your time strategically and investing it in the things that have the greatest impact on your life and the lives of your loved ones.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Which activities in your life have the greatest impact on you and everyone you're connected to?

This isn't a rhetorical or trick question, and it's not absent-minded navel-gazing.

If you don't know what's important, you will almost always be distracted by what's urgent.

Have you ever met someone you were *really* into? Or found a new hobby that absorbed you from day one? I don't care how busy you say you are—time magically opens up when there's something you *really* want to do.

On the flip side, it's tough to find time for the stuff we *don't* want to do, like writing a term paper or cleaning the house, even when we "know better." Suddenly, we have "no time" again.

Funny, right?

Not really. It's easier to find time for the stuff we care about. The stuff we want to do doesn't feel like work—or at least it feels like rewarding work and not a waste of time. We don't need motivation to do *that* stuff—it generates its own momentum and feeds us.

And that's where our values come in.

One key to increasing productivity is leveraging your values—using them to get you off the sofa or social media.

So the first step in your time/self-management journey will be this: figuring out what matters most to you. Because that will be your North Star, constantly orienting you toward the things you need to do and also want to do.

Many of us "manage" our time by jumping into the next task that shows up in front of us, whether or not it's important or even makes sense. We work at it until we get bored, distracted, or pulled in another direction.

If you've ever spent an entire day tasking away and felt like you had nothing to show for all that effort, you get what I'm talking about.

You can't prioritize without priorities.

Once you've got them, it's easy to rank tasks from the things that matter most down to the things that don't matter at all. And if the tasks at the bottom of that list don't get done—and they probably won't—that's okay, because the important stuff did.

No one else can tell you what is important, even though lots of people may try.

Your values won't match mine, your neighbor's, or anyone else's. So, you won't find morning routine lists in this book filled with specifics like "Do 10 inverted pushups," or "Drink 12 ounces of ice water," or "Cold-call 5 prospects."

The principles I'm sharing with you are universal, but their application is highly specific to you and your values. Cookie-cutter checklists give you a false sense of hope that if you master someone else's values, your life will get better. Not likely.

Mastering my *own* values is how I changed my life.

I was laid off in Seattle in 1996, where I had been recruited two years earlier to run a small theater. It was a humbling and humiliating experience. I found out I no longer had a job when I showed up for work one morning and discovered that, while I had been at rehearsal the night before, the locks to our office had been changed.

A mentor once told me that inside every disappointment is the seed of an equal or greater opportunity. I needed to believe that was true that morning.

I spent six months in Seattle collecting unemployment benefits and looking for another job. I got a lot of sympathy and exactly zero offers for work. And then an old acquaintance invited me to co-produce an awards ceremony with him at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

Saying yes to that offer was the beginning of my next career, although I didn't know it at the time. I thought it was just another gig.

Being of service has been one of my core values since I was in college. I wasn't viewing this assignment through that lens then, but looking

back now, I can see that not only that event but the work I started taking on following that event was all about being of service.

It was also a way to pay my bills, but I could just as easily have done that in a restaurant rather than starting a business as a professional organizer.

I kept applying for work as a nonprofit arts administrator, but this other work kept coming and coming, and I could see the impact I was having on my clients' lives.

And I remember very clearly standing outside my sixth-floor walk-up apartment in Manhattan and making the decision to pursue this work full-time. I had no idea then that I would become "The Most Organized Man in America," or that I'd have the privilege of speaking and teaching around the globe.

I've achieved things through this work that I couldn't have imagined then. I've been invited to work with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Mets, and Goldman Sachs. And I've spoken at Dwell on Design, BlogHer, and the Great British Business Show to standing-room-only crowds.

I've written for *O*, *The Oprah Magazine* and *Real Simple*, and published my first book with Penguin Random House.

All because of some luck, some hard work, and making choices aligned with my values.

None of this makes me special. And if I can do it, you can, too. While these may be exceptional results, I believe they are possible for you, too, when you make choices aligned with your values.

So, in this book, we'll focus on two major actions. Each one of these will change your life on its own. Together, they make you unstoppable:

- Ditching the lies, bullsh*t, and baggage that hold you back while they seem to be serving you—they aren't.
- Focusing your time on your wildly important goals—which you will define and clarify as part of the process—and hacking every recurring task in your life for maximum efficiency with minimal effort.

If that doesn't sound revolutionary or transformative enough, you can go right back to the anxious, constantly late, overworked, and compromised life you were living before you picked up this book. It's waiting for you with open arms, promising that things will be different next time.

If you *do* want more time and freedom in your life, please read on.

WHY IS THIS BOOK DIFFERENT?

Maybe because I'm the first person who has told you that time management doesn't even exist . . . ?

This book is different from any other book about time you've *ever* read, for five reasons:

REASON 1: NO BULLSH*T

I'm a New Yorker at heart, even though I grew up in Detroit—and both places have shaped the way I define determination, grit, and success.

Some people think New Yorkers are rude, but we're not. We're direct. The pace of the city won't tolerate bullsh*t. There are so many inherent obstacles to doing anything in New York that wasted time costs twice as much here.

My frank way of speaking could be termed “tough love,” but I think of it as simple honesty. I respect you and your time enough to not waste it trying to manage your feelings. We’ll dive deep into truths that may be hard to hear but are critical for recovering your time and getting you where you want to go, as fast as you want to travel.

REASON 2: MATH, NOT STORY

If the word “math” freaks you out, don’t panic. As long as you graduated from the third grade, you can do the kind of math I’m talking about: simple addition and subtraction. One of the goals of this book is to pry you loose from the clutches of story and introduce you to a facts-based approach to life—and that isn’t possible without a little bit of math.

Here’s what I mean:

You have 24 hours per day, just like the rest of us. If you spend 8 of those hours sleeping, you now have 16 hours awake to manage.

If you spend 8 hours at work, 2 hours commuting, 1 hour exercising, and 2 hours preparing and eating meals, simple math tells us there’s no way you can spend 4 hours a day pursuing a graduate degree. Or bingeing 4 episodes of your favorite TV show . . .

Because $16 - 8 - 2 - 1 - 2 = 3$.

See? The math doesn’t add up.

You have 3 hours per day to work with, not 4.

And if you spend the bulk of those 3 hours on life admin tasks like errands and washing up, and the rest on semiconscious activities like wandering around, arguing, complaining, surfing the internet, etc., you can see how little flexible time you actually have without making different choices.

You might want to fall back into a story to “explain” why you don’t have more time. Something like, “I’m just not good at managing my time. I’m really creative but I can’t seem to find enough hours in the day to study, play with my kids, read Spider-Man comics, etc.”

But the fundamental math is the problem because you never *had* four hours to begin with. The best productivity expert in the world can’t create more hours for you.

So you can either subtract time from existing activities or adjust your expectations—it’s as simple as that.

Thanks, math!

REASON 3: A SYSTEM THAT IS THE ABSENCE OF A SYSTEM

I know . . . so meta.

There are no complicated organizational methods or systems in this book. There are plenty of time management books out there that demand you adopt an elaborate, complex, or *time-consuming* system—which eats up more time than it delivers back.

Those systems make no sense, regardless of how well they are packaged. We can applaud their marketing prowess even while poking a hole in their logic. If you’re saving 45 minutes a day by spending an hour managing your system, you just lost 15 minutes—that’s a horrible ROI.

Your time is too valuable to waste on managing another system. That’s why there’s no special software and no patented tools to buy. Just universal principles that are easy to understand and use so you can heal your relationship with time.

And exactly three tools are required—which you already have if you own a smartphone, and they’re cheap if you don’t:

- A timer
- A stopwatch
- A calendar

That’s it. Not a *specific* timer, stopwatch, or calendar . . . you don’t need a timer shaped like a tomato unless you want one.

You need a way to count down time, add up time, and make appointments with yourself.

So go high tech, low tech, or no tech with your tools. As long as you consistently apply the principles, you’ll see the results.

REASON 4: ACTION- AND RESULTS-ORIENTED

Every chapter finishes with a “bottom line” summation followed by a chapter recap and fast-action steps you can take to recapture one or more hours per week. You’re not reading this book for fun—though I hope you enjoy it.

So theoretically you could just read those and get to work.

You will also find these recaps and lots of free bonus materials at www.cbobbbook.com if you want them digitally.

Of course, there are other things to glean from the book by reading it all the way through. And remember, any tool without a new mindset is likely to fail or not be sustainable. That’s why you should read the book cover to cover, and then go back to attack specific problems more thoroughly.

REASON 5: NO BULLSH*T . . . AGAIN

I can't stress this enough—if you're looking for someone to cosign your bullsh*t, this book is going to make you crazy.

If, instead, you are hungry for another way to live that feels better and gets you off that hamster wheel of “busy” for good, you're in the right place.

Your stories suck—you don't. The world doesn't suck and you're not a victim of circumstances. None of your stories automatically disqualify you from increasing your productivity and getting more time into your days.

You are not special when it comes to time. And that is what is going to set you free.

REAL-LIFE TIME WARRIORS

To help you identify where you're at right now, and to break up any feelings of isolation or uniqueness, please meet three clients of mine. See if you identify with any of them.

PATSY

Patsy is a working mother with two young kids. When she came to me, she was exhausted and pretty beaten up by life.

Her typical response to anything new, good or bad, was defeated anger . . . or angry defeat.

As if one more piece of crap heading her way was going to be the piece of crap that broke her. She was so used to being unhappy that she couldn't tell an opportunity from an obstacle.

With that mindset, she was more prone to giving up than digging in. She talked in absolutes: “always” and “never.” “This always happens to me.” “I never get a break.”

Now, for such a black-and-white thinker, she had a surprisingly rich imagination and some serious denial running because every night she would go to bed without a plan and expect tomorrow to somehow be different from today.

When we first met, the irony of her bedtime optimism compared with her waking cynicism was completely lost on her.

I could have rearranged her entire life and schedule, but with her mindset, it would not have made a difference.

Patsy’s first stop on the bullsh*t train was to let go of that ridiculous and sabotaging mindset. Because nothing could change until she was ready for it to.

PATRICK

Patrick’s mindset was just as debilitating but shaped by too much winning—at least in his own mind. He was a decent salesman but an even smoother talker. A former jock in school with just enough success and good looks to think that life would continue to unfold for him with minimal effort because he was so talented.

Except he wasn’t that talented. And talent only gets one so far. In the highly competitive world of pro sports sales, he wasn’t exactly crushing his goals. He bounced around from job to job because “it just wasn’t the right fit.” Curiously, the only thing all those positions had in common was Patrick.

He also picked up and dropped time management tools like they were on fire. He’d give something a week and if it didn’t deliver the kinds of results he wanted, he’d ditch them as fast as he adopted them.

On top of that, he was trapped in a story that had him constantly fighting everyone around him as well as himself.

His colleagues had unfair advantages over him, he was new or they had better networks or the boss was jealous or . . . blah, blah, blah. The other thing that was consistent is that it was never Patrick's fault—there was always an excellent reason why something wasn't working.

Now, it's not about blame, remember, but it definitely is about responsibility. And Patrick didn't like being held accountable for his mediocre results.

COREY

Corey works for a thriving real estate firm. He has a decent handle on his time and things are pretty good. And he's a good leader—he's often scanning the horizon for new techniques and tools to bring back to his team that will help him and everyone else get better.

When he and I first met at a conference, he had an “aha” moment during one of my presentations. He quickly recognized that by implementing one tip that I shared from the stage, his firm could quickly shave 25 to 30 percent off one of their processes and that would be a game changer.

He then asked me to provide some additional training for his company. Because he had built a culture of adaptability and curiosity, we had great buy-in from the start and, within 30 days, they had the best month in the firm's history. And that was followed by record-breaking sales for the next three months in a row.

Corey's mindset was primed for rapid adoption. He didn't need to be convinced of anything and offered little resistance to experimentation. He just needed the right tools to excel.

So . . . can you relate to any of these folks? Or do you have a completely different story running?

To find out, visit cbobbbook.com/quiz and take our *Calling BS on Busy* quiz.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There is very little magic involved in changing your relationship with time.

What's required is simply some willingness—even willingness to be willing is a great place to start.

So take the quiz to gain some clarity on where you're at and you'll be on your way. You'll find it at cbobbbook.com/quiz.

I can't wait to meet you on the other side and get to work.

Chapter 1

Mindset

“Busy is the new stupid.”

Warren Buffett

The most important takeaway in this entire book is that each of the following are shaping your results and success with “time management” period:

- How you think and feel about time (and, by extension, how you feel about math)
- How you talk about time (to yourself and others)
- How you act in relation to time

So if you do nothing else, bringing your full attention to these fundamental concepts and shifting your attitude and behavior will change your life.

I created the Organizational Triangle to simplify decluttering. It has three legs: One Home for Everything, Like with Like, and Something in, Something out. You can watch a short video illustrating the triangle on my YouTube channel.

In the same way that the Organizational Triangle (see page 103) simplified getting and staying organized, when you address these three concepts, you—and not the clock—will be in control of your day and therefore your life and happiness.

It is that simple—although not always easy. As the title suggests, no bullsh*t.

We're starting with your mindset for at least two reasons:

- If you're a type A high-achiever, you can get what you need and start using it right away.
- Like any fundamental concept, if you don't get it first, everything that comes after it may be confusing and is going to have less impact. Everything ties back to this.

So don't skip this chapter thinking your mindset is already optimized.

Time management is built on simple math. You, on the other hand, are likely a complex heap of beliefs, lies, half-formed ideas, well-meaning intentions, rumors, fantasy, and other random noise—just like most of us are. And one of those lies could be that your mindset is fine.

Any mental clutter will interfere with your ability to use the tools discussed in this book.

Also, here's the thing about tools—they're just heavy paperweights until you know how to use them correctly.

Even the best time management tool won't help if you lie or waffle or live so deeply in your own story about time that you can't use it as intended.

Here's the good news: the fundamental concepts are simple and easy to learn—you just have to be willing to learn them.

Mental clutter creates a defensive, counterproductive fog you'll need to slice through to dispel any story you're telling yourself (and anyone who will listen).

How right or wrong you are, how you know best or how you never get a break, how everyone else has it easier, how the odds are stacked against you, or how you're so broken that you're beyond hope or change . . .

All bullsh*t.

I get that things have happened in your life—I've had my fair share as well.

But after many years in and out of therapy and doing some deep work, it became very clear that most of the conclusions I had drawn from these events in my life were an attempt to give them meaning or reduce their impact. And to reinforce that glass-half-empty way of connecting the dots. I had become an expert at proving to myself and everyone else that the other shoe was always just about to drop.

In the end, they were just stories, not objective facts.

So if you've been rewarded emotionally when sharing your version of these stories, it just reinforces your attachment to them. There's not much incentive to let go of something that seems to be working, at least on some level.

And that's why we start with thinking and math. One is static and unchanging, and the other is likely all over the place—I'm betting you can figure out which is which.

HOW YOU THINK ABOUT TIME

What and how we think about anything shapes how we feel about that thing. As you examine your thoughts and behavior, talk about what you find using expressions like, "In the past, I would . . ." or "Historically, I did . . ." so you can draw a clear line between your choices then

and now. This will help break old patterns and create a present and a future that may be informed by the past but isn't repeating the past.

NARRATIVE VS. MATH-BASED GOALS

If your historical thinking about time has been strange or messed up, it's not surprising.

That's because we measure time in quantifiable units—seconds, minutes, hours, days, and so on—and yet we set up goals using narrative, word-based outcomes typically disconnected from any unit of measurement.

So we keep score using math but run the race in words. You get that that's weird, right?

Here's what it looks like. We set up narrative goals like these:

- Work on the Smith proposal until it's finished
- Tidy the garage until it's organized
- Get so-and-so to fall in love with me

Can you see that, as stated, each of these goals has a vague, undefined end point open to interpretation?

What precisely constitutes the proposal being done? Or the garage organized? Or someone falling in love with you?

Narrative goals create confusion. Even when specific criteria for a goal is established, those criteria can change at any point. They are also susceptible to misunderstandings and misinterpretation.

Because we don't always agree on what words mean.

Narrative goals require extra time. First to define and set up the criteria and then to share them with whoever needs them to work on the task.

And it's hard to budget that extra time because there is no fixed number for how long it takes to define a goal or for everyone to fully understand the criteria.

There is potentially more wasted time if you find out that some people said they understood when they didn't.

You have none of these problems with math.

If you can count, 30 minutes means the same thing to you as it does to me.

In the past, when you worked all day on something and still didn't "finish," how did you feel?

If you felt disappointed or even demoralized, that had a direct impact on your mood, and it also influenced how you felt the next time you picked up that task or project.

Feeling crappy as a result of not getting things "done" or "done on time" means you're more likely to feel less enthusiastic and engaged on your next attempt.

And when you delegate a task with narrative goals, you're setting yourself *and* your delegate up for more work than just the task itself and similar frustrations as well.

It's very hard to budget for a process, and the successful outcome of narrative goals will be harder to assess.

All of these reasons and more are why we need to think about time in terms of math, not story.

You may not completely understand what "done" looks like, but you definitely know how long 45 minutes is.

So “work on the Smith proposal for one hour” is a lot easier to check off as completed than “finish the Smith proposal.” One has a clear end point—the other does not.

Going forward, put your tasks and to-dos through the “can I measure it?” test. And when you catch yourself setting a narrative goal, call it out and switch to a math-based goal.

In Chapter 7, when we talk about planning, you’ll get to see how many of your to-dos were created without a quantified finish point.

From now on, instead of saying that you’re going to revise a chapter until you’re finished, say, “I’m going to work on that chapter for X minutes.”

Yep, it is that simple.

TIMING START-TO-FINISH TASKS

There are some tasks or errands that won’t have a unit of time attached. “Buy dog food,” for instance. You know it’s done when you have dog food at home in the container.

But that’s also because “buy dog food” is really made up of a series of smaller tasks or steps:

1. Commute to the store and park if you drove
2. Enter the store and find the dog food
3. Get in line and pay for the dog food
4. Commute home and park if you drove
5. Put the dog food in its home

Each of those steps can be timed, so even if you don’t know how long something takes before you start, you will by the time you’re finished. And then you can use that math to schedule the errand the next time you do it.

This means that we'll never create another task without either assigning it a math-based quantity before we start or timing it while we're doing it so we can accurately budget for it in the future.

DOING LESS IS DOING MORE

Did you ever see the plate-spinning guy on *The Ed Sullivan Show*? If not, see the endnotes for a link to this video.²

His act is a great visual metaphor for what busy looks like.

He'd stand a tall, skinny stick on the edge of the stage and then put a plate on top of it. He'd start spinning the stick and that would make the plate spin on top of the stick—similar to spinning a basketball on your index finger.

He'd get one plate spinning and then set up another stick, and another, until the entire apron of the stage was lined with sticks and plates spinning. Of course, as soon as he got all the way to one side of the stage, he would have to race back to the other side because those plates were starting to get wobbly.

So once every stick was up, he would run back and forth across the stage spinning each stick to keep all the plates in the air.

And this would go on for about three minutes . . . to some jazzy upbeat music.

That's your life on "busy."

You are spinning as many plates as you possibly can, except your act doesn't time out in three minutes because it isn't an act, it's your life.

So any time management system that requires you to do *more* than you're already doing is clearly not sustainable.

If you can barely keep the plates that you already have in the air spinning, how can you think that adding a few more will save you time? And why would you? The goal is to do *less*, not *more*.

Not only should you not spin more plates, but you could probably let a few of the current ones crash to the floor.

Because some of those plates are things you probably shouldn't have been doing in the first place or that you've now outgrown.

YOUR 200 LIES

The average adult tells 200 lies a day.³

Yep, that includes you.

The good news is, you're probably not a compulsive liar.⁴

For most of us, two-thirds of those lies will never come out of our mouths—they're just crap we tell ourselves.

You might be telling one right now if you're saying, "I *never* lie!"

Most of the lies we tell are harmless, like saying, "I'm good," when someone asks how you are, even if you're not feeling that great.

Or when you compliment a friend on their haircut, even though you don't love it.

That changes when you tell a colleague, "I'm so sorry to bother you," as you interrupt their day.

Because if you were *really* sorry to bother them, you wouldn't.

Or you'd tell the truth and say this instead: "Hey, Maya, I've got to interrupt what you're doing and give you a task that is going to take up

the rest of your day and possibly your week. I know you already have some deadlines you're working toward right now. Please let me know if you need any help prioritizing this or if anything is unclear. Thanks."

Same result, no lying.

These kinds of time-based lies come in lots of flavors. You may recognize some of these common phrases:

- "I'm so busy, I just don't have the time . . ."
- "I wish I could, but . . ."
- "I'm so sorry, but . . ."
- "I'll do it later, I promise, as soon as I . . ."
- "I'll see what I can do and get right back to you . . ."
- "That sounds great. If I only had more time, I would totally . . ."

We've got to start calling out these lies for what they are—bullsh*t. They are the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that we undermine our integrity and make ourselves feel bad about what we *aren't* doing.

These lies beat us down while offering false hope. We also waste precious energy and resources when we engage in fantasy instead of grounding ourselves in reality.

● PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: PAYING ATTENTION

To move this from theory to practical application, start a practice of paying attention to what you say to others and especially to yourself.

Examine any excuses or explanations shared to avoid taking absolute responsibility for your behavior.

It will sting in the beginning, but it will quickly become a fun game and ultimately set you free—not to mention saving you some serious time and heartache as well.

A great place to start is every time you say “but.” Usually anything you say next is a lie and undercuts whatever you said before.

A cousin of “but” is “because.”

See how much time you waste coming up with a really good “because” so no one can question your reason for doing or not doing something.

To be clear, this is not a *gotcha* exercise—don’t beat up on yourself when you catch yourself in one of your 200 lies. We are all guilty of them.

Just spot it, call it out, and then try to laugh rather than cry or get upset. Find the compassionate humanity in how ordinary you are instead of shaming yourself for being less than perfect.

MAKING CHOICES ABOUT YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION

You value what you choose because, by definition, it’s where you’ve placed your attention and invested your time.

So when you choose to worry, you are valuing worry. When you choose to scroll through TikTok videos, you are valuing TikTok videos . . .

You could think, “Oh, I’m just wasting a few minutes in between appointments, no big deal,” and that would mean that for those few minutes, you value wasting time.

Choosing not to choose is also a choice. You may not have considered it a choice, but it is, and it brings with it its own consequences.

What you value and where you focus your time and attention are completely up to you—the point is to make a choice.

Typically, you’re more likely to get what you want when you actively choose to do or *not* do something rather than just waiting to see what happens in the vacuum of no choice.

But sometimes no choice *is* the right choice.

Sometimes waiting and seeing what develops is exactly the best choice. To get the most out of waiting and seeing, it does help to be somewhat awake and paying attention.

Not choosing because you're avoiding or ambivalent about your decision leaves your results up to chance.

The biggest problem with that choice (!) is that you may not get what you want.

Having not made a choice, you are likely to tell one of your 200 lies about your results, and how those results prove that you never get a break or always get the short end of the stick.

Both of those are bullsh*t—you actively abdicated all responsibility for your outcome.

Note: If you're a manager reading this book and are hoping to find a way to free up more of your team's time so you can overload them with more work than they could do before—or a manic type A person who just wants to grab *more* regardless of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual consequences of getting more—sorry. We're not playing that game.

To simply fill up your free time with more tasks, etc., is to miss one of the key points of *Calling BS on Busy*.

We're trying to remove all the extraneous crap from your days so you have more focused moments dedicated to fewer things. That way, you can go deep and go long . . . rather than going wide and skimming across the surface.

You get more time for what is important.

What's important to you can change—importance isn't a rigidly defined thing that never shifts.

Rest could be important today, intimacy important tomorrow, and meeting a demanding deadline important before the weekend.

What you want to avoid is other people's urgent stuff flooding in and filling the vacuum created by your not choosing.

URGENT VS. IMPORTANT

Lots of people—including some of my colleagues—seem to get the concepts of “urgent” and “important” confused.

When your house is literally on fire, urgent and important are completely in sync.

You put the fire out immediately or get out of the house and then put the fire out from a safe distance—there's no mystery about what to do at that moment, right?

If your house isn't on fire—and this is almost always the case, thankfully—urgent things that are not important will try to steal your focus from what is important.

It's not urgent's fault. Urgency is loud and flashy and designed to catch your attention—like a glitzy showgirl in Vegas.

By comparison, important is steady and quiet, and easy to miss or take for granted.

So you can see why urgency often wins out when you aren't laser-focused on what's important.

And some of the 200 lies crop up when urgent is around. “I’ll just get this done super quick and then get right back to X, Y, or Z . . .” Only you don’t, right?

How long have you been dreaming of writing that book or going back to school, starting a family, spending more time with your family, volunteering, decluttering, or just taking a break and not feeling guilty?

And how often do you swear that you will totally do it . . . as soon as you *have the time*?

That is some serious bullsh*t right there because free time never just shows up.

And if you’re a people pleaser, it’s even worse for you. You have a permanent position on the volunteer fire department putting out everyone else’s fires before getting to your own.

Look, it’s nice to be nice and helpful.

It’s just not so nice to constantly undermine your own success and happiness while racing around hoping everyone else sees how nice you are.

Be generous, be a team player—but if you’ve ever resented the time you gave away that kept you from doing something important *to you*, can you see how your choices created that situation?

When the house is not on fire, here’s a simple way to tell the difference between urgent and important. Urgent by itself is almost always someone *else’s* agenda.

Urgency can be a by-product of being forgetful or distracted, as in when a deadline suddenly appears for renewing your visa. But then it usually arrives with importance in tow.

When urgency shows up by itself, it's usually someone else wanting something from you on their timeline, not yours.

Get it? Urgent by itself = someone else's agenda. Urgent and important = your agenda.

KNOWING WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Given how significant knowing what's important is when making decisions, it's odd that there isn't more focus in our everyday lives on identifying what's important and why.

Fortunately, we're about to fix that. Just complete the core values exercises at cbobbbook.com/values.

When you're finished, you'll have successfully identified your top 5 values. The entire set of exercises takes 25 minutes to complete.

If you've completed an exercise like this within the past year, now would be a good time to pull out your answers and see if they still apply.

If you haven't done something like this in the last 12 months, or you're thinking this sounds great but you'll do them later, or that exercises like these are a waste of time, what you're actually saying is that a fuzzy or imprecise sense of what's important to you is good enough.

But until you really know what's important to you—and I don't mean some vague sense of *sort of* knowing—you can't leverage those values to make a decision on when, where, and how you're going to invest your time.

If you tell me that your family is the most important thing to you but you've been late to one or more of your kid's events, whatever got in the way of you being on time was really what was most important to you then.

And if you're not making choices based on your values, what are you basing them on? Chance? Whimsy?

Either you're picking up a paddle or you're riding the current of life wherever it goes.

If the ride without a paddle sounds romantic or like “going with the flow,” what happens when you run into rapids? Are you more likely to capsize with or without a paddle in your hands?

With the paddle, you can always coast for a while. Without the paddle, you'll never be able to steer the boat.

If you work closely with colleagues or spend time on teams or in groups, it's a great idea to do the core value exercises individually and then together as a group. Your results will help anytime you want to resolve discord in prioritizing or deciding on a direction.

Using your collective values can help remove any bias or personality conflicts when deciding between two or more competing views. They let you focus on the actual problem in front of you—deciding which choice is stronger and more aligned with your stated and agreed-upon values—not the red herring of whose idea is better.

THE WIZARD OF OZ AS A METAPHOR

The core value exercises help us bring to the conscious level what we intuitively know in our gut but may at times discount or distrust.

The movie *The Wizard of Oz* illustrates this concept beautifully.

About 25 minutes into the movie, after Dorothy and her house have been swept up in a tornado and dropped into Munchkinland, accidentally killing a wicked witch, Glinda the Good Witch shows up and tells Dorothy to take the dead witch's ruby slippers and put them

on her feet. She then tells Dorothy they are very powerful and to not take them off for anything. And then she splits.

Dorothy does as she's told, but she's really just focused on finding a way back home to Kansas.

Suddenly, the dead witch's sister shows up and threatens Dorothy, and the Munchkins tell Dorothy her best bet for getting home is to follow the Yellow Brick Road and go see the Wizard of Oz.

What follows is a series of encounters—dangerous, absurd, and delightful—as Dorothy meets new friends and they all band together to find the wizard, hoping he will give them each what they think they're lacking.

Then, just when Dorothy's last chance to go home disappears, Glinda shows up again and tells her that she had the power to get back to Kansas any time she wanted—all she had to do was click her heels three times.

Now, Dorothy could have been really pissed off—that was a key piece of information that Glinda had withheld—but instead, Dorothy gives each of her new friends a big hug goodbye and clicks her way back home.

Like Dorothy, we each have our own ruby slippers—powerful, untapped knowledge of what's important and what is needed to get us to where we want to be.

We just need to consciously bring that forward and start using it when making decisions about what to focus on and when. When we marry our intuition with our core values, we consistently make better decisions with fewer regrets.

HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT TIME

Feelings may not be facts—but they can influence our behavior as if they *were* true. If in the past you felt cheated by time, or like time was out to get you, or that things took too long to do and that didn't seem fair, it wouldn't be surprising to find that you now resent time.

You may avoid being “real” with time, fearing that time will use your vulnerability against you. You may even keep secrets from time, as if time were an authority figure—even though those secrets only gaslight you.

You don't have to love time but you do need to let go of any resentments you're holding on to if you're going to maximize the time you have left. Otherwise, you'll work twice as hard.

You'll have to do what anyone would have to do to get something done *plus* try to motivate yourself, despite feeling like you've lost the battle before you even start.

Can you see how much energy is required to “act as if” when you already feel defeated?

So you don't want to pretend you don't resent time, you want to actually let yourself and time off the hook for past mistakes. You can do that by forgiving yourself—whether through prayer or meditation or expressing radical gratitude and acceptance until you feel those resentments diminish and fall away.

OVERWHELMED OR ABUNDANT

It's easy to feel overwhelmed when you're staring at a mountain of obligations.

Right now, these are the things I'm working on:

- Producing a podcast
- Writing this book
- Updating my first book, *Unstuff Your Life!*, for a new release
- Redesigning my business's website
- Creating a coaching certification program
- Delivering one of our two flagship coaching programs
- Updating the other flagship coaching program
- Developing a new enterprise time management Mastermind to coincide with the launch of this book

And I'm doing all of these things while maintaining the daily administration of my life—things like laundry, personal hygiene, working out, grocery shopping, getting enough rest, riding my bike, kayaking, socializing with friends, volunteering, meditating, sleeping, and eating.

When it's all laid out on paper it looks like a lot, right?

You may be comparing it to your list and thinking it's more than or not as much as you have to do.

Fortunately, we're not competing to see who is the busiest.

More to the point, it would certainly be a lot if I were trying to do them all at the same time, but I'm not.

And neither should you be.

If you have a lot of things to do, they will feel even more overwhelming if you pile them on top of each other and then start worrying about when you're going to do them all.

So here's the first thing you can do to simplify your list. Review it and if there is anything on it that is not aligned with your values, let it go.

If some items are there because of past choices you made that weren't aligned with your values or seemed like the "best you could do under the circumstances," you'll have to forgive yourself for those mistakes.

If you can let them go, do it. If legally or morally you have to do them, then do them as quickly as possible to settle your time (and other) debts and buy back your freedom.

If your list is filled with tasks and projects that are aligned with your personal and professional values, and if you want to do them all, just not simultaneously, then they aren't too much.

It's only your mindset that labels them as too much.

Either way, there's little point in feeling sorry for yourself or complaining—that's just wasted time.

And if you're digging yourself out of debt, time-based or otherwise, you don't have any time to waste.

On a bad day, when juggling a lot of obligations, you might view them negatively. You might start to feel trapped by the number of commitments you have.

You may even tell yourself that things are hopeless. That how you feel right now is how you'll feel forever.

That you're going to spend the rest of your life exhausted, overwhelmed, and unhappy.

Those 200 lies can be compelling, but they're not true.

Because, objectively, having more than you need (or want) is actually the definition of abundance.

So the lie says your circumstances suck. The math and the dictionary say your life is abundant. How's that for a discrepancy?

As stated, one solution for having more than you need is simple—downsize until you reach that Goldilocks state of just right, just enough.

That's when another of your 200 lies might try to convince you that letting something go will make you suffer, not set you free. Even though you might have just been complaining about all the things you had to do!

That's an all-too-real illustration of how a faulty mindset will feed you a story of “damned if you do, damned if you don't.”

Can you see how powerful mindset is in influencing your thinking and feeling, and how with a faulty mindset you could make choices that do not align with your values and make things worse?

This could be boiled down to a worldview (or mindset) that is either glass half-empty or glass half-full.

Half-empty has you focused on the burden of having more than you need, the loss you'll feel if you let anything go, and viewing your life and your choices through a lens of scarcity.

Half-full sees that not only do you have everything you need, but you have more than you need. That you are in a state of abundance—which is something to celebrate and be grateful for.

You are living in a state of plenty, not lack—if you are willing to see it that way.

But those 200 lies, fueled by your ego, will fight hard to persuade you otherwise.

Now, there may be parts of a project or a task that you don't enjoy doing.

You might not want to do all the stuff on your to-do list.

You don't have to.

Delegate them to someone else, automate them, or decide they don't need to be done by anyone and cross them off.

You are in control of what gets done when and by whom.

And when you use your values to make decisions, you shift from deciding if a task is "bad" or "good" to deciding if the task is worth your time and energy or not.

In fact, whether we're talking about clutter or tasks, your sense of what's good or bad comes down to how you feel about it in the moment more than objective truth.

Which is brilliantly illustrated in the Taoist parable "Maybe."

A poor farmer's horse runs off. That night, his neighbors gather around to mourn his loss. "We cannot believe this. What a terrible thing has happened to you," they say. And the farmer responds, "Maybe."

Days later, the farmer's horse returns with seven wild horses in tow. Right away, the neighbors exclaim, "What unexpected good fortune!" The farmer shrugs. "Maybe."

The next day, the farmer's son rides one of the wild horses, falls off, and breaks his leg. The neighbors cry, "What terrible fortune has befallen your son!" The farmer replies, "Maybe."

A few weeks later, the army comes through the village drafting men for the war. When they see the farmer's son and his broken leg, they

pass him by. The neighbors rejoice. “What great luck for you and your son!” The farmer simply says, “Maybe.”

Value, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

GRATITUDE AS A CURE FOR OVERWHELM

Rather than riding the seesaw of good and bad up and down, why not set any judgments aside and shift how you feel about time and commitments instead?

Instead of thinking, “I have way too much to do,” and feeling crappy about it, try thinking, “Too much is better than too little,” and foster a sense of gratitude.

Then continue building on that gratitude by focusing on a larger, macro view of your life.

Swap dwelling on whether any one task or project delights you in the moment with celebrating that you are actively curating your day—and, by extension, your life, every day.

You are not a puppet or a doll being manipulated into doing anything. You have the intelligence to decide what is important to you and the agency to act on that decision. That is a great position to be in and something to honor and protect—it’s not a burden or an imposition.

There are many people in the world right now whose circumstances are far more grim. You don’t need to feel guilty about that, but you also shouldn’t take your relative comfort for granted.

Starting there, it becomes much easier to appreciate everything that is present in your life.

Something else I’ve discovered over the past 26+ years: fighting with stuff or time doesn’t work.

When it comes to clutter, you have to physically move it—you won't think your way to an organized home.

And when it comes to time, resisting the 24-hour system and the steady flow of time won't change that system one bit. Seriously.

So another mindset shift could be away from resenting time and the tasks you have to do and toward embracing and doing them, or delegating or ditching them.

The neuroscience behind this tells us that people who express and feel gratitude have a higher volume of gray matter in their brains, which enables us to better control our movements, memories, and emotions. Focusing on gratitude enhances dopamine and serotonin, the neurotransmitters of happiness.⁵

● PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: GRATITUDE

Here's a quick way to jump-start your gratitude practice. Turn to whatever is kicking your butt in this moment, whether that is clutter or too many chores, and say, "Thank you for being in my life. You served me at one time and you no longer do. I now release you."

You will instantly feel different. The grasp that clutter or some task was holding you in will loosen. You may have to say the phrase a few times for the grip to fall away completely, but with repetition it will.

Gratitude lists are another easy way to turn up the volume on what's present and going well in your life. I start each day with a simple list of at least five specific things I'm grateful for. So instead of saying I'm grateful for my health (general), I say I'm grateful for the flexibility to bend over and tie my shoes without lower back pain (specific).

As I fall asleep each night, I also run through a list of all the people and experiences I am grateful for that day. I am consistently asleep before the list is finished.

We'll talk about triage in Chapter 7, Poor Planning—for now, just recognize that as long as you are alive, there will always be more things to do than there is time to do them. You're not trying to get to the task version of Inbox Zero.

When you start to employ this mindset shift and any of these habits, you will feel better about the work you're doing, the stress and tension you're feeling will soften and break apart quicker, and life will feel easier.

Believe it or not, your attitude and consistency are far more important to your success or failure than your ability to be disciplined.⁶

Spending 5 to 15 minutes a day doing something consistently is the time management version of compound interest—it yields higher returns for the same amount of time invested.

Think back to any term paper or report. When you crammed, you may have met the deadline, but you got there just in time and exhausted. There was no time for any revisions to make the paper better. Had you budgeted the same amount of time over a few weeks, you would have been able to update the paper until you were satisfied and still had time to take breaks.

COMFORT VS. VALUES

I think the world looks the way it does today—greater polarization, rising temperatures, dwindling resources—because we as a society have made a lot of shitty choices focused on short-term gain.

The people in power have pushed off responsibility for and thoughtful stewardship of our shared planet onto some undefined future gen-

eration—a macro version of “buy now, pay later” and the “deferred decisions” that create clutter.

On the micro side, that is enabled by many of us in the West, and in the US in particular, who maintain an almost absurd attachment to our relative comfort in the moment, often to the detriment of our long-term goals.

If your basic needs aren’t being met, comfort is important, and one result of a bigger structural problem that this book isn’t equipped to solve. No one should be hungry or unsheltered unless they have actively chosen to be.

For the rest of us, comfort is a fool’s errand, because we’re *already* comfortable. If you’re reading this book, you very likely have a roof over your head, food in your belly, and clean clothes on your back.

So, practically speaking, something that pushes you outside your comfort zone is probably still not pushing you that far.

If your first reaction to that is “But I like my comfort,” the cure for overvaluing your comfort is not to become permanently miserable. There are miles between those two polar opposites.

Just consider this an invitation to focus more on becoming your biggest, baddest, best self and less on how that feels at every moment.

What fires you up, what gets your engine stoked? What inspires you to push forward regardless of headwinds or resistance?

To rise to that level, you’ve got to be clear about what is important to you. And you’re going to have to exert yourself—which might not be comfortable.

If you've resisted staking a claim for what actually matters to you because asserting yourself has been uncomfortable, let's swap that discomfort for this discomfort. If you're going to be uncomfortable, you might as well have something awesome to show for it.

And if you are currently crushing your goals and living an amazing life, you already have a certain tolerance for discomfort. You are perfectly set up to use this book to optimize your time even more.

A world where everyone is engaged and lit up, bursting with life force and energy—where we're primarily focused on activities, experiences, and relationships that move our hearts and feed our minds and spirits—is a rich, robust, and diverse world.

It's the kind of world I think most of us want to live in.

To get there, we're each going to have to be willing to be momentarily uncomfortable at times.

That doesn't mean a life of misery and drudgery—that's so dramatic!

It just means that choosing activities aligned with your values may sometimes be uncomfortable. Not naked-and-hungry-and-cold-forever uncomfortable. Just temporarily uncomfortable.

You'll swap superficial comfort while being secretly miserable at your core for a little temporary discomfort while being overwhelmingly satisfied and happy at your core.

Which discomfort is more insidious—the one that tells you sweat, effort, and challenges are to be avoided at all costs *or* the one that hums constantly in the background, spoiling any sense of satisfaction?

You'll forget the first kind in 24 hours or less. The second kind will actively prevent everything you dream of and are capable of from ever happening.

HOW YOU INTERACT WITH TIME

How you think and feel about time directly impacts your actions—whether you're enthusiastic and digging in or disinterested and tentative.

You can do anything, in spite of how you're feeling—it will just take a lot of energy or require you to jump into action before thinking and feeling.

You can definitely change how you think and feel through physical activity. *Move a muscle, change a thought* or *Move a muscle, change a feeling*.

It's just that, for most of us, we want to *feel* like getting up and moving before we get up and move. So if we're not feeling it yet, we're stuck in a Catch-22 situation. We need to move to shift our feelings but we don't feel like moving so we stay where we are.

Ultimately, regardless of what you think or how you feel, actions speak the loudest when it comes to time management.

If you half-ass your efforts, or do the wrong thing at the right time, or even the right thing at the wrong time, you're likely to get sub-par results. Even if you do the right thing at the right time, you might not see exceptional results. A faulty mindset and wobbly feelings will use these results to “prove” that time always has the upper hand and you can't win.

Bullsh*t. Improving time management is an objective game of trial-and-error—you've got to be willing to keep trying regardless

of your immediate results. Simon Sinek brilliantly illustrates this point—see the endnotes to watch a video of him explaining it.⁷

GOLF BALLS, PEBBLES, AND SAND

What's up with the story that says, "Let's get a bunch of small, unimportant tasks out of the way so we can open up a block of time with no distractions for that big sexy project"?

I have fallen for that lie more than once myself.

And every time I burn through the day knocking out a bunch of inconsequential crap, by the time I'm ready to take on the big work, I'm exhausted.

Then I tell myself another one of my 200 lies—tomorrow will be different. I'll get up early and do the big thing then.

Sound familiar?

In reality, it's completely backward.

First off, those little tasks often take longer than expected.

And then, like a demonic game of Whac-A-Mole, another task always pops up demanding attention.

Even if you're nodding your head right now, it may still be hard to accept that small things first is not the way to go—and here's why.

First, there's the dopamine hit you get when you check something off your list, even something small and insignificant.

Then one of your 200 lies might tell you that there aren't that many of them and that you'll get them done faster than you think.

The lie may even tell you that you are the exception to this rule, or that you're clever enough that the rule doesn't apply to you. But there is a video that illustrates this point simply and clearly.

In the video, a professor shows his class how hard it is to fit the big things into your life when you start by focusing on the small stuff. He does this with golf balls representing the “big” stuff and sand as the “small” stuff. Filling a jar with sand first leaves no room for the golf balls. When he puts the golf balls in first, the sand easily flows around the balls and everything seems to fit.⁸

Lots of people focus on the small stuff, thinking the big stuff can wait and that they'll definitely get to it soon, or one day, or someday.

But time and life don't work that way.

And I understand it can feel counterintuitive—that getting all the busywork out of the way *should* leave time for all the big things.

But that is exactly how we nickel-and-dime ourselves out of an entire year of our lives. And it happens in 5- and 10-minute increments.

Remember Patsy from the previous chapter?

Patsy was always rushing around dealing with whatever was urgent. A phone call, text message, email, doorbell, errand, chore—it didn't matter.

She was so busy that she couldn't even tell if she was having a good day or a bad day until it was over. And then pretty much every day ended badly. She was constantly *reacting* to the world around her, rather than *acting* on her own terms.

And when she got a completely free day, she had no idea what to do with it.

She'd surf the internet, scroll through social media, play some solitaire, and watch the clock. She'd tell herself she was relaxing but really she was just waiting for the day to end so she could get back to a routine she understood—racing through tasks at breakneck speed, then crashing at the end of the day, exhausted.

We typically choose the devil we know even when he's trouble.

Fortunately, after a few weeks of us working together, Patsy started to shift her mindset.

She used the tools outlined in this book—a timer, a stopwatch, and a calendar. She did the core value exercises, began writing a daily gratitude list, slowly broke free from her old way of thinking, and started making progress.

When we're in overload, like Patsy, getting *any* relief sometimes feels like a good strategy.

We consider what's required to move a golf ball, and the sand looks much more appealing.

We don't think about the satisfaction we'll get after tackling one of our golf balls—that seems too abstract and far away. And unfortunately, there's always more sand.

WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS?

You might be thinking, "Well, okay, Patsy was a mess. What about Oprah or Bill Gates—they get lots done every day!"

They do, and most billionaires have staff.

Of course, they weren't always billionaires, but I'll bet they both knew the difference between the golf balls and the sand and were almost

maniacal about shutting out anything that might have been standing between them and their goals.

So if you're willing to match their focus and attack your life with that much intensity, they could be great role models.

It's just that most people really like their comfort.

There are plenty of stories about the early days at Microsoft that say when Gates was programming, he would often pull all-nighters, sometimes many in a row. It seems he regularly worked 80 to 120 hours a week, to the exclusion of most other things.

Are you willing to do that? Are you able to do that? If not, what can you afford to do—or not do?

Ultimately, modeling your life on anyone else isn't that helpful.

You are you, with your own set of circumstances—so let's hack your life and get you as much time as we can for the things you think are most important.

THE BOTTOM LINE

You can't change your relationship to time without changing how you think, feel, and interact with it. That's why *Calling BS on Busy* starts with mindset.

It's the fundamental stepping stone to everything that comes after.

The best tools in the world are just paperweights if you don't know how to use them, so don't underestimate or neglect shifting your mindset if you want to change your approach to time.

CHAPTER RECAP

To get control over your day and your life, you're going to need to change your relationship with time. That requires changing three things at a fundamental level:

- How you think about time
- How you feel about time
- How you interact with time

HOW YOU THINK ABOUT TIME

In the past, you may have thought that time was slippery and hard to pin down. Sometimes it raced by, other times it dragged on.

Stories about how you use time may be slanted to prove you are losing the war with time, particularly if you've got a glass-half-empty mindset.

To interrupt those stories or set them aside, stop trying to evaluate your relationship with time. Instead, focus on how you measure time: 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day.

Then shift from stating narrative goals like working on something until you're "done" to using math-based goals, like working on something for X minutes.

You'll get more done and feel more accomplished when you swap "cleaning the garage" for "cleaning the garage for 30 minutes," and then set a timer. When the timer goes off, if you actually worked in the garage for all 30 minutes, you did what you said you were going to do. You win.

Getting time back so you can do more means doing less or, more specifically, doing fewer things but doing them deeper and more thoroughly. Productivity isn't necessarily about keeping more plates spinning. It's about committing to what matters most to you and using

those values to decide which plates need to stay in the air and which can now crash to the floor without negatively impacting your life.

Math doesn't lie, but humans do. The average adult tells 200 lies per day—mostly to themselves. Start paying attention to the false stories that rob you of time. Stories like “I’m a hopeless procrastinator” or “I never catch a break.” These kinds of falsehoods do not serve you. You don’t get a pass because you’re so “bad at time.” Get better at how you use your time and you’ll see that these stories have been holding you back and defining your reality. When you let these lies go, you will quickly find that you have the same amount of time as everyone else.

Back to values. By definition, what you choose is what you value. It is the clearest demonstration of where you’ve invested your time and attention. Make sure to prioritize the important over the urgent whenever possible. Sometimes what’s urgent will demand your attention, and if it’s both urgent and important, it deserves your attention, like when something is literally on fire.

But often urgent will just be jumping up and down, trying to get your attention regardless of its significance. With some practice, you can learn to ignore that insistence and stay focused on what’s actually important, regardless of its urgency.

If you’re struggling to figure out if something is both urgent and important, it’s probably not both. A simple thumbnail to help you distinguish urgent from important is this: Urgent by itself = someone else’s agenda. Important = your agenda.

To nail down exactly what is important to you, complete the core value exercises at cbobbook.com/values. When you’re finished (in about 25 minutes), you’ll have identified your top 5 values and can then use them to further identify what is worthy of your time and attention and what you can let go of.

Until you know what's important to you and then leverage those values every time you decide how, when, and where to invest your time, you may never “get around” to the things that matter. You may continue to tell yourself that there is something you need to “get out of the way” first so you have “enough” time to focus on what's important. Hopefully, you can now start to see that that is the exact opposite of how you should be approaching what matters most.

HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT TIME

Feelings aren't facts, but they can influence our choices around time, consciously and unconsciously. Feelings are the basis for many of those stories in which you are running late, are running out of time, or end up losing the battle with time.

Gratitude is an instant cure for feeling overwhelmed. “Too much to do” can be seen (and felt) as an abundance of opportunities just as easily as it can be seen as a relentless, unyielding burden. So flip the script on feeling bothered by all that abundance and take a moment to celebrate the fact that you have so much going on in the first place.

Turn to whatever it is that is kicking your butt in the moment, whether that is too much stuff (clutter) or too many chores, and say, “Thank you for being present in my life. You served me at one time and you no longer do. I now release you.” It will instantly improve your mood and your results.

Consider starting a practice, if you don't already have one, of writing simple gratitude lists when you wake up and at the end of your day to stay positive about what is present in your life rather than focusing on what is missing. Be specific when you call out what you are grateful for. Instead of just being grateful for your health, what *about* your health are you grateful for—flexibility to bend over without pain, shedding X pounds, a clean cancer screening?

Embrace or at least accept that some short-term discomfort may be required to get you long-term success. If you are more comfortable than you typically consider or acknowledge—you're not lacking food, clothing, or shelter—you don't have to resign yourself to a life of misery to make progress. You just have to be willing to sit in temporary discomfort every now and then. Few if any significant things ever happen in the middle of someone's "comfort zone."

HOW YOU INTERACT WITH TIME

Once you've addressed how you think and feel about time, you'll want to get into action, and you'll want to do that with clarity and decisiveness.

Like any skill, the more you practice using your time deliberately, the better at it you'll become.

With the proper mindset, you'll be able to quiet down those 200 lies that tell you either that you have all the time in the world or that you have so little time available that you will never catch up. From there, you can start to prioritize what's important to you and what is aligned with your current core values.

BIG THINGS FIRST

There is a pervasive myth that getting a bunch of small, unimportant tasks out of the way first will open up a big block of unstructured time so you can then do your big work. But once you've burned through your time with busywork, you're often too tired to dig into that big work, right?

So, like a lot of other people, you may end up pushing the big stuff off, telling yourself that you will definitely get to it soon, or one day, or, worse, someday. And before you know it, you'll have nickel-and-dimed yourself out of a year or more of your life—in 5- and 10-minute increments.

Professor Meir Kay illustrates this in a simple video you'll find in End Note 8. Using golf balls to represent the "big" stuff and sand as the "small" stuff, he fills a jar up with sand. Not surprisingly, there is no room left in the jar for any golf balls.

When he puts the golf balls in first, the sand easily flows around the balls and everything seems to fit.

So even though it may feel counterintuitive, develop the practice of prioritizing the big things, your golf balls, first. You'll get the little things done, too . . . or even better, you'll delegate them away or decide they don't need to be done at all.

About the Author



Photo by: Peter Hurley

ANDREW MELLEN is a speaker and coach, and the author of the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller *Unstuff Your Life!* and *The Most Organized Man in America's Guide to Moving*. He is the creator of the De-Stress Your Mess Challenge, the Unstuff Your Life System, and the Calling BS on Busy Mastermind—virtual programs that have helped over 500,000 people and businesses around the world change their relationships with stuff, time, and clutter for good.

Mellen has been a student of mindfulness and meditation since 1989. In a previous career, he was an award-winning actor, director, and arts administrator who toured the United States performing improvisational theater in prisons and penitentiaries. He currently splits his time between New York, Lisbon, Southeast Asia, and Treasure Island, Florida.

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