

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Cal Newport | Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World (Episode 159)

What if you don't really need to be *smarter* or more educated than everybody else to get what you want out of life? What if the real trick is just finding a way to be more *focused* than everybody else? The distractions of modern living might make this seem like an equally difficult task, but [in this episode](#) we talk to someone who knows how to close out the mental clutter and get things done.

Cal Newport is a professor of computer science at Georgetown University and author of several best-sellers, including [Deep Work](#) and his latest, [Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World](#). In it, he makes the case for why focus is actually the new IQ and explains what you can do to use the technology at your disposal to enhance that focus rather than detract from it.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Dominate the Technology

"If you're a minimalist with your physical possessions, you clean out the house and you only bring back in the things that you really need and like," says Cal. "This is like Marie Kondo or The Minimalists. This is just the same thing in your digital life."

Cal says to wipe the slate clean. Get all of the optional tech out of your life and rebuild from scratch with intention by asking yourself:

- What do I actually *care* about?
- What do I actually *want to do*?

If you're a high schooler, your answers will likely differ from those of a 39-year-old college professor. The idea here is to dominate the technology rather than having it dominate you. Taking apps and gadgets out of your life that you once swore you "couldn't live without" -- and bearing witness to the fact that you still breathe and your heart continues to beat -- is liberating.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Here's Cal's process:

Commit to taking 30 days off from all non-essential personal digital technology. For starters: remove all of the social media apps you use regularly from your smartphone. Go cold turkey. For these 30 days, adopt the mindset that this is a *permanent* change rather than a *temporary* detox. At the end of the 30 days, only reintroduce the technology that gets a "Yes" answer when you ask yourself: "Is this particular technology the best way to use technology to help one of these small number of things I've identified as being very valuable?"

"You're just bringing back in huge ROI tech and ignoring all the lower ROI tech," says Cal. So what gets left behind and what makes it back? Jot down your do-withouts and must-haves below.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

What, How, and When?

Once you've done without your digital obsessions for 30 days and separated the wheat from the chaff, you begin to see what's really useful about the technology that passes muster.

Cal says: "When you let something back into your life, you go past the binary question of 'What?' and you add the 'How?' and 'When?'"

For instance, a digital minimalist who decides that Facebook is worth using won't just use Facebook for a given number of minutes a day. He or she will also consciously decide *how* Facebook will be used and *when* it will be used.

A visual artist might decide that Instagram is worth keeping because it allows them to see other artists' works in progress (*how* it's used: as grist for their own creativity), and add its use to their daily schedule for a certain amount of time (*when* it's used: 30 minutes after lunch).

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Going further into *how* Instagram is used as the best technology for the job, the artist might further decide they don't need the app on their phone. Maybe they only use it at their main work station, and maybe they restrict themselves to only following a select 10 artists. Maybe instead of every day, they just use it for 15 minutes on Sunday nights when new images go up. "They're getting 99 percent of the value out of Instagram and they're giving up 99 percent of the cost," says Cal.

Of the technology you consider crucial enough to reintroduce, *how* are you using it, and *when*? Try to be as specific -- and minimalist -- as possible.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Intention Trumps Convenience

"The foil to Minimalism is historically Maximalism," says Cal. "Coming across some app that gives you a little bit of convenience, the maximalist says, 'If I don't download that app and use it, it's like someone is stealing from me.'"

Maximalism is what drives people in the digital space to download everything and use everything if there's any value or any convenience.

"Minimalism is the opposite, which says, 'Only focus on the big wins and, on purpose, ignore the small wins.'"

The key here is being intentional. When you're careful, cognizant, and selective about how you use the technology at your disposal, you're able to leverage the technology that benefits you instead of being leveraged into using the technology that benefits someone else's agenda.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Looking for a real-world example of intentionality trumping convenience? Cal presents the Amish.

"What the Amish do is just an extreme type of intentionality-based minimalism," Cal says. "They have one value that's very important, which is the strength of their community. And they have this very clear rule, which is: 'When it comes to new technologies, all that matters: does it strengthen our community or weaken it?'"

Think of conveniences you might consider intentionally giving up for the sake of supporting your core values and list them here. Do the benefits of doing without outweigh the cost of convenience, and would this value be enough to keep you away for good?

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Are You Starving the Social Brain?

Research has shown that painkillers can numb the emotional effects of loneliness because, as Cal tells us, “It’s so important in our species’ history to be social that the social aspects of the brain are hooked into the pain centers of the brain.”

As it turns out, social media makes a poor substitute for real-life interaction with others -- it’s easier and requires less energy, but it doesn’t fulfill the same requirements your social brain evolved to expect. It’s no coincidence that loneliness and anxiety-related mental health issues have spiked since the introduction of the smartphone -- especially among teenagers.

Are you getting out of the house and interacting with real people on a regular basis? If not, I’m challenging you to dedicate some time each day to getting out and having face-to-face conversations -- even if it’s just to buy a newspaper from the local magazine stand (not a machine) to read in place of your news app!

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Conversation Office Hours

This is a short and seemingly obvious one, but it's something that might have slipped under your radar if you're used to always being available to some degree thanks to the "convenience" of your smartphone.

Rather than answering your phone whenever it rings or returning texts immediately, let it be known to your colleagues that you will be accepting calls and meetings only between certain hours every day (or only every business day). Remember: you're not obligated to jump at the whim of other people just because technology has made perpetual intrusion possible!

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

About



Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers -- from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth -- and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

support@jordanharbinger.com

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW



Share This With
Your Friends!



Share This