THE THINKING LIFE

HOW TO THRIVE IN
THE AGE OF DISTRACTION

P. M. FORNI

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Contents

OURS IS AN AGE OF DISTRACTION. THE BACKGROUND OF OUR LIVES IS THE WHITE NOISE OF INCONSEQUENTIAL TELEVISION PROGRAMS, POMPOUS PUNDITS, SHRILL TALKBACK CALLERS, TEN-SECOND NEWS GRABS, AND THE CULT OF CELEBRITY. IN THIS ENVIRONMENT, THE NEED FOR CONTEMPLATION AND SOME INTROSPECTION BECOMES COMPELLING; A TIME TO STOP AND THINK; TO MAKE OUR WAY, GUIDED BY A MORAL COMPASS, A BEARING THAT DIVINES OUR BEST INSTINCTS.

—Paul Keating

THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID
FOR SITTING STILL AND LETTING THINGS COME CLEAR,
THE WAY MORNING FOG BURNS OFF THE LAKE.

—George Witte

Preface

When the idea of writing a book that would rediscover the merits of the thinking life was still coalescing in my mind, one day I jotted down a couple of paragraphs with what, in essence, was the rationale behind the project. Quite uncharacteristically, those paragraphs were in the form of a report by a visitor to Earth from another galaxy. Having put them aside while I considered other projects, I had half forgotten them when I found them in a binder's pocket.

As the first week of my mission on Earth comes to a close, I must report a puzzling find. You remember that in a previous message I described the ability that all humans have to silently converse within their own selves. This internal conversation, which they call "thinking," allows them to take stock of the world around them and to plan their most suitable ways of dealing with it. If there is something that I could determine for sure about life on Earth, it is that happiness is the most coveted good, and that it is a by-product of the good life. You will then fully understand the importance of thinking when I tell you that it is virtually impossible to build a good life without the foundation of good thinking. What has been puzzling me is the cavalier way in which humans use such a core faculty. Any intergalactic visitor would be as struck as I am by their overindulging in thought-avoidance. The amount of their time spent in serious thinking does not even get close to that spent in mindless entertainment and the exchange of unnecessary information. From lack of thoughtful

awareness of any situation in which they find themselves to the failure to prepare for adversity, inadequate thinking is without a doubt the number one cause of their grief and sorrow.

Even to a novice student of the human experience it becomes immediately apparent that good thinking is the necessary prelude to making good decisions. Training their children in it has to be a primary concern for human parents, you would think. Well, it is not. Does such training occupy a prominent position in the schools' curricula? It does not. And so good thinking fails to become second nature. On account of lack of thinking humans keep arriving unprepared to the crossroads of their lives where they must make decisions upon which the quality of their remaining time on Earth depends. In sum: A distinctive human character is the inclination to relentlessly pursue the trivial. That makes them waste an enormous amount of time and energy that would be better spent on matters of consequence. It is heartbreaking indeed to witness their unwitting sabotage of their own lives—because this is what their avoidance of serious thinking amounts to. I wonder what it is going to take for them to realize how crucial this issue is and to start a serious effort to reform their ways.

Respectfully submitted.

Now, I am not one who believes that when nobody is looking, extraterrestrial spaceships make scheduled stops in Paramus, New Jersey. In fact, I'm not even a science fiction fan. However, I know that a familiar landscape often escapes attention. It is the eyes of the stranger that see what remains unnoticeable under the varnish of the ordinary. In this case, the stranger was the extragalactic visitor who is struck by the fact that humans don't seem to realize they are not thinking nearly as much as they should. My challenge with this book

is to make a few suggestions about changing that situation. I want to get as many people as possible to get serious about serious thinking.

In this age that has made distraction a way of life, the essence of my message could not be simpler: Think if you wish to thrive. In conveying it, I have enlisted some of the most influential thinkers from antiquity, such as Aristotle, Epictetus, Plato, and Marcus Aurelius. Being the product of an education that placed emphasis on the classics, I am at ease in their presence and enjoy pointing out all that in their thinking is relevant to our lives today. The essential features of human life have not changed in the last twenty-five hundred years, and the eloquent wisdom Athens and Rome have bequeathed us is still eminently applicable. Why reinvent the wheel when somebody is handing you a well-crafted and perfectly functioning one? This book will acquaint—or reacquaint—you with the basic and the best in thinking habits and thinking skills. Ultimately, the good life is the thinking life. If you want to reach its sunny shores, you'd better rediscover the causeways of thinking. It is by choosing to think that you are going to take the first necessary step toward life's elusive grand prize—true happiness. My job—a very gratifying one—is making it easier for you to take that step.

Introduction
Thinking Seriously About Serious Thinking

BY THE BEGINNING OF 2009, THE AVERAGE AMERICAN CELL PHONE USER WAS SENDING OR RECEIVING NEARLY 400 TEXTS A MONTH, MORE THAN A FOURFOLD INCREASE FROM 2006. THE AVERAGE AMERICAN TEEN WAS SENDING OR RECEIVING A MIND-BOGGLING 2,272 TEXTS A MONTH. WORLDWIDE, WELL OVER TWO TRILLION TEXT MESSAGES ZIP BETWEEN MOBILE PHONES EVERY YEAR, FAR OUTSTRIPPING THE NUMBER OF VOICE CALLS.... IT'S OFTEN ASSUMED THAT THE TIME WE DEVOTE TO THE NET COMES OUT OF THE TIME WE WOULD OTHERWISE SPEND WATCHING TV. BUT STATISTICS SUGGEST OTHERWISE. MOST STUDIES OF MEDIA ACTIVITY INDICATE THAT AS NET USE HAS GONE UP, TELEVISION VIEWING HAS EITHER HELD STEADY OR INCREASED.

—*Nicholas Carr*

AREN'T A SOCIETY'S COMPETITIVENESS AND ITS PROSPECTS FOR A BETTER FUTURE ROOTED IN MORE THAN SHEER TECHNOLOGY? ISN'T HOW WELL WE USE THE DEVICES AS CRUCIAL AS HOW FAST THEY ARE? WILL PURSUING MORE AND MORE DIGITAL CONNECTEDNESS MAKE US SMARTER AND MORE CREATIVE? WILL IT HELP US UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER BETTER? WHEN WE'RE ALL HYPERCONNECTED, WILL OUR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES BE STRONGER? WILL WE BUILD BETTER ORGANIZATIONS AND LEAD MORE PROSPEROUS LIVES? MOST IMPORTANT, CAN WE ACCOMPLISH ANY OF THESE LOFTY GOALS IF WE CONTINUE DEVOTING ALL OUR ENERGY TO ELIMINATING THE VERY THING WE NEED MOST TO ACHIEVE THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE—SOME SPACE BETWEEN TASKS, RESPITES, STOPPING PLACES FOR THE MIND?

—*William Powers*

A CRISIS OF CONCENTRATION

In late July 2008, as the race for the White House was fast approaching its homestretch, an utterly exhausted candidate Obama flew to Europe on a multi-nation journey meant to invigorate his credibility as a statesman. As he met with Tory leader David Cameron in London, an ABC News live boom microphone picked up the private and informal conversation, which then became available to a world that was only too happy to eavesdrop. In it, Mr. Cameron expressed concern about his American visitor's punishing work regimen. After mentioning an upcoming short August break, Mr. Obama shifted focus from lack of downtime to lack of thinking time:

> But I agree with you that somebody, somebody who had worked in the White House who—not Clinton himself, but somebody who had been close to the process—said that, should we be successful, that actually the most important thing you need to do is to have big chunks of time during the day when all you're doing is thinking.

While casting a glance toward his possible future, the candidate who would be president stressed the need for a president to set aside for thinking not just some time, but rather "big chunks of time." Letting oneself be swept along by the tidal wave of busyness was one of the worst things a president could do. "You start making mistakes, or you lose the big picture," Mr. Obama observed. Making good decisions was at the core of good politics, and good decisions were the result of good thinking, the two leaders agreed. One can't help wondering if former candidate Obama does set aside big chunks of thinking time as a resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Of course, making—and keeping—appointments with your brain is beneficial not only to presidents but to all of us. Good thinking, however, doesn't just happen; it is the result of a personal commitment.

* * *

During the first decade of the new millennium, the digital media have changed the way we live. Every day, we spend most of our time doing things that our parents and grandparents not only did not do, but also could not even have imagined. Unfortunately, deep thinking is often the illustrious casualty in the digital revolution. As the most comprehensive encyclopedia ever assembled, the Internet yields serious and complex content. But we know that it is also a provider of mind-numbing distraction. The idea that communication is an intrinsically good thing seems to pervade our culture with the power of a self-evident truth. Hence—at least in part—the inordinate amount of time we spend online. That is unfortunate, because as we value the act of communicating, the value of what we are communicating becomes almost irrelevant. We have only a limited number of waking hours in our days. Time wasted online will never be graciously returned to us by benevolent Internet elves. It is bizarre how many of us have been time-profligate engaging in frivolous searches or retooling our images on social media, all the while neglecting to set aside even a few minutes to do some serious thinking. True, insight can travel by Twitter, but there is no substitute for uninterrupted reflection and introspection—not if we want to discover who we really are, check if we are true to our own values, learn from our mistakes, and plan our future. A lot of what goes online is technology-driven. We often communicate because we can, not because we need to. As we do so, we forget that the shape of our lives depends on what we make time for as we go through them. No, cyber-loitering does not qualify as thinking, and no, we cannot truly thrive without engaging in real thinking. That is why we must rediscover the very wise notion that communicating is only as good as what is being communicated. We must acquire the habit of consciously separating what's important from what is not and allocate our time accordingly. Norman Cousins said,

"We in America have everything we need except the most important thing of all—time to think and the habit of thought." The statement may be hyperbolic, but it underscores a real problem with our current way of life. Only through bypassing the ever-present temptation to divert and amuse ourselves can we take the first, crucial step toward an engaged and rewarding life.

RETRIEVAL VS. RETENTION

Evidence is surfacing that we are losing more than our power of concentration to our addiction to the Internet. When we are on the Net, our prevailing operational mode is one of retrieval, not retention. The problem with that is that our brains' neural pathways are only as good as the cognitive tasks we ask them to perform. When they do not make the *effort* to retain, they lose their *ability* to do so. We count on the Net to do our storing for us, but retention is not just passive storage that we can delegate to a machine. The accumulation of retained knowledge allows us to trace the connections with which we make sense of the world. This is what allowed Newton to make his milestone discovery and Proust to write his prodigious novel. Closer to home, it is only by banking on connections among retained bits of knowledge that your doctor can come up with a correct diagnosis, an accurate prognosis, and an effective therapy for you. That we can access the Internet's digital vaults in no time at all and with the utmost ease is both a blessing and a curse. We engage in successive and quick horizontal searches that fail to do justice to complexity and nuance. As our primary source of content becomes a digital world where we "surf" and "click," looking for bits of information, we risk losing the skill of sustained attention, which allows us to engage in deep reading. We may become unable to read *War and Peace* and *Moby-Dick* from

beginning to end. Is this so bad? Yes, it is, if you consider that shallow readers are at risk of becoming shallow thinkers.

So in light of all this, and not to put too fine a point on it: "Is Google making us stupid?" That question happens to be the title of a seminal essay by Nicholas Carr, whose answer was a resounding "Yes" and who subsequently enshrined his "Yes" in a compelling monograph called *The Shallows*. Still, it may take years to fully qualify that "Yes." In the meantime, we can't go wrong by rediscovering and embracing serious thinking as a defense against a culture of distraction. Today we live with the feeling that there is too much life both physical and digital out there for our limited brainpower to sort out and absorb. The fast pace of innovation in technology often sends us scrambling to learn new skills in a world that appears more dauntingly complex every day. This complexity is matched by an equally daunting dearth of absolutes. For many of us, the only certainty we can rely on is that there are no certainties. This skepticism is not only unfortunate but also unwarranted. In reality, when it comes to what really counts, the age of Google is in perfect agreement with the age of Socrates. What constitutes a good life has not been a mystery for more than two thousand years. The good life is a life nurtured by a healthy sense of self-worth, brightened by a positive outlook, warmed by a loving family and loyal friends, grounded in congenial and challenging work, and made meaningful by an involvement in something larger than ourselves. We also know for sure that happiness is a by-product of the good life and the good life is a by-product of good thinking. Becoming a good thinker, then, is a prerequisite to achieving what all human beings want—in Sigmund Freud's words: "to become happy and to remain so." By "thinker," I do not mean a full-time philosopher, but rather anyone whose good thinking habits are part of his or her daily being in the world. "The life which is unexamined is not worth living," Socrates is famously said to have said. We may or may not be ready to endorse to the letter the powerful statement of a heroic thinker

who chose to die to remain faithful to his principles. It is, however, difficult to quibble with his advocacy of submitting life to the scrutiny of reason. That is how good judgment comes into being. Any life habitually lacking this scrutiny is incomplete and unsafe. Yet we seek to spare ourselves the trouble of thinking as much as we can. We have literally made an art of it. The multibillion-dollar entertainment industry of our time is essentially built upon humanity's addiction to thought avoidance.

Choosing to live the thinking life, the challenge of this book, entails making a comprehensive commitment to the active life of the mind. When you choose the thinking life, you:

- Think first. Before saying or doing anything, you stop and think about the best ways at your disposal and about the likely consequences of your actions.
- Make paying attention your default mode of being in the world.
- Reduce substantially the time you devote to trivial distractions.
- Invest time in serious, uninterrupted introspection and reflection.

In this book on thinking, what I usually have in mind is critical thinking, the kind that is rational, informed, purposeful, and reflective, the kind that strives to remain bias-free and to arrive at logical conclusions. The critical thinker is an examiner of life, always alert, ready to pay attention, interested in everything, constantly asking, "Why?" and taking delight in the process of discovery. Life loves such a thinker, rewarding him or her handsomely. And that is why this is not just a guide to good thinking. More important, it is a thinking person's guide to life.

1
Why You Don't Think and Why You Should

HEADS DOWN, WE ARE ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE EVER-MORE ENTRANCED BY THE UNSIFTED TRIVIA OF LIFE.

—*Maggie Jackson*

DOING WHAT IS OF THE ESSENCE

They took their name from the Stoa Poikile, the famous painted porch in the heart of Athens where Zeno, their founder, philosophized. A Greek slave and a Roman emperor were two of the most influential among them. And in more than two thousand years of Western thought, you will not easily find more effective principles and strategies with which to face life's challenges than the ones they bequeathed us. I am talking about Stoicism, a school of thinking that flourished in Greece and Rome between the last three centuries BCE and the first two CE. The Stoics maintained that temperance in all things human and benevolence toward all people are part of the natural and rational order of things. Conforming to this order entails living a life of virtue, which is the only kind leading to happiness. We are the ones who make our own lives good or bad through the workings of our own thoughts. In other words, life is what the inclinations of the mind make it. A self-help author of our day might say, "Attitude is all." Since we have control—at least some—over our attitude, this is a comforting message, but of course it also saddles us with responsibility. Ultimately the Stoics say, "Life is up to us."

The Stoics did not disdain to address the ordinary and practical aspects of life. In his intellectual autobiography, which is at the same time a guide to the good life, Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE), the emperor who fell in love with philosophy, wrote about everyday life topics such as learning from mistakes, minding your own business, and controlling anger. He also considered the wisdom of keeping the number of one's commitments as low as reasonably possible: "Is it not better simply to do what is necessary and no more, to limit yourself to what reason demands of a social animal and precisely in the manner reason dictates? This adds to the happiness of doing a few things the satisfaction of having done them well. Most of what we say and do is unnecessary anyway; subtract all that lot, and look at the time and contentment you'll gain. On each occasion, therefore, a man should ask himself, 'Do I really need to say or to do this?' In this way, he will remove not only unnecessary actions, but also the superfluous ideas that inspire needless acts."

Do few things and do them well, speak only when necessary: The wisdom behind the economy of action invoked here has not faded in its journey across the millennia. In fact, we are as likely to benefit from it as any of the generations that preceded us. Our narcissism and our worship of self-expression are relentless producers of unnecessary words. Our activism is irrepressible, and our quest for happiness is usually about adding things to do, not subtracting them. As devoted worshippers at the altar of consumption, we want more, and to have more we do more, only to realize eventually how wrongheaded our decision was. Marcus Aurelius's admonitions resonate with us by contrast. They remind us that more is not always better than less. In fact, less can give us more of what we really need—of what really matters.

THINKING IS HARD WORK

Delightful as it may be—thanks in part to the release of dopamine in our brain—thinking is also hard work. After we have engaged in it for a while, our levels of dopamine and glucose drop, and mental fatigue sets in. That thinking is tiring only begins to explain why so many people are wary of seriously engaging in it. Of course, some of us are naturally more inclined to think. Our formative years are a factor as well. If our family and friends did not model serious thinking for us, that was probably not without consequences. We may also avoid serious thinking because we do not want to get too closely acquainted with ourselves—just as many of us avoid looking at our faces in a mirror under an unforgiving light. By making us want to learn, humility keeps us willing to think. Unfortunately, in times like ours that condone and even encourage inflated self-opinion and reckless overconfidence, humility is in short supply. When we feel that we know it all, we are not inclined to spend a lot of time reflecting, let alone second-guessing ourselves. A further disincentive to think is the perception that the problems we are confronting are just too daunting. I may care about world hunger, but if I feel that nothing in my power can make a real difference, I may simply relegate this concern to a corner of my mind that I will seldom revisit. Finally, anti-intellectualism is still a force to be reckoned with. Americans admire full-time doers but are wary of full-time thinkers, especially when the results of the latter's thinking are not usable for practical purposes, such as finding a cure for cancer. The American ethos may not be easy to define, but one thing it is not is bookish. In fact, more often than in other parts of the world, in the United States "bookish" carries a connotation of "freakish." If asked if they would like their child to become an egghead, few parents would answer with an enthusiastic "Yes!" An intellectually gifted child will often be prevented from becoming a good thinker by the attitudes of his or her immediate environment and of society at large. Am I suggesting that we should retire from the world to live a life of contemplation? I am not. I am simply arguing

that we should find the resolve to welcome deep thinking into our very active lives. The problem, then, becomes finding the time.

BUSY, VERY BUSY

A charming vignette graces the first page of William Powers's *Hamlet's BlackBerry*, one of the must-read books for those who want to understand our times. The vignette is about the author's friend Marie when she was a recent immigrant to the United States and still learning to speak English. Whenever he asked her how she was doing, she would respond, "Busy, very busy." The fact that her words never changed, and that she invariably uttered them with a big smile, gave Powers pause: "She seemed pleased, indeed ecstatic, to be reporting that she was so busy." It took him some time to figure out that Marie had been constantly hearing Americans say they were "busy, very busy"—to the point where she'd come to believe it was a polite formulaic response like "Very well, thank you." When was the last time you managed to sit down, sit still, and just think for a while? I mean losing yourself in the ebb and flow of serious reflection, neurons humming, and without letting your attention drift to the nearest computer screen. If you don't remember, you are certainly not alone. For many of us, serious thinking—the kind that makes a positive difference in our lives—has been shrinking like an endangered, pristine marshland threatened by suburban sprawl. The daily need to take action on short-term goals makes it difficult to reflect on the big picture at work. Much to the frustration of the best brains among us, work is increasingly for *doing,* not thinking. We are logging in a growing number of extra working hours that we scavenge in the rubble of what used to be leisure time. Thus, fatigue sets in at times of the day and the week when in the past our refreshed minds became hospitable to insight. Performance-addicted people do not think as much as they

should because, engaged as they are in achieving, they look at thinking as a waste of time.

Maybe the family still feels like a sanctuary to chronically overworked Americans. The erosion of true leisure, however, has not spared the realm of the personal. Two-earner and one-parent households are forever pressed for time. Simple and ordinary tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and getting children ready for school can easily become burdensome chores to add to a daunting to-do list. "Overscheduled" is a recurring definition of today's family life, when fourth-graders need appointment calendars and unstructured child play is becoming a thing of the past. Very often it is as difficult to set aside some thinking time at home as it is at work. Good thinking requires time, and we believe we don't have it; it requires energy, and we are fatigued; it requires the conviction that it is good for us, and we have become indifferent to it; it requires concentration, and we have embraced entertainment. Ill at ease with the rare moments of true quiet still gracing our days, we fail to turn them into opportunities to assess who we are, where we have been, and what awaits us. It is more often the case that we hasten to disturb the unsettling void around us by turning to the closest digital screen. A dubious accomplishment of the often misguided age in which we live is its unparalleled perfecting of the art of distraction.

TIME WASTED

Gifted Canadian illustrator Melinda Stanley blogs both with words and with images (melindastanley.com/blog.html). In one of her long-gone entries, a stylish cartoonlike image of herself was sitting at a draftsman's table in an otherwise empty room, one of whose walls was covered from floor to ceiling with Internet logos: Facebook, Yahoo!, Blellow, Vimeo, cnn.com, Google, eBay, LinkedIn, Technorati, and so

on. She was supporting her tired head with her left hand, and her face was a grimacing mask of comedic vexation. It only took a couple of seconds to realize that in her hour of exhaustion, her computer's screen had morphed into an elongated shape clearly identifiable as a shark with an enormous, toothed, wide-open mouth. The caption beneath the image read: "Sometimes I think about how big the internet really is and I feel as though it could swallow me whole." The Internet may not literally swallow us whole, but trillions of precious hours do disappear daily around the world as we sit transfixed at our remarkable digital machines. Melinda Stanley's cartoon can serve as a commentary on both the size of the Internet and our sizable Internet-related budgeting of time. Being in awe of the former should not prevent us from questioning the wisdom of the latter. One problem with our communication-saturated environment is that in it the actual value of what gets exchanged can become almost an afterthought. As the line separating the seriously consequential from the mostly entertaining keeps blurring, shallowness is entrenching itself as part of the human condition. Is it in the billions or trillions the numbers of workplace task interruptions that in any given day launch us into more or less furtive forays into the alluring realm of the digital? Do you really need to check the BBC headlines again, the silly video that is the viral craze of the moment, or the latest largely overlapping postings by half a dozen of your favorite news bloggers? Do you need to do it right *now*? What do those interruptions do to the quality of your work? The first, basic responsibility we have toward ourselves and others is choosing to think. In an age of distraction, that is also our challenge. Bypassing the ever-present temptation to divert and amuse ourselves is the first, crucial step toward an engaged and meaningful life. The next chapters will help you find the motivation and the time to do exactly that.

This is where you must decide whether you wish just to *read* this book or whether you wish to *live* it. Should you choose the latter, every chapter of this book ends with a number of exercises that are meant to maximize the benefits of the material covered in that chapter.

1. In the age of multitasking, is Marcus Aurelius's exhortation to keep things to a few inspirational or impractical?
2. Is finding time to think hard for you? What are the main obstacles you encounter? Is it family obligations, too much time spent at work, addiction to online amusement—to name a few? How can you overcome these obstacles?
3. Work on your motivation to think. Start making a list of the benefits that increasing your thinking time will bring you.
4. "Humility" is one of those words that seem to be covered by an archaeological patina. I do not remember the last time I heard a parent teach his or her child to be humble. It must have been decades ago. Besides the one mentioned earlier in this chapter, what are the uses of humility in today's world?

2
Finding the Time to Think

THE BAD NEWS IS TIME FLIES. THE GOOD NEWS IS YOU'RE THE PILOT.

—*Michael Altschuler*

REDISCOVERING LEISURE

"I have no time," we say, but we do, we always do. What we lack is the will or wisdom to commit our time to goals that would be smart of us to pursue. If you are really motivated to do something, you will *make* time for it. I am not arguing that you are not busy. Most of us are. I am simply urging you to consider that you are only as busy as you let yourself be. Leisure is waiting around the corner. When we speak of "leisure" today, we seldom speak of anything more serious than recreation or vacation. With the words *skole* and *otium*, which we usually translate as "leisure," Greece and Rome in antiquity often designated a time being free from the obligations of work that could be dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. No endeavors back then were held in higher regard than those afforded by leisure. This view implied that as humans we are at our best when, unencumbered with practical matters, we have the time and ease to think. We work in order to buy time free from work, proclaimed Aristotle, who considered *skole* (from which we derive our "school") humans' opportunity to fulfill their humanity and whose lofty idea of leisure influenced an entire civilization. Back in ancient Athens and Rome, access to thoughtful leisure was limited to a privileged

few. At a time like ours when engaging in serious thinking could be possible for so many people, we are left to consider our widespread lack of willingness to do so. Since setting aside time to think is as important today as it was in Cicero's age, we need to rediscover the kind of leisure that is about exercising our minds. There is only one source of thinking time, and that is the time we spend doing something else. Once you have identified the things you usually do that you wish to cut to regain control of your time, go ahead without looking back. "Reduce," one of the environmental imperatives of our times, should be our constant concern. Imagine all of those things that make you impossibly busy as overbuilding. It is urgent that you restore ecological balance to your life by thinning out the sprawl of the trivial in it. We all need to find the resolve—to do fewer things and do them more effectively so that we can think more.

Learn to say no. Here is a subject missing in our schools' curricula. It is really too bad, because knowing how to articulate an effective and gracious refusal is a skill that we all could use in the most diverse circumstances of life. As a clear commitment to boundary setting, a firm "No" is a form of self-respect. It allows you to keep the time that belongs to you for the purpose of spending it at your discretion. When you feel guilty about saying no, repeat to yourself that your time is exactly that, *yours,* and you are not wronging anybody by exercising your privilege to employ it as you wish. If you have determined that "No" is your chosen reply, do not procrastinate in conveying it. You will be surprised how easy it is to say it once you have tried it. Also, the more you bring yourself to say no, the easier it becomes. A more effective way of finding time to think never existed. Warning: If your sense of self-worth is not as strong as it should be for your own good, chances are you will have to work on it before you get to the point of being able to assert yourself successfully.

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