



Upgrade

Taking Your Work and Life from Ordinary to Extraordinary

Rana Florida
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Focus

Leadership & Management
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► **Career & Self-Development**
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Take-Aways

- Many people live in a state of “managed dissatisfaction.”
- They compromise on what they want and take the path of least resistance.
- “Upgrade” your life by following seven key principles:
- Visualize where you want to be in the future.
- Discover your passion.
- Embrace creativity.
- “Protect your time.”
- “Collaborate.”
- Take risks. Don’t fear failure.
- Stop making excuses for not having the life you want. “Your time to upgrade is now.”

Rating (10 is best)

Overall
7

Applicability
8

Innovation
6

Style
7

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How to achieve the life you want, 2) Why you may want to make changes how you live and 3) How to use seven key principles to “upgrade” your life.

Recommendation

Many people compromise their standards and settle for a life of second-best. Consultant Rana Florida shows you how to live the first-best life you want, stop living in a state of “managed dissatisfaction” and “upgrade” your life by doing what you love. She interviews a wide range of celebrities – including tennis star Andre Agassi; Richard M. Daley, former mayor of Chicago; architect Zaha Hadid; and singer Nelly Furtado. Despite their different backgrounds, each one achieved success by following seven basic principles of life management. Although Florida’s book is sometimes short on details, the strongest, most practical chapter discusses time management and offers concrete suggestions about eliminating filler, curbing your choices, and saying no to people and events that don’t add value. *getAbstract* recommends her insights to those seeking to make positive life choices.

Summary

“Envision Your Future”

Adults often have a hard time answering the questions, “What do you want out of life? and “What matters most to you?” Many people trudge through their days in a state of “managed dissatisfaction.” The concept of managed dissatisfaction comes from Nobel Prize-winning economist Herbert Simon, who coined the term “satisficing” – a combination of “satisfy” and “suffice.” Back in 1956, Simon reasoned that humans cannot imagine every conceivable alternative, so they make decisions based on what they know. Thus, they often settle for what they think is “good enough.”

Take stock of your life and decide what you want to do. Write down your goals. If you can’t verbalize your thoughts, draw pictures. Start with the five “W”s: Who? What? Where? When? Why?” Ask yourself what kind of person you want as your business or life partner. Do you want to be single and independent or married or partnered? Do you want children? What do you hope to gain from your career? What matters to you: creativity, flexibility, a steady paycheck, health insurance or something else? Do you want to live in a city, suburb or rural environment? What is your timeline for what goals you want to accomplish? Where do you find purpose and meaning?

Within these parameters, make a plan for getting what you want. Although change is hard and stressful, “merely opening your mind up to the possibility of change brings change.” Don’t fall into the trap called “learned helplessness” – which is how psychologist Martin Seligman describes the plight of people who believe they have no control over their lives. Give yourself room to fail and rebound if need be. Declutter your life. Stop trying to keep up with other people’s trappings.

Discover Your Passion and Embrace Creativity

Daniel Pink, who wrote the bestsellers *Free Agent Nation* and *Drive*, teaches that the activities you pursue in your free time – when nobody watches – often provide greater

“Time is more important than money and possessions. It’s the one thing you can never get back and something you can’t buy, barter or borrow.”

“If you are not constantly growing, learning and adapting, whether in business or in personal development, you, too, will become obsolete.”

“Instead of developing a real strategy based on where we want to go in life and why, we just slog through in a state of...managed dissatisfaction.”

“Identify what you want your life to look like, learn how to leverage the resources you...have, prioritize your needs and knock out time wasters.”

“Assessing and accepting risk...causes fear and confusion. Physically, it can lead to stress and fatigue. But it's part and parcel of upgrading your life.”

“Curiosity is stifled in a risk-free environment. Many new discoveries and breakthroughs are realized through trial and error. Our society needs to encourage more risk taking.”

insight into your personality than launching a career based on your “passion.” Try new things and discover something unexpected, as Ina Garten did with cooking. Now Garten is known as the “Barefoot Contessa,” the title of her popular TV show on the Food Network. She originally worked as a White House budget analyst. Cooking gave her a reprieve from a stress-filled life in government. Incorporate your passion into your life. If you love animals, volunteer at an animal-rights organization or at rescue groups. If you love art, teach kids after-school or volunteer at a gallery.

People smother their creative instincts by constantly saying no. You tell your children they can't have that cookie or toy; your boss tells you that you can't work from home; and your spouse says not to paint the walls the color you want. For creativity to thrive, say, “Yes, let's try that” or “Yes, let's do it.” Make good ideas happen instead of stomping on them before they can grow. Find time to play. Heed Tony Schwartz, CEO of The Energy Project, who wrote a *New York Times* op-ed article about taking time out for “strategic renewal.” He suggests exercising, napping, taking vacations and sleeping more. How you play is up to you: hit the treadmill, take a walk, play racquetball, snowboard, do yoga, read, write or whatever. Researchers understand nature's calming effects, so city planners strive to give urbanites parks and green spaces.

“Protect Your Time”

You can do only “three things...with your time: have fun, be productive, give back. That's it; there's nothing else.” Spend time doing what you love. Working falls under being productive, as does furthering your education, cleaning, exercising, and so on. You “give back” when you volunteer at a homeless shelter, pick up cans in the park for recycling, or take care of your sick children. Maintain balance. If you work too hard, you'll burn out. Spend too much time having fun and you'll overload on stimulation. Giving back feels great, but focus on your needs, too.

Many women juggle family and career. Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg covers these issues in her book, *Lean In*. Anne-Marie Slaughter, president of the New America Foundation, wrote an *Atlantic* cover story titled, “Why Women Still Can't Have It All.” Working mothers try to climb the career ladder, which often entails working long hours that conflict with after-school activities. Educated stay-at-home mothers remain a huge untapped resource for companies, which could do a better job of maximizing women's contributions and talents by offering more flexible working arrangements. Many women are leaving workplaces and starting their own firms. In the US alone, women own approximately eight million businesses, which contribute \$1.2 trillion to the gross domestic product. Women now make up 48% of the overall workforce. “It's no surprise that more women are leaving hostile and rigid work environments, preferring to take their chances with businesses they can launch from their homes.”

Even celebrities must balance their time. As tennis star Andre Agassi says, “People chase money and forget that time is our most precious resource. So for me it's a daily struggle to find a balance between work and friends and family.” Cut out the people and things that waste your time. Make a list of friends, family members, business associates and others you spend time with and rate them as positive, negative or zero. Positive people bring you happiness, add value to your life and are fun to be around. Negative people “drain you of energy” and don't add value to your life, either personally or professionally. Zeros neither add nor subtract value; they are empty fillers. Surround yourself with positive people. If you want to be happier and mentally nourished, minimize the time you spend with negative people and zeros.

“As painful and annoying as it is, rejection is part of the game; you can’t let it stop you. Use it as fuel to start your engine.”

“But when we experience a few setbacks in life, too many of us are too quick to throw up our hands in surrender, content to waste the rest of our lives not trying to achieve anything.”

“The value of being able to control your own time, work at your own speed and manage your own schedule is a form of freedom that few of us get to enjoy.”

“We need to learn to say no...so that we can protect our time.”

The Power of No

As you learn to say yes to play and creativity, embrace the power of no. Say no to networking or social events that don’t benefit you. Ask yourself what your goals are for each event, for example, if you might meet new clients. If you have a hard time saying no to every invitation, monetize your time. If you make \$50 per hour and you’re spending 20 hours a week attending events that don’t work for you, you are losing \$1,000 worth of time. Cut back on events in order to spend more time doing what you enjoy.

Pink writes, “It’s actually easier to stay motivated working for yourself than it is working for others. If you don’t get things done, you don’t earn anything. Most people working for themselves are doing things they enjoy.” Limit your choices and use technology to track your time. Ryan Prince works as an entrepreneur in health care, real estate and hospitality while balancing his obligations to his wife and twin daughters. He limits his wardrobe to two blue suits, two grey suits, one black suit, one white tuxedo, and plain blue or white shirts, so he doesn’t waste time thinking about what to wear.

Consider leaving a job that requires a lengthy commute. It eats time you will never get back. If you’re in a job where your tyrannical boss cares more about when you punch the clock than about how well you do your work, consider quitting. While shifts are necessary for certain jobs, such as nursing or teaching, “most creative white-collar jobs” can be done anytime, anywhere. Entrepreneur Jason Fried’s company, 37Signals, offers four-day, 32-hour workweeks from May to October. Fried says his employees maintain their productivity during the summer months and explains, “When there’s less time to work, you waste less time. When you have a compressed workweek, you tend to focus on what’s important. Constraining time encourages quality time.”

Manage your time by clearly laying out your expectations for each person on your staff. Eliminate life’s little frustrations: unsubscribe from email lists, don’t submit your mailing or email address in response to advertisements, and avoid long lines at the post office, grocery store and airport. Fly direct, print your boarding passes at home and don’t check your luggage. Don’t schedule meetings unless absolutely necessary. For each meeting you must attend, prepare an agenda with follow-up instructions, so you don’t waste time on nonpertinent topics. Don’t schedule meetings outside normal working hours. Pretend the “Reply All” button doesn’t exist. Stop copying everyone on email. Check your email and texts only during certain hours of the day. Make technology work for you.

“Collaborate”

“Collaboration means engaging with others in work or life to accomplish a shared goal.” Most people learn to collaborate when they are young by playing team sports. In business and life, collaboration means learning to accept your strengths and weaknesses and finding partners who complement them. Top-down leadership is out; collaboration is in. Today’s employees want to work for organizations that value their time and expertise, to accomplish their projects without being micro-managed, to feel that their work matters, and to know that everyone in the company is working toward a common goal. Fostering collaboration means letting go of control and recognizing the “power of we.”

The benefits of working together include adding resources, exchanging ideas, expanding your network, playing to each individual’s strengths, and gaining different perspectives and insights. Find the right partner or partners: people whose strengths and weaknesses you know as well as your own. Then, they can hold you accountable and offer emotional support when you need it.

“Collaboration is leadership.”

“The right partner is crucial in helping you grow, but the wrong partner can eat up time and resources.”

“You’ll be surprised how much happier you can be when you spend your time doing what you like. Yes, it really is that simple.”

Never Fear Risks or Failure

Many people are afraid to take risks or try something new. Joel Horowitz, Nathalie Jordi and David Carrell took a leap of faith, put in \$1,000 each and started their own business, People’s Pops. They make gourmet frozen popsicles and shaved ices out of locally grown, organic ingredients. Their flavors include peach-habanero, watermelon-ginger, apple-lavender and strawberry-lemongrass with sauvignon blanc. They didn’t have much business experience, and all three worked other jobs while launching their company. One of them explains, “Making mistakes has been the most important thing we’ve done.” Most successful business owners would agree.

Entrepreneurs, in particular, are natural risk takers who learn to balance the ups and downs of running a business. One woman had been hugely successful in fashion and advertising, and had produced an award-winning documentary film. When the 2008 recession hit, she faced bankruptcy. She fired her staff and learned to do much of the hands-on work herself. She never considered working for someone else. Her passion and creativity fed her dreams, and she started over again.

Failure or fear of failure keep most people from upgrading their lives. Starting from an early age, people are conditioned to take the safe route. But sometimes a detour makes a huge difference. When Sara Blakely was a child, her father would ask, “What did you fail at today?”

Blakely founded Spanx, the hugely successful undergarment company, and is the world’s youngest self-made female billionaire. David Kidder, who interviewed Blakely for his book, *The Startup Playbook*, writes that her father showed her the merits of failure: “He made it clear that failure was an indication that you tried something. It was a good thing.”

Success comes through perseverance and trial and error. Pop star Katy Perry seems like an overnight singing sensation, but she spent years singing in front of small crowds before her songs became hits. Carter Kustera, a New York-based artist, redefined himself when sales for his paintings and drawings started lagging. Kustera came up with a simple idea: the “I Love Me” mirror, which would give viewers a positive self-esteem boost. Initially, Kustera etched these words on a mirror as a joke, but a friend wanted such a mirror for someone who was facing some difficult challenges. “Right then, I knew I had something,” Kustera says, “but how could I ever make something like this on a large scale and get it out into the world?” He sought legal counsel to trademark “I Love Me,” made tons of cold calls, sent letters and pitched about 50 meetings over the course of five years before Bed, Bath & Beyond agreed to sell his product.

View failure as an opportunity to learn and grow. “Failure is sometimes just the beginning, not the end.” Stop making excuses for not having the life you want. “Your time to upgrade is now.”

About the Author

Rana Florida is the CEO of the Creative Class Group consultancy. She writes the *Huffington Post* column, “Your Startup Life” and contributes regularly to HGTV. Previously, she was a senior communications executive at HMSHost (Host Marriott Services) and at Feld Entertainment.