

# 'Upgrade': Learn to have fun, work hard and give back more effectively

Rana Florida TODAY books

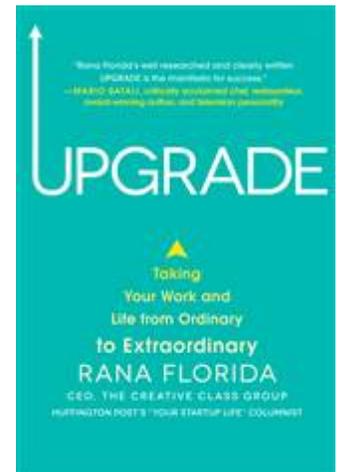
*In "Upgrade: Taking Your Life and Work from Ordinary to Extraordinary," corporate strategist and CEO Rana Florida provides step-by-step tips on how to enhance your life, maximize your productivity and achieve your goals. Here's an excerpt.*

## DESIGN YOUR TIME

*People chase money and forget that time is our most precious resource.*  
—Andre Agassi

Time. It's the one thing we can't buy, trade, or get back. The *Boston Globe* calls it, "A problem so common it may qualify as a new American epidemic: We've got no time. Too busy. Overwhelmed by work, family obligations, and the fast-paced nature of a run-ragged world, many Americans—especially working adults, parents of young children, and those with college degrees, according to polls—feel strapped for time and are leading less happy lives as a result.

"Researchers in the 1990s gave this familiar, if dreadful, feeling a name: time famine. More recently, they coined a term to describe the opposite: time affluence, that elusive feeling of being rich in time. Time affluence, it appears, has real benefits in our lives. If time famine can create a state of rolling personal crisis, studies have shown that feeling 'time affluent' can be powerfully uplifting, more so than material wealth, improving not only personal happiness, but even physical health and civic involvement."



McGraw-Hill

Let me try to make this as simple as possible: there are only three things to do with your time:

- Have fun
- Be productive
- Give back

That's it; there's nothing else. Having fun is pretty straightforward. Take vacations, spend time with your friends, indulge and pamper yourself at blissful spas in Arizona, get crazy drunk, fall in love, dance and gamble all night long in Vegas, visit museums in Paris, drive a convertible up

the Pacific coast, go sailing in Amalfi, sip rosé in Cap D'Antibes or Prosecco in Sardinia. Lie on the sofa and watch football, go bowling, or play your Xbox or Wii. Maybe jump out of an airplane. Whatever your definition of fun is, please indulge it.

Being productive can mean going to school, getting a job, starting a business, taking a class to learn a new skill, continuing your education, engaging in professional development, and working on your health and well-being—pretty much anything that moves you forward personally or professionally.

Giving back occurs when we channel our resources toward others: healing the sick, educating others, investing in the community, taking care of children and family, organizing our efforts for a charity or common good, and volunteering our time.

Those three things—having a blast, feeling a sense of accomplishment, and cultivating a sense of a larger purpose—are all that really matters in life. Anything that falls outside those three categories is clutter or filler and a waste of your time, and you need to eliminate it from your life immediately. Not only is it a waste of time, but it interferes with getting to the three buckets that do matter.

Balance is the key. If you are having fun living like a rock star, the constant flow of stimuli will be hard to maintain, and when it does slacken, your overall happiness will be reduced. Adding productivity to the mix will give you a sense of accomplishment. Giving back will give you a sense of higher purpose and with it the type of happiness that is achieved only when you are contributing to something that is bigger than yourself, something that has meaning to you. The goal in life is to maximize these three key things while striking the right balance in your life to achieve maximum happiness.

I constantly review how well I am doing on keeping my buckets filled; I keep running notes on all three of them, and that allows me to see how I'm spending my time and when I should shift my focus and efforts to filling the other buckets. As for having fun, I have maxed this category out. I've gone skydiving, camel riding in the desert, dune bashing, paddleboarding with family at sunset on New Year's Eve, parasailing in the Bahamas, and snorkeling at the Great Barrier Reef. I've discovered great events and met fascinating people in every corner of the world. I've attended parties of every sort from backyard BBQs to red carpets and black-tie affairs. I've been to exotic spas, on African safaris, and on adventures throughout Asia. I've checked out the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, and been to the top of the Eiffel Tower. I've heard concertos performed by world-renowned violinists, rocked out with Nirvana, and road-tripped across country with friends to see Graceland. I've petted a penguin, fed a giraffe, and enjoyed a champagne brunch among warthogs. I've enjoyed fun times with my husband, friends, and family. If I died tomorrow, I could surely say I had the time of my life.

Being productive covers everything from going to school and graduate school to working hard; running a business, reading, writing, and learning; taking classes and lessons in everything from cooking to painting, photography, and sculpting; eating healthy, and exercising. I try to pack in as much productivity as possible in my job and in my professional and personal development. I am constantly pushing myself to grow, explore, and discover.

Giving back means everything from serving on the boards of nonprofits and cultural institutions, to helping families in need, to volunteering in a hospital. In my current job, I am helping through important initiatives such as the Philips Livable Cities Award and partnering with organizations such as the United Nations and the Institute for Human Activities. In my personal life I try hard to be there for my family, for my 12 nieces and nephews, and for my aging relatives.

These are my examples of the three buckets; your own may be completely different. Think about yours. Take out a notepad or your go-to device of choice and start to fill them. Take a long look at these buckets and evaluate which one needs more filling. Remember that the goal is to maximize all three.

This may be a hard concept to grasp because we are all taught that a bucket list is something on which you check everything off before you die, in other words, that your goal is to empty your bucket. This principle guides you to fill up your buckets and even hope that they overflow.

Try to think about them routinely. I know I do. When making tough life decisions or just contemplating everyday minutiae, think about how your choices affect each of the three buckets. If something falls outside of them, it's time to eliminate it from your life.

One thing is for certain: we are all going to die. Therefore, why not try to make the most of the time you have while you are still young and healthy?

## **Manage Your Time**

Effective time management is one of the most important keys to success. It is so easy to let others fill up your days. A good friend who is a successful attorney, real estate developer, and family man has three words on the subject of time management: "Let's do lunch." Want to grab dinner with him? You're out of luck. That time slot is reserved for his family. Casual friends and prospective business partners have to content themselves with an hour or two in the middle of the day.

It's a line in the sand and a necessary one to preserve both his sanity and the life he wants to lead.

Many of us say yes to too many things and too many people. In his book *How Will You Measure Your Life?* Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen makes a salient point about how great influence always comes with a catch: the more people there are who recognize and appreciate your contributions, the more people there are who are clamoring for your insights, your energy, or 30 minutes of your time. Even when you know what's most important to you, how do you choose from among all those competing demands?

Those decisions need to be made daily. "In fact," Christensen concludes, "How you allocate your own resources can make your life turn out to be exactly as you hoped, or very different from what you intend."

It took a while before I learned to place a value on time; others have caught on much faster. When I interviewed Andre Agassi, he said, “I feel time running through my fingers every day. I’ve always been hyper-aware of time, ever since I was a kid. 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. The first step is accepting that there’s no foolproof system, no perfect formula for time management. All balance requires constant tweaking.”

### **Lose the Time Wasters**

So many of us have people in our lives who take up our time without adding any value. I’ve come up with a rating system for the people in my life. This may sound harsh or cynical, but it is a critical first step in managing your time. We complain that we don’t have enough time to get to the things on our happiness list or to execute on our vision for the future and that life is already too busy. This exercise allows us to free up our time to put ourselves first.

Make a list of the people you spend time with. Now make one of these three marks next to their names: a negative (–), a zero (0), or a positive (+).

A negative person is someone who drains you of energy and adds no value to your life socially, professionally, or otherwise. You know exactly who and what I’m talking about. We all have them in our lives: they just take, take, take.

A zero neither adds nor takes away value. These people always seem to be hanging around or texting: “Hey whatcha up to? I’m bored.” They are always bored. They target you and make you spend your most precious resource—*time*—to entertain them. These are people I consider filler.

A positive, in contrast, is someone who adds real value to your life. You are learning from this person, who is helping you move forward.

Take a long, hard look at your list. Put a plus, negative, or zero next to each name. Really think about that person. Don’t get caught up in emotions. Try to think about it systematically. What contributions, what value are these people really adding to or taking away from your life? When you’ve given everyone a score, it’s time to cross off all the names you’ve marked with negatives and zeros. If you’re serious about improving and upgrading your life, it’s time to banish these people from your life or minimize your interactions with them. With your newfound time, you can go back to your passion list and devote more time to the activities that make you happy. It sounds simple, and it is once we get past the emotional side of the connections. (Maybe it’s not so simple if some of your zeros and negatives are close relatives. But even in those cases, it’s important to set up and enforce boundaries.)

*Excerpted from Upgrade: Taking Your Work and Life from Ordinary to Extraordinary by Rana Florida. Copyright © 2013 by Rana Florida. Excerpted by permission of McGraw-Hill. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.*