

THE BIG IDEAS



A Daily Miracle

24 new hours a day.

Before Beginning

Some precautions.

Your Own Ardor

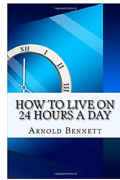
Check it!

Concentrate

Do you have the power to?

Dangers to Avoid

Flexibility + Rule #6.



How To Live on 24 Hours a Day

BY ARNOLD BENNETT

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“You have to live on this twenty-four hours of daily time. Out of it you have to spin health, pleasure, money, content, respect, and the evolution of your immortal soul. Its right use, its most effective use, is a matter of the highest urgency and of the most thrilling actuality. All depends on that. Your happiness—the elusive prize that you are all clutching for, my friends!—depends on that. Strange that the newspapers, so enterprising and up-to-date as they are, are not full of ‘How to live on a given income of time,’ instead of ‘How to live on a given income of money!’ ...

Which of us is not saying to himself—which of us has not been saying to himself all his life: ‘I shall alter that when I have a little more time’?

We never shall have any more time. We have, and we have always had, all the time there is. It is the realization of this profound and neglected truth ... that has led me to the practical examination of daily-time expenditure.”

~ Arnold Bennett from *How To Live on 24 Hours a Day*

I got this little book after [Dale Carnegie](#) raved about it in [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#).

Arnold Bennett was a contemporary of Carnegie's. Born in 1867, Bennett was an English novelist and playwright.

In this tiny little booklet (get a copy [here](#)), he tells us that most people focus on how to get by on a budget of X dollars per day but what we really should be thinking about is how we can most effectively use the precious twenty-four hours we're given every day!

This is a super quick and fun/funny read. Check out our [Masterpiece Days Wisdom Pack](#) for more goodness on the subject.

For now, I'm excited to share a few of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump straight in!

A DAILY MIRACLE

“Philosophers have explained space. They have not explained time. It is the inexplicable raw material of everything. With it, all is possible; without it, nothing. The supply of time is truly a daily miracle, an affair genuinely astonishing when one examines it. You wake up in the morning, and lo! your purse is magically filled with twenty-four hours of the unmanufactured tissue of the universe of your life! A highly singular commodity, showered upon you in a manner as singular as the commodity itself!

For remark! No one can take it from you. It is unstealable. And no one receives either more or less than you receive.

Talk about an ideal democracy! In the realm of time there is no aristocracy of wealth, and no aristocracy of intellect. Genius is never rewarded by even an extra hour a day. And there is no

“It is always the man who has tasted life who demands more of it. And it is always the man who never gets out of bed who is most difficult to rouse.”

~ Arnold Bennett

"You say I am dealing with minutiae. I am."

~ Arnold Bennett

punishment. Waste your infinitely precious commodity as much as you will, and the supply will never be withheld from you. No mysterious power will say: 'This man is a fool, if not a knave. He does not deserve time; he shall be cut off from the meter.' It is more certain than consols, and payment of income is not affected by Sundays. Moreover, you cannot draw on the future. Impossible to get into debt! You can only waste the passing moment. You cannot waste tomorrow; it is kept for you. You cannot waste the next hour; it is kept for you.

I said the affair was a miracle. Is it not?"

Time.

It's easy to take for granted. But, when we stop to think about it for a moment we see that it really is a "daily miracle."

And time is the ultimate democracy. Everyone gets twenty-four hours. Can't buy a minute more.

The only question is: What will you do with that precious, replenishing twenty-four hours a day?

Helping us Optimize that is, of course, what the book is all about. Now that we've taken a moment to reflect on the grandeur of that new day, let's look at some Ideas on how to live on 24 hours a day.

P.S. This exercise from [Todd Henry's *Die Empty*](#) remains one of the best I've ever read and always worth the reflection: *"Imagine for a moment that you will have a guest accompanying you throughout your day tomorrow. This person's task will be to follow you around from the moment you wake up until the moment you fall asleep. They will take copious notes about your schedule, how you interact with your family and friends, how you engage in your tasks and projects, and your mind-set through it all. Once the day is over, this person will spend the next few days processing their observations, draw conclusions about your motivations, and compile their notes into a book about you that will stand as the definitive record of your life and work.*

How would you act differently tomorrow if you knew that your actions and attitude on that one day were going to be a permanent testament to your life? If you're like many people to whom I've posted this question, you would probably get up a little earlier, pay extra attention to your family and the barista at Starbucks, be fully vested in every meeting, be meticulous in every task, call up an old friend for lunch, reconcile with an alienated colleague, and generally wrap up loose ends.

Next I ask, 'How does your imagined behavior compare with how you are actually living your life today?'"

PRECAUTIONS BEFORE BEGINNING

"The most important preliminary to the task of arranging one's life so that one may live fully and comfortably within one's daily budget of twenty-four hours is the calm realization of the extreme difficulty of the task, of the sacrifices and the endless effort which it demands. I cannot too strongly insist on this.

If you imagine that you will be able to achieve your ideal by ingeniously planning out a timetable with a pen on a piece of paper, you had better give up hope at once. If you are not prepared for discouragements and disillusionings; if you will not be content with a small result for a big effort, then do not begin. Lie down again and resume the uneasy doze which you call your existence."

That's from a chapter called "Precautions Before Beginning."

Note: If you're not ready to roll up your sleeves and do the hard (!) work of Optimizing your days, then, and I quote: *"Lie down again and resume the uneasy doze which you call your existence."*

"The fact is that there is no easy way, no royal road. The path to Mecca is extremely hard and stony, and the worst of it is that you never quite get there after all."

~ Arnold Bennett

Arnold has a way with words, doesn't he? (Laughing.)

So, Step 1: We need to know that there's no magic secret formula that'll make it super easy for us to start rocking it immediately. (Sorry to break the news.)

We need to embrace reality. Which reminds me of [Ray Dalio](#) and [Tal Ben-Shahar](#).

First, Mr. Dalio. What's Principle #1 in his book, *Principles*? "Embrace Reality and Deal with It."

Sub-principle 1.1 "Be a hyperrealist."

Here's how Ray puts it in *Principles*: "Learning how reality works, visualizing the things I want to create, and then building them out is incredibly exciting for me. Stretching for big goals puts me in the position of failing and needing to learn and come up with new inventions in order to move forward. I find it exhilarating being caught up in the feedback loop of rapid learning—just as a surfer loves riding a wave, even though sometimes it leads to crashes. Don't get me wrong, I'm still scared of the crashes and I still find them painful. But I keep that pain in perspective, knowing that I will get through these setbacks, and that most of my learning will come from reflecting on them. Just as long-distance runners push through pain to experience the pleasure of 'runner's high,' I have largely gotten past the pain of my mistake making and instead enjoy the pleasure that comes with learning from it. I believe that with practice you can change your habits and experience the same 'mistake learner's high.'"

That's one way to approach embracing reality, eh? Jump so fully into the "feedback loop of rapid learning" that our failures create a "mistake learner's high."

Then we have Tal Ben-Shahar. In *The Pursuit of Perfect*, he tells us how much he struggled as a perfectionist who ignored the constraints of reality. Here's how he puts it: "The first step was to accept the reality that I could not have it all. While it seems obvious that you cannot work fourteen hours a day and remain fit and healthy and be a devoted father and husband, in my perfectionist fantasy world, nothing was impossible."

Yep. Accepting reality is good. We shift from being a Perfectionist to being an Optimalist: "Taking the constraints of reality into consideration, the Optimalist then works toward creating not the perfect life but the best possible one."

See *Conquering Perfectionism 101* for more. And remember that Optimalist and Optimize come from the Latin word *optimus*—which means "the best." (Not perfect, the best!)

BEWARE YOUR OWN ARDOR

"Let me principally warn you against your own ardor. Ardor in well-doing is a misleading and a treacherous thing. It cries out loudly for employment; you can't satisfy it at first; it wants more and more; it is eager to move mountains and divert the course of rivers. It isn't content till it perspires. And then, too often, when it feels the perspiration on its brow, it wearies all of a sudden and dies, without even putting itself to the trouble of saying, 'I've had enough of this.'"

Beware of undertaking too much at the start. Be content with quite a little. Allow for accidents. Allow for human nature, especially your own.

A failure or so, in itself, would not matter, if it did not incur a loss of self-esteem and of self-confidence. But just as nothing succeeds like success, so nothing fails like failure. Most people who are ruined are ruined by attempting too much. Therefore, in setting out on the immense enterprise of living fully and comfortably within the narrow limits of twenty-four hours a day, let us avoid at any cost the risk of an early failure."

We're still in the chapter on "Precautions Before Beginning." :)

One more precaution: Set yourself up to win.

"Yes, books are valuable. But the reading of books will not take the place of a daily, candid, honest examination of what one has recently done, and what one is about to do of a steady looking at oneself in the face (disconcerting though the sight may be)."

~ Arnold Bennett

As [Tynan](#) puts it in [Superhuman by Habit](#), when you're thinking about how you're going to change your life and create new habits, you want think about how you'll rock it on the HARDEST days, not on the easiest ones (in the beginning when you're all fired up!): "Start small, become consistent, and increase at a manageable pace. That's how you optimize for the finish line, rather than for the starting line."

Which reminds me of [Teresa Amabile's The Progress Principle](#). Create wins!!

Then we have [Sean Young's](#) book on how to [Stick with It](#). He tells us it all comes down to managing seven psychological forces that he captures in the handy-dandy acronym SCIENCE: Stepladders + Community + Important + Easy + Neurohacks + Captivating + Engrained.

Check out the Note for more. For now, know this: Two of those seven principles are about making the whole process easy for you: the Stepladders and Easy. He says: "Science shows that people have a better chance of success by focusing on small steps." And: "Small means tiny." "People often think they understand easy, but they actually don't."

So, when you think of Optimizing your life/days, what's the #1 thing you know you could be doing that you're not doing? Maybe you tried to install the habit before and it didn't quite stick...

Well, what's one thing? A keystone habit?

And... How can you make it E A S Y to win?

No... That's too hard. Make it EASIER!!!!

P.S. I can't read that brilliant line about having too much "ardor" in the beginning and not think of the ancient idea of being a hero in the beginning.

In [Passage Meditation](#), [Eknath Easwaran](#) tells us: "It helps to know at the outset that you will be running a marathon in this program, not simply jogging once or twice around a track. It is good to be enthusiastic when you sit down for meditation the first morning; but it is essential to be equally enthusiastic, equally sincere, at the end of the first week, and the end of the first month, and for all the months to come."

He also tells us: "There is only one failure in meditation: the failure to meditate faithfully. A Hindu proverb says, 'Miss one morning, and you need seven to make it up.' Or as John of the Cross expressed it, 'He who interrupts the course of his spiritual exercises and prayer is like a man who allows a bird to escape from his hand; he can hardly catch it again.'"

Then we have [Gregg Kreck](#) quoting Easwaran in his great book [The Art of Taking Action](#): "It's not really the feeling of excitement itself which is the culprit here, it is the loss of excitement which then prompts us to abandon our efforts towards fulfillment of our dreams — dreams which were, at one time, very exciting to us. If anticipatory excitement moves us to action, the loss of excitement often prompts us to stop. Action dissolves into inaction."

Meditation teacher Eknath Easwaran tells us of a Sanskrit word — arambhashura — which means 'heroes at the beginning' — people who take up a job with a fanfare of trumpets but soon find that their enthusiasm has tiptoed down the back stairs."

THE POWER TO CONCENTRATE

"And without the power to concentrate—that is to say, without the power to dictate to the brain its task and to ensure obedience—true life is impossible. Mind control is the first element of a full existence.

Hence, it seems to me, the first business of the day should be to put the mind through its paces. You look after the body, inside and out; you run grave danger in hacking hairs off your skin; you employ a whole army of individuals, from the milkman to the pig-killer, to enable you to bribe

" Now in the cultivation of the mind one of the most important factors is precisely the feeling of strain, of difficulty, of a task which one part of you is anxious to achieve and another part of you is anxious to shirk."

~ Arnold Bennett

your stomach into decent behavior. Why not devote a little attention to the far more delicate machinery of the mind, especially as you will require no extraneous aid? It is for this portion of the art and craft of living that I have reserved the time from the moment of quitting your door to the moment of arriving at your office.

'What? I am to cultivate my mind in the street, on the platform, in the train, and in the crowded street again?' Precisely. Nothing simpler! No tools required! Not even a book. Nevertheless, the affair is not easy."

That's from a chapter called "Controlling the Mind" in which we meet the average early 20th century guy who wasted his trip to the office mindlessly walking and then reading his newspaper.

(Alas, what would Arnold have to say about our modern worker whose attention is consumed by an onslaught of information?!)

So... We must, as Arnold so wisely says, put our minds "through its paces"!

His idea was to focus your mind on the wisdom from a book you read the night before. He recommends [Marcus Aurelius](#) (he says he never leaves home without him!) or [Epictetus](#). I like the man's taste in fine wisdom!

That'll work... And, so will all the other ways we can put our minds through its paces: meditation, focusing on one task, eliminating distractions, etc.

I'm reminded of this line from [The Telomere Effect](#): "The iPhone mind-wandering study showed that when people are not thinking about what they're doing, they're just not as happy as when they're engaged. As [researchers] observed, 'A wandering mind is an unhappy mind.'"

"The wandering mind is an unhappy mind."

<— That's a (really!) powerful statement.

Solution? [Blackburn](#) and [Epel](#) tell us: "You can start to renew your telomeres, and your cells, right now. One study has found that people who tend to focus their minds more on what they are currently doing have longer telomeres than people whose minds tend to wander more. Other studies find that taking a class that offers training in mindfulness or meditation is linked to improved telomere maintenance."

DANGERS TO AVOID

"On the other hand, a programme is a programme. And unless it is treated with deference it ceases to be anything but a poor joke. To treat one's programme with exactly the right amount of deference, to live with not too much and too little elasticity, is scarcely the simple affair to the inexperienced."

That's from one of the final chapters "Dangers to Avoid" in which Arnold gives us a bunch of things to keep in mind including this gem on maintaining *just* the right amount of elasticity.

We need to be flexible. Like that river that flows between the banks of structure and spontaneity—without flooding either side into rigidity or chaos! ([+1 on that theme here.](#))

But, first and foremost? Arnold tells us we don't want to become a "prig." Defined as "a self-righteously moralistic person who behaves as if superior to others."

As he playfully puts it: "Now a prig is a pert fellow who gives himself airs of superior wisdom. A prig is a pompous fool who has gone out for a ceremonial walk, and without knowing it has lost an important part of his attire, namely, his sense of humor."

The best prig protection?

Rule #6. Don't take yourself too seriously!!

"It is as well not to chatter too much about what one is doing, and not betray a too-pained sadness at the spectacle of a whole world deliberately wasting so many hours out of every day, and therefore never really living. It will be found, ultimately, that in taking care of one's self one has quite all one can do."

~ Arnold Bennett

As per [Roz](#) and [Ben Zander's](#) great book *The Art of Possibility*: "Two prime ministers are sitting in a room discussing affairs of state. Suddenly a man bursts in, apoplectic with fury, shouting and stamping and banging his fist on the desk. The resident prime minister admonishes him: 'Peter,' he says, 'kindly remember Rule Number 6,' whereupon Peter is instantly restored to complete calm, apologizes, and withdraws. The politicians return to their conversation, only to be interrupted yet again twenty minutes later by an hysterical woman gesticulating wildly, her hair flying. Again the intruder is greeted with the words: 'Marie, please remember Rule Number 6.' Complete calm descends once more, and she too withdraws with a bow and an apology. When the scene is repeated for the third time, the visiting prime minister addresses his colleague: 'My dear friend, I've seen many things in my life, but never anything as remarkable as this. Would you be willing to share with me the secret of Rule Number 6?' 'Very simple,' replies the resident prime minister. 'Rule Number 6 is 'Don't take yourself so g—damn seriously.' 'Ah,' says his visitor, 'that is a fine rule. After a moment of pondering, he inquires, 'And what, may I ask, are the other rules?' 'There aren't any.'"

(Hah!) Here's the final comment from the book: "The last, and chief danger which I would indicate, is one of which I have already referred—the risk of a failure at the commencement of the enterprise. I must insist on it. A failure at the commencement may easily kill outright the newborn impulse towards a complete vitality, and therefore every precaution should be observed to avoid it. The impulse must not be over-taxed. Let the pace of the first lap be even absurdly slow, but let it be as regular as possible.

And, having once decided to achieve a certain task, achieve it at all costs of tedium and distaste. The gain in self-confidence of having accomplished a tiresome labor is immense."

Amen and let's do this! Set a pace you can sustain. Optimize and enjoy the miracle that is today's twenty-four hours!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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About the Author of "How To Live on 24 Hours a Day"

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Arnold Bennett was an English novelist, playwright, critic, and essayist, born on May 27, 1867. His major works form an important link between the English novel and the mainstream of European realism.

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.