

Finding Happiness, Focus, and Productivity No Matter How Busy You Are

**JEFF SANDERS** 

WILEY

#### **Endorsements**

"Busy people rejoice! It doesn't have to be this way. More coffee isn't the solution, less sleep isn't the answer. Let Jeff guide you into a new way to be productive without just running from task to task with manic speed."

—Jon Acuff, New York Times bestselling author of Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done

"When Jeff Sanders puts pen to paper he means it. *The Free-Time Formula* is a no nonsense guide to getting your best work done. If you're looking to increase focus and productivity, this is the book for you."

—Dean Karnazes, Ultramarathoner and New York Times bestselling author of *Ultramarathon Man* 

"If you want to get your most important work done but feel you "don't have time," then read this! The step-by-step action plan will walk you through the journey from busy and chaotic to productive and accomplished."

—Claire Diaz-Ortiz, award-winning author and Silicon Valley innovator

"When so many other productivity gurus teach superficial hacks and 'effortless' solutions, Jeff Sanders pushes us to do the real (often hard!) work to create quality free time—by first deciding what truly matters, then cultivating the discipline to do only that. If you're tired of quick fixes that don't fix anything, and ready to go to work identifying and uprooting the real causes of the procrastination, friction, and stress in your life—so that you can spend it doing work that matters—then *The Free-Time Formula* is an absolute must-read."

—Matt Frazier, author of No Meat Athlete and The No Meat Athlete Cookbook

"Time is money. Yadda yadda. We've heard it before. But realize it's the only thing in our lives we never get back. Jeff gives you concrete things to get more time back in your life to do the things you REALLY want to do."

-Noah Kagan, founder of Sumo.com and #30 employee at Facebook

"The Free-Time Formula is a must-read if you want to get your most important work done, but just can't find the time. The step-by-step action plan that Jeff gives you is revolutionary."

—Hal Elrod, author of The Miracle Morning

"This is not a repackaged restatement of the same things we've all read before about time management. *The Free-Time Formula* is a truly practical guide that is full of insights and actionable tips for getting your schedule and your to-do list under control. More than that, it's a book that will inspire and motivate the reader to *take action*. I took notes while reading it and have made plans to implement some of Jeff's smart advice in my own life. His "green pen" approach alone is worth the price of the book!"

—Laura McClellan, lawyer, writer, and host of *The Productive Woman* podcast

"We're all 'busy,' but with the right focus you'll find productivity, and through productivity you'll find happiness. In *The Free-Time Formula*, Jeff provides the step-by-step guidance you need to IGNITE your business and life."

—John Lee Dumas, host of the Entrepreneurs on Fire podcast

"Ready to get more done and feel great while doing it? Grab *The Free-Time Formula*. Jeff Sanders goes above and beyond with a step-by-step process for finding more time, efficiency, and serenity every single day."

—Pamela Wilson, founder *BIG Brand System* and author of *Master Content Marketing* 

"Who better to walk us through the keys to finding more happiness, focus, and productivity than Jeff Sanders? Jeff's step-by-step framework will help anyone struggling with the busyness of life find peace while knocking their goals out of the park."

—Jeff Brown, award-winning broadcaster and host of the *Read to Lead Podcast* 

"This is the book every busy leader needs. Full of practical advice and actionable strategies, *The Free-Time Formula* is your antidote to the poison of busyness."

—Dr. Brian Dixon, founder of Amplify Publishers

"In *The Free-Time Formula* Jeff functions as a self-aware sherpa leading us out of overwhelm and into a new place of intentionality. Discover how peace and productivity can co-exist as your new norm."

—Kary Oberbrunner, author of *Elixir Project* and *Day Job to Dream Job* 

"Jeff is an efficiency machine. He not only studies efficiency and productivity but he lives it out. This book gives you a step-by-step action plan on how to get more done with your time."

—Grant Baldwin, keynote speaker and founder of *The Speaker Lab* 

"This book is not about time management—it is about life management. You will learn how to plan the life you want so you don't live a life you don't want."

—Lee Cockerell, executive vice president, Walt Disney World (retired) and author of *Time Management Magic* 

"The best-selling author of *The 5 AM Miracle* has miraculously managed to do it again. In *The Free-Time Formula*, Jeff Sanders not only addresses our greatest fears surrounding success, but provides a compelling blueprint for the only kind of success that really matters: the meaningful kind. This book is a must-read for anyone who realizes that the only ladder of success that matters is the one leaning against the right tree!"

—August Turak, author of Business Secrets of the Trappist Monks

"Jeff Sanders's *The Free-Time Formula* humanizes personal productivity and shows that it's possible for everybody, even YOU, to get more from the time you have."

—David Hooper, host of BIG Podcast

"Imagine being able to fully apply your attention and energy where and when you need it most. Jeff Sanders walks you through why free time is the hidden secret of achieving this. Stop distractions, start eliminating nonsense from your life, and make the most of your time and energy."

-Erik Fisher, host of the Beyond the To-Do List podcast

"Finally, someone said it—we can be super productive, busy, and wonderfully ambitious and still create time to enjoy our hard work!"

—Andy Ramage, co-founder of One Year No Beer and author of *The 28-Day Alcohol-Free Challenge* 

"Jeff has already helped me rethink what I should do at 5 a.m. each day. In *The Free-Time Formula*, Jeff helps us develop the plan and gives us permission to reimagine how we spend our most limited resource—our time."

—Dave Delaney, founder of Futureforth and author of New Business Networking

"Jeff uses great storytelling to help us slow down so we can speed up and get more out of our day. This is a great read for anyone who wants to escape the trap of busyness and achieve a better tomorrow."

-Scott Friesen, Busyness Killer and founder of Simpletivity

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# **Foreword**

Imagine if you could get an extra hour of free time, every single day—to read, to work out, or to spend with your family.

What if you could double your productivity while eliminating those feelings of being overworked and overwhelmed?

Seems impossible? That's what I thought too until I experienced it myself.

A long time ago I believed success was all about the hustle. Working five days a week wasn't enough so I worked seven. Eight hours a day wasn't enough so I worked sixteen or more, often sleeping just a few hours under my desk. I was "crazy busy" and wore my insane schedule like a badge of honor. "I'll sleep when I'm dead," I'd say with bravado.

And that almost happened. One early morning I stopped to fill up my car with gas and when I drove away, *klunk*! I had forgotten to take the nozzle out of my car. I was lucky I didn't blow the place up. A week later I was pulled over by a state trooper. He told me he was driving the speed limit in the slow lane when I pulled up behind him and rode his bumper, then

I swerved around him and sped off ultimately doing ninety miles per hour. And I never saw him until his siren went off and his lights flashed in my rearview mirror. I was so tired, stressed, and not present that I was like a drunk who just didn't understand how many drinks I had.

That breaking point led me to a long study of productivity, time management, and mindfulness. I've interviewed hundreds of ultra-productive people including self-made millionaires and billionaires, Olympic athletes, and even straight-A college students. What were their secrets to extreme productivity?

With my last company, I went from working a hundred hours a week for my little \$1-million-a-year business to thirty-two hours a week in a \$12-million-a-year business. Twelve times the results with one-third the work. When I sold that business, to celebrate, I bought a painting by renowned New York City artist Peter Tunney. It's called *The Time Is Always Now*.

Today, I'm devoting my life to helping others achieve their full potential. My company, LEADx, offers free online training programs to everyone around the world. We reach people in 192 different countries and universally our most popular courses are on overcoming procrastination, choosing priorities, increasing focus, and maximizing energy. The desire for more time is universal, because time is life.

That's what makes Jeff Sanders's *The Free-Time Formula* literally life-changing. He shares not just research from other leading productivity experts, but also, with total vulnerability, the mistakes he's made and lessons he's learned on his own journey to greater focus and happiness.

And be prepared to be pushed out of your comfort zone. Like a magic mirror, this book will reveal where you truly are in your own life, it will reveal your distraction habits, and other ways you self-sabotage your success. I definitely squirmed in discomfort as I answered Jeff's questions and completed the self-assessment and realized how much further I have to go. But I know you can't have an extraordinary life by doing what you've always done.

How would an extra hour or two a day change your life? How could that time make a positive impact on your health, happiness, and family? There are 1,440 minutes in a day. As each minute passes, you never get it back. Remember, the time is always now.

Kevin Kruse New York Times best-selling author of 15 Secrets Successful People Know About Time Management and CEO of LEADx

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#### THE DARK SIDE OF PRODUCTIVITY

Six weeks after signing the papers to write this book about free time, happiness, and productivity, I found myself (for the first time), as a patient in the emergency room.

The doctor concluded I had suffered an esophageal spasm, a condition that closely resembles a heart attack and is presumed to be caused in part by stress and anxiety (Whelan, 2017).

How did I get here? How did a guy in his thirties, a productivity coach and marathon runner, find himself so overworked that his own body revolted against him? How did a beautifully manicured calendar with ambitious goals turn into an uncontrollable monster with such an extreme consequence?

Most importantly, how can *you* craft your own productive, fulfilling, and successful life, while ensuring a situation like this one does not happen to you?

This book is about so much more than free time. It is about so much more than an extra hour of Netflix, or another night

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out on the town. This book is about designing your ideal world and experiencing the extraordinary benefits that come with it.

#### **BURSTING AT THE SEAMS**

Let's back this story up just a bit. There is a lot to unfold here.

One year before my surprising medical fiasco I was in a good place. I was working hard, accomplishing goals left and right, and riding a wave of hope, optimism, and some seriously great outcomes.

Right in the middle of this productive season I got sick and took a few days off to recover. I was beaten up, exhausted, and long overdue for a break.

Though my physician told me I had caught a seasonal bug, I knew the truth: I had caused this illness. I had pushed too hard, asked for too much, and believed I was invincible (*which is pretty typical Jeff Sanders behavior*). Knowing that I tend to lean on my natural ambition (and quite a few shots of espresso), it was clear I needed a new plan to ease into my goals. I needed a new rhythm, more flex time, and a balanced approach to my entire calendar.

I tried a new approach and, surprisingly to me, it worked wonders. For a full year, I was crushing my goals while not getting crushed myself. For twelve whole months, I managed to get more done than I expected and avoid any serious lapses in productivity.

But...(you may have seen this coming)...it did not last. I got greedy. I became overly ambitious (again) and began to uncontrollably take on more than I could reasonably handle. My projects were growing bigger in scale, I was saying yes to

more opportunities than I had time for, and, most importantly, I was squeezing every last ounce of margin out of my life.

Free time? Nah! I had work time.

Breaks? Nope. I was on fire, remember?

Then, one by one, the precursors to the ER began to appear. Because I had booked my schedule to the brim, there was no free space for anything else, including the inevitable problems that always show up in the process of doing anything significant.

Let's get specific.

In eight short weeks I booked and delivered back-to-back-toback speaking engagements; recorded and edited the audiobook for The 5 AM Miracle (my first book); negotiated the contract for the book you are reading now; launched a premium productivity membership program; scaled up my exercise routine to six days a week; continued recording, editing, and publishing weekly episodes of my podcast—and I continued to manage any and all personal responsibilities I have with my wife, Tessa; our home; our pug, Benny; our finances; and on, and on.

You can likely see where this is headed. There was no wiggle room, no flexibility, no free time. Though I could not see it myself, I was teetering on a total breakdown, and it was only a matter of time before I would come crashing down.

Without warning, and in the final seven days of this eight-week calamity, my life went from busy and productive to chaotic and unmanageable. On top of all of the many projects I was working so hard on, three formidable and unforeseen problems fell right into my lap.

I found myself arguing over a contentious contract dispute with an important client, fighting a collections issue over a hospital billing error, and receiving challenging family medical news that only added additional debt, stress, and frustrating uncertainty.

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This was a formula for disaster—a shining example of building a frail house of cards and then helplessly watching as the foundation gives way.

Each challenge was daunting on its own. As they began to stack up, one after the other, it was becoming clear that I was losing the tight grip I valued so much over the projects and opportunities I had personally accepted, and relinquishing any ability I had to respond to setbacks I never saw coming.

I was beginning to feel the substantial weight and crushing magnitude of my current commitments and brand-new obligations. Without a minute of flex time on my calendar, and my stress already rising to an all-time high, I was out of options to realistically complete the tasks at hand.

A few days later my wife called 911 when I found myself with heart attack-like symptoms: rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, rising blood pressure, nausea, and extreme tightness in my chest—essentially, a full-on panic attack that felt as though death was knocking at my front door. Thirty minutes later I was riding in an ambulance to the nearest Nashville emergency room, and confronting my poor decision making that allowed this mess to occur.

A perfect storm arose, and I was crushed beneath it.

### A LIFE ON LESS

Fast-forward a few months and my life, business, and daily calendar had all transformed in dramatic ways.

No longer was I planning epic goals on top of one another, or booking fourteen-hour workdays on purpose. Instead, I found myself with an extraordinary situation that still makes

me smile today. I had free time—real time to process my life and goals—time to address the unpredictable challenges that inevitably pop up-AND focused time to make significant progress on my most important work.

The irony is not lost on me—I needed "free time" to write The Free-Time Formula, and I made it happen.

There are many lessons to be learned from our most challenging seasons in life: consequences we should avoid, problems we should prevent, distracting people we should block on Facebook . . .

And I believe there is also so much to be gained from reviewing our victories, digging deep into the seasons of life when everything flows smoothly, analyzing our brightest moments, and figuring out how we can repeat those successes over and over again.

When I think back to that tough season of my life that resulted in an unexpected ER visit, I am forced to confront difficult but powerful questions—and you too can ask yourself these same questions about your current challenges and vision for the future:

- 1. Do you have all of the precious time you need right now to fully process the busyness of modern daily life?
- 2. Are your current goals serving you, or are they serving someone else's agenda, external validation, arbitrary checkboxes, or blind ambition?
- 3. Are you in the habit of self-sabotage, undermining your progress just when things start to go well?
- 4. Do you consistently respond to unexpected yet inevitable challenges with clear focus, wisdom, and patience?
- 5. If your current reality continues as it is going now, will you become the person you always hoped to become?

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- 6. Do you have guaranteed blocks of time on your calendar for what matters most today, and every day going forward?
- 7. What transformative actions can you take now to clear the nonsense from your calendar and be at your best every day?

The answers to questions just like these are what this book is all about. There is a lot we can do to build ourselves up to handle more every day, but there is infinitely more we can do to design a life that operates beautifully on less.

The process to find more happiness, focus, and productivity lies in *The Free-Time Formula*. Carving out free time for our most valuable ambitions (*and our sanity*) in the midst of a busy life is more of an art than a science, but the productive building blocks are here, and I am excited to share them with you!

# STEP Find Out What's Really Going On

# The Freedom to Do Anything

## We All Want More Free Time, Right?

All of your time is free time—every minute.

That can be a hard pill to swallow, especially when we are bombarded with responsibilities, obligations, and important tasks to accomplish every week of every year. However, as you will soon see, you have an incredible opportunity with the time you already have, with the work you are already doing, and with the calendar you know is already overbooked (again).

Working on goals that matter to us is what we are here to do, and no matter how you define it, your time is your time. How you choose to spend it is influenced by more factors than we have time to unpack in this book, but let's start with the biggest chunk for most people: work.

#### FREE TIME: AN EXCUSE TO KEEP WORKING

I know this is the Type A in me speaking loudly, but work is not the enemy—it is one of our greatest means to fulfillment

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and goal achievement. Work is a love affair with our inner creative and a real opportunity to leave the world better than we found it.

My wife, Tessa, and I are self-identified workaholics, and we both work from home. We naturally fill our free time with more work because we genuinely love what we do.

Every Friday night is date night for the two of us—a chance to stop working, get out of the house, and eat dinner together somewhere in Nashville. I would love to say that we have tried all of the best restaurants, but we are way too predictable (and cheap) for that. If not tacos at Las Palmas, then tacos at Taco Mamacita. If not Mamacita's, then back to Las Palmas. Tacos win almost every week.

Date night used to be scheduled at 5:00 pm, then 5:30, then 6:00. A few weeks ago, we skipped it because both of us would rather finish our projects than leave anything undone. Though Tessa and I intentionally schedule free time on our calendar to be filled with a night out, we ultimately choose in the moment how we want that time to be spent.

Free time becomes a placeholder on our calendar for priority management fighting against impulsivity. In other words, in the open spaces on our calendar we could tackle our responsibilities and goals, or spontaneously do whatever we want. Knowing the two of us, "whatever we want" often means choosing to extend our workday a little longer.

This choice comes with its own set of pros and cons, but when you genuinely love what you do, working a few extra hours can often bring more satisfaction than clocking out early to get a jump start on the weekend. On the flip side, you could find

yourself working to the bone and falling into the trap of staying busy because it is the only thing you know how to do.

#### FREE TIME: THE ULTIMATE ESCAPE

Free time can also be your greatest chance to do anything other than what you dislike. We often plan to leave open blocks of time on our calendars (mostly nights and weekends) so that we can stop doing whatever it is we have been doing all week. In other words, we hate our jobs and are dying to do absolutely anything else.

Given the opportunity to do absolutely anything in an open block of time, we do a little dance because it sounds so intriguing and hopeful. Here, the term free time is seductive. It infers that we never have enough of it and that something amazing will happen when it shows up.

It is easy to dream about how time away from the office could be spent surfing the ocean, climbing mountains, or rereading Fifty Shades of Grey, but what do you do in the moment?

How is your current free time being occupied? Is it routinely as fulfilling and rejuvenating as you hoped?

Chances are that you actually have enormously more free time than you realize, but you just call it something different:

- Me time
- Family time
- Boys' night out
- Girls' night in
- Napping
- Hustling

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- Training
- Catching up on Game of Thrones

Wanting more free time to unwind and relax is admirable and necessary to balance out the stress of life, assuming you define *free time* as any time outside the office...or the kids...or the spouse...or the dog...or the \_\_\_\_\_\_ (you get the picture).

Defining what free time means to you is the most important first step to ensuring you get as much of it as you want.

#### THE MYTH OF FREE TIME

The thing about free time is that it is up to you to define what it means, how you use it, and how much of it you believe is necessary to achieve a healthy sense of balance (which is a word that is often misused and results in lots of guilt).

Free time is a myth. It has never existed and it never will.

Every minute of every day is up to you. There are no restrictions. You can do whatever you want, whenever you want.

As radical as that sounds, it is true.

You can get up off your couch and go for a run right now. You can walk into your boss's office and quit right now.

If you choose, you can change the entire course of your life in an instant—this instant.

Now, most of us would never take advantage of this fact because we box ourselves in with occupations, families, mortgages, and other self-created boundaries to define and optimize our time here on earth (and to avoid winding up homeless, alone, or in jail).

And this is a good thing.

I am not arguing that because we all have the freedom to do anything that we should. Quite the opposite—because we can do anything, we have to choose very carefully how our time is spent, or the whole thing falls apart.

Having the power to choose what to do with every waking minute is an enormous responsibility that most of us surrender to societal structures, employers, family members, or the latest hit series on YouTube. (I will not quote Spiderman right now, but you know that line is coming next, don't you?)

And yet, it is true, you do have incredible power to choose how you spend your time, and you do have the responsibility to make the most of it.

#### THE TIME MANAGEMENT CONUNDRUM

Time management is a bit of a farce. You can never actually manage time because it moves forward at its own pace, regardless of what we do.

Activities, on the other hand, are up to us.

We get to choose what to engage in or disengage from. We get to opt in or opt out, say yes or say no, get roped into something, or wiggle our way out of it.

The greatest challenge with managing our many activities is doing so inside the time box of twenty-four hours. Though time is technically infinite, daylight is not. We are only awake for so long before we crash and pass out.

This clear daily boundary leaves us with a problem most of us (including myself) struggle to overcome. There is just too much to do in the few hours we have each day—too many responsibilities, too many obligations, too many everythings that seem to never end.

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The abundance of choice is paralyzing, overwhelming, and exhausting. More opportunities exist today than ever, which means more work exists today than ever. We are stressed out because life is inherently stressful. The challenge is ubiquitous and, without a clear plan, very few among us can escape the trap of this modern mayhem.

In my work as a productivity coach, I see a few common problems that appear to affect nearly everyone, and most on a daily basis.

## Too much, too often

Having more work to accomplish in shorter time spans may be the most prolific problem in most companies and households, and on most personal calendars.

Downsizing causes those left over to take on more tasks, family members find themselves solving problems for others instead of addressing their own responsibilities, and the twenty-four-hour clock never gets any bigger.

The problem is not that more work actually needs to get done, it is that more nonsense needs to get cut. A clear lack of priorities leads to the chaos, overwhelm, and stress that accumulates from doing too much, too often.

Working harder only gets you so far. Working faster can only last for so long. Working on nonessentials wastes even more precious time, and saying yes to yet another task adds to the already overinflated schedule.

## Last-minute catastrophes

I frequently survey the subscribers to my email newsletter about their productivity mistakes and pitfalls.

One question asks, "What is your biggest frustration around your own productivity?" The most common answer is procrastination—waiting until the last minute and avoiding the work that needs to get done right up until it's almost too late.

The last-minute stress that builds up as a deadline nears can be debilitating. Yes, some people thrive on pressure, but not many do so well when that pressure never lets up. When we find ourselves prioritizing activities that never had to get done in the first place, we find ourselves panicking as the clear priorities float to the top of the list just as they need to be addressed.

#### More coffee! now!

If a pot of coffee could solve all of our productivity problems, you and I both would likely just hook up an IV drip of dark roast espresso and start bulldozing through our bucket lists.

The challenge with productivity in this sense revolves around naturally derived energy and focus—two elements that, when combined, create a powerhouse of potential.

Most office environments serve up endless opportunities for staying awake to burn the candle at both ends without ever truly crafting a solution to stay alert and centered on one thing at a time.

Longer work hours, collaborative office environments, increased demands, and a heavy reliance on stimulants just to get through the day also introduce a slew of health problems from poor sleep and weight gain to high blood pressure and eventual trips to a marriage counselor.

It is not a pretty picture.

When results are prioritized above sustainability, when productivity is prioritized above sanity, and when "trying to get it all done" is prioritized above doing only what matters, we find ourselves trapped in a prison of perfectionism.

When the bar is too high, it is too high, and there comes a point when the madness has to stop.

#### A DANGEROUS WORD

I wrote this book for one specific and clear reason: productivity is a dangerous word.

The double-edged sword of getting more done is that you can check more boxes, and so you do—over and over again. Doing more is alluring and certainly provides clear benefits, but (as we just discussed) at enormous costs.

The opposite is also true.

When I tell people I teach others how to get more done, it is quite common to see a reaction of "Oh, I don't need MORE to do...." In other words, we know we are doing too much already, and the last thing we want is to have to do more in order to do less.

No one actually needs another book on getting things done, or another ten-step online video course on achieving four-hour workweeks, and yet we struggle day in and day out with balance. We still never can get it all done.

#### FREE TIME AT ITS FINEST

We are having the wrong conversation about productivity. We should be talking about how to do less when all we ever do is talk about how to do more. What is really going on here?

This is not an anti-productivity book, but it was designed to help you outsmart the temptation and repercussion of doing more in order to optimize the few things that actually provide the outcomes you have been striving so hard to produce.

Saying you should work smarter, not harder is a bit cliché, but if it works for you, own it. Work as intelligently as you can.

This book is here to help you make critical changes to your calendar, outwit your nemesis of distraction, and redesign your life with more clarity and resolve than ever before.

Free time at its finest is when your calendar serves you, and not itself or someone else. When open blocks of time show up again and again, you have a tremendous opportunity to live differently, to change the lives of those around you, and to secure a more prosperous future.

If you would like more freedom to pursue your grandest goals, or even just enough downtime to take a solid nap, you are in the right place. With more free time comes more creative breakthroughs, clarity on your most important goals, and the freedom to choose how to live your best life.

The steps to reach this new life are about to unfold.

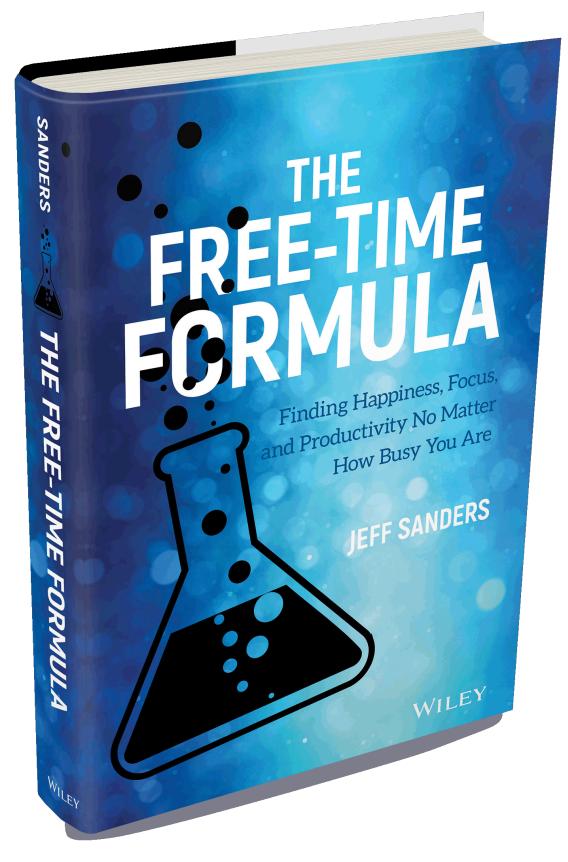
#### THE FREE-TIME FORMULA

The Free-Time Formula is a seven-step system to help you find happiness, focus, and productivity no matter how busy you are.

It is a path to high achievement without the burden of slaving away 24/7 to get there. In short, it is a process to cut the nonsense, focus, and achieve more than ever.

## The seven steps

This book is divided into seven steps (or parts), aligned to the seven steps of the formula, with two chapters dedicated to each step:



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