

Leadership Edge

Book Review by Wendy Garrard

Title: **'Four Thousand Weeks: Time and How We Use It' (2021)**

Author: **Oliver Burkeman**

Publisher: Bodley Head, Penguin.

My Story

I have just been enlightened by this great book. I first listened to it on Audible as I didn't think I would find the time to sit down and actually turn the pages to read it for myself. However, having done so I continue to dip into the pages to remind myself of some of the profound thinking and excellent tools recommended to make the best use of the time we have ... left. The title refers to the amount of time we as a human may be granted; however, who knows - and so we are invited to ask ourselves, *'What is this obsession with time all about?'*

I describe myself as 'a serial scheduler'. I thrive on to-do lists, post-it notes and a jam-packed colour-coded calendar; rarely do I have enough 'time' to do all that I want to and I find myself apologising for my lack of time to engage in the many tasks that I or others want me to do - and that in reality, I will never get to do. Since lockdown, I feel that this is becoming an obsession and many of my retired friends laugh at me and say, "Why are you doing this?"

Well, the short answer is - I love all the things that I do and I want to do more! I want to fit in as much as I can into every day.

If you relate to the above, this book is for you.

In coaching conversations, I frequently find 'time-management' is often introduced as a line of enquiry as it is one factor that can result in considerable stress, anxiety, frustration - but also joy and happiness. Perceived 'lack of time' has a significant impact on a person's life, their relationships, performance and well-being.

Why do I think this is a great book?

Oliver shares his insights into how to face reality, focus on time lived and tasks completed, manage technology and avoid distraction. Productivity and efficiency, prioritisation and making choices, digital distractions – indeed *all* distractions, procrastination, time-wasting and laziness are just some of the fundamental elements discussed.

The message that one day each of us will no longer be able to 'fill' our calendar with allocated slots of time, an attempt to use 'my time' wisely, is presented with humility, wisdom and humour.

So, as I look ahead to this half term, to Easter and beyond, I see various family activities (yellow), events (blue), work projects (purple), coaching appointments (green), travel trips and visits (orange) and lots more including a multitude of Zoom meetings and Teams gatherings. Everyday more and more of my 'future time' is allocated to activity that, in reality, may not come to pass. For sure, one day this will certainly happen. This book provides '10 Tips' for embracing your finitude.

In this book, Oliver Burkeman shares his insights into how to face reality, focus on 'time lived' and 'tasks completed', manage technology and decide what you will do about distractions.

Some of my key Learning:

- Time is life not a resource or commodity which you pay for
- Lead by example
- Learn to live in the moment and appreciate the small things in life
- Think about what life was like before clocks (computers, emails, social media...) were invented
- It's okay to practise doing nothing sometimes; however, this is easier said than done
- Set up two to-do lists, one open (everything you plan to do), and one closed (celebrate what you have done)
- Focus on only one big project at a time
- Live life and adopt an attitude of curiosity
- Embrace uncertainty
- Act on impulses, be generous, kind and caring - this is time well spent

On reflection, *'Time and How We Use It'* is an interesting challenge that we all face, and this book provides a refreshing look at many of the key factors that we may think about and consider. I now see myself as a coach who is paid for the conversations I inspire and the experience I offer, rather than for the hour that I give.

'Four Thousand Weeks' was recommended to me by an old friend who said, *"Wendy you should read this."* I am so glad I did!

Marian Keys describes this book as, 'Comforting, fascinating, engaging, inspiring and USEFUL, actually genuinely useful' and I whole-heartedly agree.