

Bill Gates' key to productivity: The art of 'deep work'

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Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates is often lauded as one of the most successful entrepreneurs and thinkers of the 20th century. Mr. Gates' intelligence and foresight into the booming future of computing certainly propelled him, but his accomplishments were truly made possible by something else entirely: deep work.

Calvin Newport, PhD, assistant professor in the department of computer science at Washington, D.C.-based Georgetown University, defines "deep work" as "professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit, [which then] create new value, improve your skill and are hard to duplicate," according to *Business Insider*.

With an unshakeable habit for concentration that borders on obsession, Mr. Gates could reach optimal levels of productivity while developing Microsoft. This practice persisted throughout his career. In 2014, Mr. Gates wrote on Reddit, "20 years ago I would stay in the office for days at a time and not think twice about it." His current work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is characterized by a more reasonable schedule, though he still employs the same level of concentration, according to *Business Insider*.

However, Dr. Newport emphasizes that just spending a lot of time working does not equal success. Instead, it's the realization that perpetual distractions threaten to cap our potential and make our work less impactful. Practicing deep work helps prevent this.

One must not seek to emulate Mr. Gates by working around the clock for days on end. Rather, striving to engage in deep work requires setting aside certain stretches of time to concentrate and work without distraction of any kind — no emails, no phone calls or text messages, not even getting up for a cup of coffee, according to the report. An hour or two at a time a few days per week can significantly bolster productivity.

"A commitment to deep work is not a moral stance and it's not a philosophical statement — it is instead a pragmatic recognition that the ability to concentrate is a skill that gets valuable things done," Dr. Newport writes in his new book, *Deep Work*. "Deep work is important, in other words, not because distraction is evil, but because it enabled Bill Gates to start a billion-dollar industry in less than a semester."