Chapter Four
Rediscover Yourself

Before you start trying to organize everything in your life, you need to understand your life in greater depth. You can't fix something until you know exactly what's wrong with it. So it's time to break down your life into bite sized pieces to see what's going on under the surface. When you are done analyzing yourself, you will know what you spend your time on, what stray thoughts plague you, and what habits enslave you. These techniques will help you decipher what exactly in your life is blocking your creativity and seeding discontent.

Track Your Time to Understand Your Day

You need to establish where exactly your time goes. First, estimate how much time you spend on certain tasks each day. Write down your best guess for how long

you spend on chores, work, sleep, hobbies, exercise, and TV/video games, and on your phone. Feel free to add more categories to properly round out your unique life circumstances. Once you have your estimates, I want you to draw out a bar divided into twenty four segments. Draw out your approximated time usage on that bar and hang that paper up somewhere prominent- above your desk, on the fridge, on the bathroom mirror – you get the idea.

Some people might have each minute planned out each day, but the majority of us have some free time floating around between obligations. Time will often vanish without a trace and we move on without thinking much about it. Your job is to root out these time drains and redirect your focus to more productive work.

If you have been rushing from day to day with no focus on the present, you probably have been spending time in ways that mystify you. Imagine yourself split into two beings: the aware you – the one that's here and reading right now – and then the secret, wild animal you. Your wild animal is constantly busy doing something underneath the surface of your awareness, and it is extremely difficult to control. It does things for mysterious reasons and you may find yourself spending your time in strange, unexpected ways.

How do we learn more about wild animal as it goes about its typical day? We observe the animal in its natural habitat. To observe yourself takes dedication, patience, and some sneaky detective work. Slap on your safari hat and strap on your binoculars. You must be persistent and vigilant if you want to see your wild animal in action. Tracking the minutes of your day is an intimidating task, but it is vital to seeing where your animal spends its time. You must identify when you switch tasks and how long you spend on tasks every day. And I mean all the tasks, tiny as they may be. Aim to break your day down into five minute increments to see what micro tasks might be eating up your time.

Unfortunately, the act of observing does tend to change behavior. You can't really get an unbiased view on your wild animal's day unless you set up a hidden camera

or hire a third party to observe you. These are extreme measures, so here are a few techniques you can do by yourself that are a little less intense.

You can buy a handheld digital voice recorder and carry it with you all day to record your time usage on the go. Set it on your desk, take it with you to meetings, carry it around the house, and keep it in the car. Make sure the batteries are fresh or you can plug it in throughout the day. When you are alone, you can dictate to the recorder. For example, you might say, "I am picking out my outfit…. I am about to brush my teeth…. I am about to read the paper."

> **Make a strong habit of glancing at the clock every time you begin any new task.**

Using a recorder is great for people who are constantly on the move or who work in a private place. You certainly don't want to record people's conversations without their knowledge, and it can be awkward to bring it up. But having an audio file is ideal for people who don't want to stop to write down their tasks all the time. If you don't like the idea of keeping a recorder on all day, you can simply get a recorder that is noise activated. Then all you need to do is announce the time and the task you are beginning, and the recorder will catch it for you. Of course, one downside to this technique is that you must still transcribe the audio and get the data down in writing.

If the thought of recording is uncomfortable, consider writing the information down. Simply keep some paper next to you and manually write down the time and each new task as you begin. If you have a dry erase board nearby, roll your chair over and jot it down. When it becomes crowded on the board, stop and enter the data into a spreadsheet. This method requires a significant amount of diligence and attention, and you can't do it simultaneous to other tasks like you can with the voice recorder. However, it is less socially awkward than the recorder and you don't need to listen to

long audio tracks to capture your data.

If you are concerned about forgetting to write down the information as you switch tasks, try setting a reminder on your phone for every 15 minutes. When your phone dings, just stop and write down how you spent the time. The trick to getting through these days of detail-oriented observation is to make it a strong habit of glancing at the clock every time you begin any new project or distraction.

Getting a detailed picture of your time usage throughout the day is essential to understanding your daily ebbs and flows. Do not skip this step. Track your time diligently for a full week and you will be able to discern holes in your day, regular failings in your schedule, and time periods of great success. Tracking your time is especially vital if your schedule changes from day to day because of classes or multiple jobs.

For example, a typical college student has classes every other day, meaning they have two block schedules. Time usage can vary dramatically between a Monday and Tuesday. It is important to capture all these variations in schedule.

At the end of the week, it's time to crunch your data. Break down your various tasks into categories, just like you did in your estimates. Add any new categories to reflect unexpected time usage that you discovered. Again, draw out horizontal bars and divide them into twenty four segments. You should have a bar for each day you monitored your time. Find some colored markers or steal your kid's crayons and settle in for some serious coloring.

Fill out the bars to reflect the way your day was spent. Get as detailed as you can, with a new color or pattern for each category in your life. When you are done, compare your estimated time usage chart to your actual time usage. Is it what you expected? How do the individual days compare to each other from your week of tracking? Think about where your time usage isn't very efficient and consider ways you can alter your schedule or your habits to increase productivity.

Download a Digital Time Tracker to Discover the Time Drain

You may already know that you spend an obscene amount of time on your phone, but sometimes you just need some hard data to really drive the point home. The digital world is where your secret animal thrives. It is the proverbial watering hole, a place that the animal must visit multiple times per day. This is where so much time gets wasted and we don't really understand how much. Thankfully, there are free and easy methods for hunting down the information you need to wrangle this beast into submission.

There are several apps you can download onto both your computer and smartphone that will observe how much time you spend on certain digital activities. I suggest the Break Free app, which is compatible with Apple and Android phones. It will track your usage and break down how much time you spend in apps and how often you check your phone. Try it out and discover what useless games and social media apps are draining your time away and sapping you of your productivity. [Download Rescue Time](#) for your computer to achieve similar results. Don't forget to add your digital time to your final report.

Develop a Habit Tracker to Identify Patterns

This is something that I keep in my bullet journal and it is a magnificently versatile tool for observing my habits in action. If you think back on a specific habit like water consumption, you may confidently state that you have been drinking at least X amount for the last week. You are wrong about at least one of those days. How much water did you really drink seven days earlier? How do you know? The best way to know is

through tracking that information day by day.

The habit tracker will force you to face your day's habits, both good and bad, each and every day. I have at least fifteen items on my habit tracker. Some examples of habits to track include:

- Exercise
- Exercise the dog
- Water the plants
- Cook dinner
- Do laundry
- Clean
- Floss
- Sex
- Amount of sleep

The list goes on and on. You can add whatever you'd like to observe, from the small to the strange. You are gathering data for your study and your habits are integral data points. A habit tracker is a way to peek retroactively into your day to get a glimpse of what activities you did or didn't do. Each evening, sit down and think about your day. Go through your list and check off the habits that occurred. Use a simple yes/no answer to keep things nice and neat.

I like to keep my tracker in my bullet journal so it's easier for me to check every day, though this would also be great taped up on a wall. I use brightly colored pens to keep my tasks distinct and separate (not to mention visually stimulating). You certainly don't need to color code your tracker, a simple black and white system would work beautifully. However you design it, make sure you keep coming back to fill it out every day. If that means bright colors or bold black lines, then more power to you.

I like to keep my habit tracker in the monthly calendar of my bullet journal. Keeping

it as a month allows me to see monthly trends and patterns, and it's handy keeping all my information together in big chunks. I would recommend that you don't have your tracker span any less time than a week. A longer time span allows you to see patterns. And identifying patterns is always extremely useful.

Chart Your Level 10 Life to Assess Yourself Honestly

Yet another excellent tool to learn more about yourself is the Level 10 Life. I originally saw this technique thanks to Kara from BohoBerry.com. The basic idea of this chart is to section your life into ten different categories: Family & Friends, Personal Development, Spirituality, Finances, Career, Romantic Relationships, Recreation, Giving/Contribution, Physical Environment, and Health.

Then you assign a score to each category, ranging from 1-10 with 10 being the highest. Essentially, you decide how happy you are with all ten categories and chart your responses. I like to create my chart by hand because I feel more connected to the process and more thoughtful with my answers. If you would prefer to do it digitally, then please do! This exercise is just a diagnostic tool to identify the lopsidedness in your life, so the actual method does not matter. I would only recommend that you record your chart and put it where you can see it regularly. You want to be able to find it in six months or a year to see how you have grown since drafting up the chart.

The point is to be honest with yourself about how happy you are in all corners of your life. The Level 10 Life chart helps you identify what has been thriving and what needs attention to achieve balance and a well-rounded happiness. Have you been making strides in your career but neglecting your spirituality? Have you been happy with your relationship but woefully ignoring your hobbies?

This chart will shed light on all aspects of your life, both good and bad, to become aware of and allow you to focus on all areas of your life. It is virtually impossible to be perfectly happy with all ten categories, but you can certainly try to actively build up weaker sections. There is always something to improve, and that's okay. A perfect life

would be incredibly boring, and we are human beings who always want to stretch and grow.