

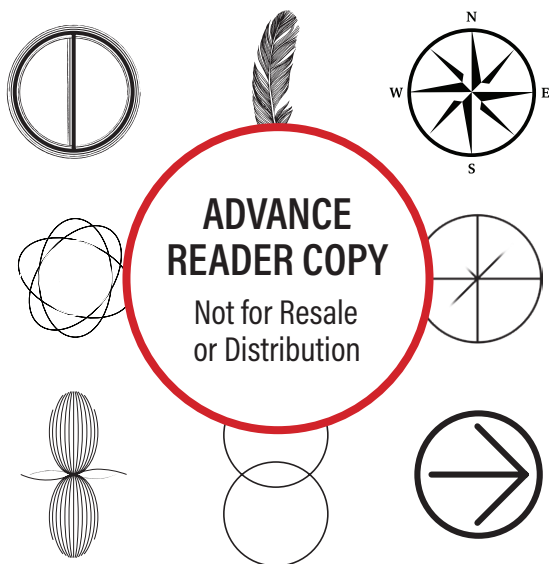
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PRODUCTIVENESS



MIKE VARDY



PRODUCTIVENESS

MIKE VARDY

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“I stand upon my desk to remind myself that we must
constantly look at things in a different way.”

—DEAD POETS SOCIETY

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For those learning to be before they do.

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PREFACE

Back in 2023, I wrote an essay titled “The Path to Productiveness.”

It wasn’t meant to be a manifesto. But it ended up becoming a marker—a moment when I stepped back from the fast-moving current of productivity culture and asked:

What exactly are we chasing? And why does it still leave so many of us feeling behind?

I’ve spent years exploring productivity. I’ve studied it, taught it, built systems around it—even made fun of it. But somewhere along the way, the word started to feel too thin. Too industrial. Too much about *doing* more instead of *being* more.

That’s when I rediscovered a word we’d quietly left behind: productiveness.

And it changed everything.

Before “productivity” became the buzzword it is today, we used “productiveness.” According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, productiveness appeared as early as 1727. It meant “the state of being productive.”

Productivity, by contrast, didn’t show up until 1809. And by the late 1800s, it had taken on an economic edge: “rate of output per unit.”

That’s when the shift began—from being to doing, from quality to quantity, from presence to performance.

You can see this turn reflected in the language and priorities of the Industrial Revolution. Productivity became a measure of efficiency in factories, popularized by economists like Charles Babbage and later formalized in national accounts and management theory. By the early twentieth century, thinkers such as Frederick Winslow Taylor had made “scientific management” synonymous with progress. The focus narrowed to output, speed, and measurable results—values that still shape how we think about work today.

Over time, productivity came to mean efficiency. Output. Results. It became a scoreboard—an endless race toward more.

But productiveness?

Productiveness was never about speed. It was about substance.

It was the felt sense of progress. The human sense of making something meaningful.

It wasn’t about how much you did. It was about what it added up to—for you and for others.

PRODUCTIVENESS

That's the story this book wants to tell.

This isn't a guide to getting more done.

It's an invitation to live in a way that feels durable, intentional, and true.

Because productiveness is the state of being productive, not just the activity of producing.

Productivity focuses on quantity.

Productiveness asks for balance. It makes space for quality, for context, and for you.

We've spent years trying to optimize our way out of overwhelm—chasing systems, hacks, and habits that promise control but often leave us feeling more fractured. Many of us are busy but unsure what our busyness is serving. We meet every deadline but lose sight of what feels alive. We measure progress by metrics that don't measure meaning.

Maybe what we need now is not more optimization—but a better orientation.

One that helps us reconnect effort with essence, align attention with intention, and bring a steadier rhythm to our days.

This book offers that shift—through principles that help you reimagine time not as a resource to spend or control, but as a relationship to tend.

Not through strict rules or endless hacks—but through principles.

Lived, tested, humane principles that can carry you through the complexity and the quiet alike.

You don't have to read it quickly.

You just have to bring yourself to it—fully, openly, maybe even curiously.

Let the book unfold in rhythm.

Because if you've ever wondered why productivity didn't feel like enough ...

If you've ever felt like your systems were efficient but your soul was tired ...

Then this book is for you.

It's not about doing more. It's about doing what matters in a way that lets you return to yourself.

And I believe that's a return worth making.

That return doesn't just mark an ending—it signals a beginning. You've already learned to shape your days and tend your systems. Now comes the deeper work: turning that structure into something that sustains you.

You made it through the “diet.” You examined your habits. You fed your systems. You carved out structure where it once collapsed. You nourished your productivity.

But there's another kind of hunger.

One that isn't satisfied by systems alone.

One that doesn't live on inputs and outcomes—but on meaning, resonance, and rhythm.

This book is about that hunger.

PRODUCTIVENESS

We've spent too long forsaking quality for quantity. *Productiveness* restores that balance—valuing depth alongside output, meaning alongside measurement. It's not a system manual, but the philosophy beneath the systems.

A lyrical, human-first exploration of how to work *with* time rather than against it.

It's about the thing I teased at the very end of *The Productivity Diet*.

It's about *productiveness*.

Not how you get things done—but how you live while doing. Not just the scaffolding of your day—but the soul of your time.

Not just when and what—but why, and sometimes why not.

This is the other story I promised.

It's more album than algorithm.

More feeling than formula.

And it begins where most productivity books end.

To guide that beginning, this book moves through nine principles of productiveness:

- Humanness
- Grace
- Prudence
- Nuance

- Tolerance
- Efficacy
- Cadence
- Trust
- and Will

Each principle opens a different door.

Together, they form a home for the kind of work—and life—that lasts.

You could skip around, sure. But like an album, this one has a sequence for a reason.

Each track builds on the last. Each silence matters.

Read it in rhythm, not in haste.

Let the first note lead you in.

PRODUCTIVENESS

HUMANNESS



There's a scene in the documentary *I Like Me*, about the life and legacy of John Candy, that's lingered with me ever since I watched it within hours of its streaming debut.

A montage of his early life plays as “Making Time” by The Creation hums in the background—a raw, defiant track from 1966. The song captures the grind of repetition, the sense of moving through the same motions day after day. But it's the title—*Making Time*—that carries something more profound.

“Making time” can mean rushing—trying to get somewhere faster. But it can also mean creating—turning time into something that matters. (The irony that the band's name was “the Creation” isn't lost on me.)

That duality captures what it means to be human. We live inside time's machinery, but we also shape it. We don't just count the hours; we fill them.

Candy did that through joy. Through presence. Through the kind of laughter that outlives the moment.

And that's where *Humanness* begins—not with efficiency or endurance, but with engagement.

WHEN WE FORGET

You are not a machine.

But chances are you've been told to operate like one.

You've been asked to optimize.

To output.

To maximize your minutes.

To measure your worth in what you do.

And when your energy lags or your attention wavers—

you don't ask what you need.

You ask what's wrong with you.

Because somewhere along the way, you were trained to believe that being human is a liability.

Something to fix.

Upgrade.

Automate.

PRODUCTIVENESS

We've been asked to do things no human should be asked to do—to ignore fatigue, to flatten feeling, to treat care as inefficiency.

We've been told to push past pain, to produce through grief, to prioritize deliverables over dignity.

These are not just inhuman expectations.
They are inhumane ones.

The answer isn't to harden ourselves further, but to soften—to remember that compassion is not a weakness in work.
It's a form of wisdom.
And choosing what's human and humane isn't indulgence.
It's integrity.

And here's the truth: Humanness is not the flaw in your productivity. It's the foundation of your productiveness.

PRODUCTIVENESS BEGINS WITH BEING

You can't align your time until you know what you value.

You can't design your day until you know what you need.

You can't direct your attention until you accept your limitations.

This is the difference between productivity and productiveness:

- Productivity assumes you are a system.
- Productiveness remembers you are a person.

This is where it begins:

Not with a calendar.

Not with a checklist.

But with a return to yourself.

FEAR LIVES HERE TOO

Let's not pretend it's easy.

To be human is to be afraid sometimes.

Afraid of missing out.

Afraid of letting others down.

Afraid of not being enough.

But fear is not your failure.

It's part of the terrain.

You'll see it echo across the principles in this book—

especially in Prudence, where hesitation masquerades as wisdom ...

in Trust, where systems falter ...

in Will, where the question becomes not, "Can I keep going?"
but "Why should I?"

But fear doesn't define your path.

Humanness does.

And that makes fear navigable.

Not because you conquer it—but because you walk with it.

You carry it, gently and honestly, alongside your values.

I've felt that fear, too. When I first began to move away from traditional productivity advice—the kind built on metrics, streaks, and optimization—I worried I'd lose my footing. That if I slowed down, I'd fall behind. That if I questioned the old systems, I might not have anything solid to stand on.

But what steadied me wasn't certainty—it was Humanness.

Remembering that time isn't a problem to solve but a partner to relate to. That rest isn't weakness, and reflection isn't waste. Leaning into those truths didn't erase the fear, but it gave it form—something I could see, name, and walk beside.

That's the kind of courage this book invites: not fearlessness, but familiarity. A way of living where fear can exist without leading.

THE SYSTEM THAT SERVES YOU

You don't need a system that runs at full capacity 24/7. You need a system that lets you return to yourself.

That's what this book offers: a return.

To rhythm.

To reflection.

To the right kind of resilience.

One that doesn't flatten you for the sake of output—but grounds you in your being so your doing can actually matter.

You haven't forgotten that you're human.

You've just been told to act like you're not.

Not once. Not twice. But constantly. Relentlessly.

By metrics, messages, and moments that reward speed over substance.

There is a forced forgottenness at play here—a cultural rhythm that demands you ignore your limits and deny your needs in favour of endless output.

And after a while, that message gets internalized.

You begin to mistake stillness for laziness.

You begin to treat fatigue as failure.

You begin to believe that friction means you're doing it wrong.

But friction doesn't mean you're broken.

It means you're alive.

It means something inside you is trying to get your attention.

A MOMENT REMEMBERED

I remember a time before all this—before I had the language for TimeCrafting, before I started building my own frameworks—when I was working as an online news reporter.

It was my first ongoing role in the digital space, long before I began my deeper journey into productiveness. My job was to keep up with all the breaking tech news across the Canadian landscape. And if you know anything about Canada, you know it's not small. Each city has its own distinct culture—not unlike the patchwork feel of Europe, but stretched across a massive geography. Trying to balance all of that, with very little regional context, was like trying to edit five newspapers from five different places ... simultaneously.

I monitored Twitter, Hacker News, and RSS feeds. I used multiple apps to stay on top of things. I spent hours sitting at my desk, eyes locked on the screen, chasing updates. My home—this very space I'm sitting in now as I write—was full of reminders of who I was. But I felt removed from them.

I was surrounded by signals of my Humanness ... and yet I wasn't tapped into it.

It wasn't enjoyable anymore. And I don't say that to diminish the work. As Paul Scheer puts it, "I don't want to yuck on anybody's yum." Some people love that breakneck pace. But for me, something was breaking.

What I was doing was rooted in productivity as it's commonly defined: the power or quality of being able to produce—especially in abundance. It wasn't about writing stories with depth or delivering meaningful insight. It was about being first. And in that race, quality often got trampled by quantity.

I knew I needed to find a way out.

And when I did—slowly but deliberately—I found myself returning to something I hadn't realized I'd lost: my Humanness.

It's an ongoing challenge even now—especially now—working in a space obsessed with productivity. But I keep coming back to this moment as a reminder that I don't want to live at the mercy of metrics. I want to live in accordance with meaning.

SIGNS YOU'VE FORGOTTEN (OR BEEN MADE TO FORGET)

Sometimes the forgetting is subtle. Sometimes it's screaming.

But there are clues. There are symptoms.

And they rarely sound like “I forgot I'm human.”

They sound like:

- “I said *yes* even though I was already spent.”

PRODUCTIVENESS

- “I keep downloading tools hoping one of them will finally fix me.”
- “I feel like I have to earn rest.”
- “I confuse pace with progress.”
- “I keep asking how to do more ... without asking if it matters.”

These aren't personality flaws.

They're systemic signals.

They are what happens when a person is expected to perform like a machine in a world that only rewards output.

And if you don't name them, you'll try to optimize your way through something that's actually asking for compassion.

I learned that the hard way.

In the early days of developing TimeCrafting, I got arrogant. I wanted to see how far I could bend my own framework without breaking it—how much I could fit into a single day if I just planned it perfectly. For a while, it looked like it was working. My days ran with factory precision: every block filled, every hour themed, every task tracked.

But what I didn't see was that I wasn't testing the system anymore—I was testing myself. And I was losing. The framework didn't break. I did. I was being inhumane to myself, asking one human to do an inhuman amount.

The shift came one afternoon when I caught myself writing “rest” on a to-do list—then checking it off before I’d actually done it. That small absurdity stopped me cold. I realized I’d turned care into another form of performance.

So I began again, but slower this time. When I felt spent, instead of forcing myself to finish, I paused. I let the work wait. I let myself wait. And in that space, something softened. I saw that compassion wasn’t a detour from productivity—it was what made productiveness possible.

That’s what Humanness restores: the permission to treat yourself not as a system to optimize, but as someone to tend.

A RETURN, NOT A REINVENTION

You don’t need to rebuild yourself.

You need to remember yourself.

Productiveness doesn’t demand that you become something new.

It invites you to return to what’s already true.

You are cyclical.

You are rhythmic.

You are responsive, not reactive.

You need space to reflect.

You need systems that adapt.

You need days that don't demand your best but allow for your real.

This is a book about systems, yes.

But not inhuman ones.

Not rigid, robotic ones.

Human systems.

The kind that support you because you're human—not in spite of it.

And that's why this is one of the few chapters that offers a few simple things you can actually try.

Not because you need to be fixed.

But because you might need help remembering.

PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT HUMANNESS

(Choose what feels like care—not control.)

You won't find exercises in every chapter of this book.

That's intentional.

But here, in this one, you'll find a few.

Because Humanness is the one thing we're most often pulled away from.

And these aren't steps. They're supports.

Not rules—but reminders.

Use them to return.

To recall.

To remember.

1. EXTERNALIZE THE SWIRL

Capture the thoughts that cloud your attention. Don't rely on memory.

Use index cards, voice memos, sticky notes, chalkboards—anything.

Let your ideas, worries, and insights exist outside of you.

Don't judge them. Don't sort them yet.

Just get them out of your head.

The garden is easier to tend when you can see the weeds.

When I first started doing this, I was trying to hold everything in my head—projects, deadlines, half-formed ideas, even reminders like *pick up coffee filters*. The noise was constant. I'd sit down to write and suddenly remember an invoice or a text I hadn't answered. My attention never stood still long enough to deepen.

So I began carrying index cards. Not for tasks alone, but for everything: phrases that struck me, questions I couldn't shake, worries that kept circling. I'd jot them

down the moment they appeared. Sometimes I'd discover themes: a pattern of fatigue, a repeated idea, a story trying to surface. Other times, it was just mental compost. Either way, once it was written down, it stopped taking up space in my head.

That's the point of externalizing the swirl. It's not just about getting organized—it's about getting honest. You can't work with what you can't see.

2. BUILD A "CHECK-IN CUE"

Create a moment in your day that interrupts autopilot.

A cue that simply asks:

"What do I need right now—not ideally, but honestly?"

It could be a Post-it note on your laptop.

A calendar alert that says "Pause."

A journal prompt on your Daily Driver.

It's not about adding friction.

It's about creating feeling.

For me, this started during a stretch when I was writing and recording nonstop—moving from one commitment to the next without ever asking if I had the energy, focus, or presence for it. My days blurred together.

So I added a small cue: a reminder on my phone at 1:30 p.m. every day that simply said “*Time to check your pulse.*” Not literally, but energetically. Sometimes I’d realize I needed water, not coffee. Other times, I needed to step outside or close the tabs I’d been avoiding. It was rarely dramatic, but it was always a reset of sorts ... a grounding.

Over time, that cue became less about productivity and more about presence. A brief invitation to re-enter my own day, to notice whether I was acting from intention or inertia.

That’s what a check-in cue does—it brings you back to yourself before the world pulls you away again.

3. MAKE REFLECTION A RHYTHM, NOT A REPORT

Let reflection be less about review—and more about reconnection.

End your day with one of these:

- What surprised me today?
- Where did I act like a machine—and where did I remember I’m not?
- What deserves another look tomorrow?

You’re not measuring output. You’re noticing being.

That kind of noticing doesn't require an elaborate ritual. It can be as simple as taking two quiet minutes before bed, closing your laptop before you turn off the light, or jotting a few words in a notebook you keep by the coffee maker. The point isn't to record everything—it's to return to yourself.

When you make reflection a rhythm, it starts to work quietly in the background. You begin to see patterns—where your energy peaks, where your patience frays, where meaning shows up unannounced. You respond instead of react. You recognize progress that isn't visible on a spreadsheet: steadier mornings, clearer choices, fewer days spent on autopilot.

Reflection turns awareness into alignment. It slows the spin just enough for you to hear what time—and your own Humanness—have been trying to tell you all along.

4. LET SILENCE LEAD

Sometimes the most human response is not one at all—it's a pause.

Before jumping into the next task, take a beat.

Breathe.

Resist the urge to fill every space.

Ask yourself:

“Is this coming from urgency ... or awareness?”

Let silence be your system reset.

Let it remind you what you're not.

For me, this practice began in the spaces between projects—those uneasy gaps where momentum fades and doubt gets loud. I used to rush to fill them: answer emails, plan the next thing, reach for noise. Anything to avoid stillness. But over time, I realized silence wasn't absence—it was data. It showed me what I'd been avoiding, what ideas were ready, and what needed rest.

Now, I build small silences into my days: a few minutes after a meeting before I open another tab, a pause between writing sessions, a quiet walk without headphones. These brief resets clear the mental static and reconnect me to a slower, steadier rhythm.

When you let silence lead, you remember that awareness isn't found in activity—it's found in attention. In the space between doing and being, silence reminds you who's in charge: not the noise, not the clock, but you.

HOW WE MEET TIME

John Candy comes back to mind here. His father died at thirty-five; he lived to forty-three. Maybe he always felt time pressing on him. You could see it in his warmth—the way he gave joy like it was something he might run out of.

And then there's Diane Keaton. She just passed as I write this. Her life felt like a quiet act of authorship—deliberate,

disciplined, deeply human. She shaped her time rather than letting time shape her, filling it with her own rhythm and restraint.

My grandmother lived beyond a hundred years. When I asked how she felt near the end, she said, “I’m ready to go. I’ve had a hard life.” She didn’t mean it bitterly; she meant it truthfully. She’d lived enough, seen enough, given enough. She once left her four young children for a three-week road trip in 1954 with two friends—before the highways we take for granted even existed. That kind of audacity is its own kind of Humanness too.

Candy burned bright. Keaton moved with care. My grandmother endured.

Each lived by a different Cadence—something I’ll return to later because Cadence shapes how we live with time.

We can’t outlive time, but we can live with it—fully, fiercely, and humanly.

A FILTER WORTH KEEPING

This chapter—and really, this whole book—isn’t about becoming more efficient.

It’s about becoming more whole.

It’s not about productivity.

It’s about productiveness—

the act of being productive, not just doing things productively.

So when your energy dips ...

When your attention fractures ...

When the weeds begin to grow back—

Don't ask what's wrong with you.

Ask what filter you need to see yourself clearly again.

That's not giving up control.

That's giving yourself permission.

To come back.

To recalibrate.

To begin again.

Because you are not a machine.

You never were.

Let's build from there.

GRACE



There's an ache that lives in Jeff Buckley's voice.

You hear it in the quietest moments of *Grace*, the only full-length studio album he released before his untimely death in 1997. You hear it in his cover of "Hallelujah," in the haunted falsetto of "Lover, You Should've Come Over," and—most powerfully—in the album's title track: "Grace."

That song has always stayed with me.

Not just as a piece of music, but as a signal—something calling out, quiet but persistent.

I first heard *Grace* while working at 93.3 CFMU, the campus radio station at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. The station's tagline was Redefining Radio—a phrase I'd say on-air every time I queued up a track. And that's exactly what Buckley's music felt like it was doing: redefining something.

In between bouts of CANCON (a requirement of Canadian radio) and alt-rock staples like the Flaming Lips or Sisters of Mercy, I'd slip in Buckley tracks. "So Real" got a fair bit of airtime from me, but the title track was the one I always returned to. It had a kind of gravity. A depth. A tension that never fully resolved but never fully let go.

And it spoke to something in me.

Buckley was obsessed with the moon—he referenced it often in his lyrics and interviews. That resonated deeply. I was (and still am) a night owl, someone more attuned to the quiet hours, to solitude, to subtle shifts in energy that the daytime often drowns out.

So when Buckley sang of time's relentless ticking and then surrendered fully to the fire of it—I felt that. Still do.

It wasn't just poetic. It was true.

The clock does click.

Time does burn.

And we do wait in it—sometimes with hope, sometimes with fear, often with both.

Over the years—especially since his passing—my admiration for that album has only deepened. Not because it became popular, but because it remained true. It didn't ask to be understood. It asked to be met. On your own terms. In your own time.

That's what Grace is.

It doesn't push.

It doesn't hustle.

It waits.

It waits in the fire.

THE GIFT WITHIN THE WORD

But that's not all Grace is.

Grace shares its roots with another word we use often but rarely look at closely: gratitude. Both come from the Latin word *gratus*—meaning pleasing, thankful, freely given.

We talk about gratitude as something to practice—a list we keep, a ritual before sleep, a tool for optimism. Those gestures matter, but they can become a kind of performance. Counting blessings isn't the same as feeling blessed.

Grace reclaims gratitude from performance. It slows it down. It reminds you that gratitude isn't about tallying what's good—it's about Trusting that goodness still exists, even when the evidence is thin.

Gratitude without Grace can sound like pressure: be grateful, stay positive, look on the bright side. Grace softens that demand. It lets you whisper thanks from inside the ache. You can be grateful and grieving, grateful and tired, grateful and not yet okay. Grace gives that room.

And here's the quiet truth: when you give yourself Grace, you're already giving yourself gratitude. Not for what you've achieved, but for what you've endured. For showing up again. For staying kind to yourself when it would've been easier to be cruel.

Gratitude aimed inward is not self-indulgence—it's self-recognition. It's thanking the part of you that kept the fire burning low instead of letting it rage. The part that waited. The part that didn't give up.

That's the hidden reciprocity between the two: Grace creates the stillness; gratitude fills it. One opens the space; the other inhabits it. Together they form a quiet, sustaining loop—less a feeling, more a way of being.

Grace begins as recognition, but it lives as presence.

THE QUIETEST STRENGTH IN THE ROOM

And yet there's something about Grace that can't be taught.

It doesn't announce itself.

It doesn't demand your attention.

It simply is.

It doesn't need to arrive first.

It just needs to arrive.

Grace isn't the loudest principle in the room—far from it.

PRODUCTIVENESS

It's the one that sits quietly in the corner, watching. Waiting.
Holding space.

And yet it may be the most essential.

Because Grace is what holds the rest of it together.

Without Grace, Humanness feels like failure.

Without Grace, Prudence becomes rigidity.

Without Grace, Nuance becomes noise.

Without Grace, Trust fractures.

Without Grace, Willpower shatters.

Grace, in this book, isn't about elegance or divine mercy. It's the kind of compassion that stays steady in the storm—a quiet strength that allows space for imperfection.

Grace is the principle that lets the others breathe.

It doesn't override effort. It doesn't dismiss struggle.

It simply says: "You are allowed to be in process."

Not polished. Not perfected.

Just present.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE

I used to feed the ducks down the street with my daughter
when she was young.

A little pond, tucked away not far from where we live.

We'd toss torn bread into the water and watch them scramble.
Flap. Glide.

Lately, I still visit that pond.

Not as often. Not to feed. Just to watch.

And it's different now.

I see them move with a kind of steady Grace—sliding across
the surface with barely a ripple, even though I know their
little legs are paddling like mad underneath. That's the thing
about Grace. It's not about stillness—it's about how you carry
the struggle.

You're still moving.

Still working.

Still waiting.

But with softness.

That's Grace.

Not the calm above.

But the churn below, held gently.

REDEFINING EVERYTHING

The irony of Buckley's album is that it never got a follow-up.

No second LP. No victory lap.

And yet *Grace* became a kind of permission slip for artists to let things be messy. Raw. Unfinished in the best way.

It redefined what a debut could be—not as a launchpad, but as a statement.

A still point.

When I played *Grace* on the air, I wasn't just choosing a song.

I was participating in something quieter, more potent than playlists or airtime quotas.

I was redefining myself.

Not with every play. Not with every track.

But slowly. Over time.

Grace got into my bloodstream.

It helped me see that I didn't need to rush.

Didn't need to be first.

Didn't need to be everything.

I just needed to be ... enough.

I felt that truth while writing this book. At one point, I was forcing it—trying to meet imaginary deadlines, shaping sentences before they'd fully formed. Each writing session felt like a sprint, and the words showed it: brittle, rushed, lifeless. I'd forgotten that time isn't just something to schedule—it's something to inhabit.

So I stepped back. I gave the book—and myself—space. I wrote less some days, but listened more. I let certain chapters breathe, returning when they felt ready rather than when the calendar said I should. Slowly, the work softened. The sentences started to sound like me again.

That's when Grace truly settled in.

It taught me that meaningful writing—and meaningful living—requires space as much as time. That enough isn't a finish line. It's a feeling.

And once I stopped trying to control the pace, the book began to find its own.

THE FIRE IS REAL

Let's go back to that moment in Buckley's *Grace*—the one where time clicks forward and the fire builds beneath it.

Time clicks.

Even now—while you read this.

Even now—while I write it.

PRODUCTIVENESS

We are always waiting in the fire.

Waiting for the email to arrive.

Waiting for the kids to fall asleep.

Waiting for the idea to feel ready.

Waiting for our energy to come back.

Waiting for the season to change.

Waiting for the ache to ease.

Grace isn't about speeding that process up.

It's about not collapsing in the middle of it.

It's the breath you take when you can't control the outcome.

The shrug you offer instead of the spiral.

The gentle nod to your past self who did their best with what they knew.

Grace doesn't erase the fire.

It teaches you how to wait inside it.

AN UNHURRIED RELATIONSHIP

We don't just need Grace from others.

We need it from time itself.

Time that doesn't demand every minute be filled.

Time that makes room for reflection.

Time that allows for rhythms—not just routines.

This is where productiveness departs from productivity.

Productivity will measure your output.

Productiveness remembers your worth.

Productivity will call time a resource.

Productiveness will call it a relationship.

And every relationship—especially the good ones—requires Grace.

I see this most clearly in my closest relationships. There are moments when I want to move faster—resolve a disagreement quickly, finish a conversation neatly, tidy the emotional edges. But relationships don't work that way. They need the same spaciousness that meaningful work does.

When I practice Grace, it means pausing before I respond. Letting silence sit between sentences. Allowing someone else's timeline to take precedence over mine. With my family, it might mean ending a workday early even when I feel "in flow." With friends, it's listening without trying to fix.

Grace gives relationships breathing room—the same kind that productiveness gives to time. It reminds me that connection, like creation, deepens when I stop trying to control the pace and start honouring the presence.

GRACE AS A FILTER

There's a reason this principle comes early in the book.

Not because it's easy.

But because without it, the others get misused.

Nuance turns into overthinking.

Prudence becomes paralysis.

Will hardens into force.

Grace keeps the edges soft.

It teaches you how to pause without guilt.

How to try again without shame.

How to let go without losing yourself.

It's not a productivity hack.

It's a human necessity.

And in a world that will constantly try to pull you into the next thing—

to hurry you through heartbreak, to monetize your mornings, to flatten your feelings into frameworks—

Grace lets you stay.

Just a little longer.

A FINAL NOTE FROM THE MOONLIT HOURS

I'm still a night owl.

Still more likely to hear the whisper of wisdom at midnight
than over my morning coffee.

And I still play *Grace*.

Not as often. Not out loud.

But it hums beneath the surface of my life.

It reminds me that I don't need to be prolific to be present.

That depth doesn't require speed.

That the work that matters is rarely the work that rushes.

So if this book has any invitation so far—

if Humanness and Prudence have asked you to see
yourself differently—

Grace asks you to stay with yourself.

Even when it hurts.

Even when you doubt.

Even when the clock keeps clicking.

Grace won't stop the fire. But it will wait with you.

Grace doesn't erase effort; it softens it.

It reminds you that ease isn't the opposite of work, but the quality that lets work endure.

To live with Grace is to keep moving, but without the violence of hurry—to let time pass through you instead of trying to conquer it.

THE STILLNESS BEFORE THE STEP

Grace lets you stay.

But eventually, you must move again.

And when you do—when the fire has quieted, or simply when you're ready to walk through it—you'll want more than willpower.

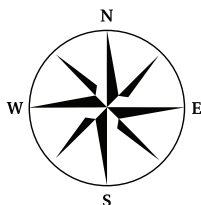
You'll want discernment.

You'll want to move with purpose, not panic.

You'll want Prudence.

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PRUDENCE



“Dear Prudence.”

I remember hearing “Dear Prudence” and wondering:

What if John wasn’t singing to a woman?

What if he was singing to something else—

something quieter, older, easily overlooked?

A principle.

A presence.

Prudence not as a person,

but as a possibility.

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A DIFFERENT KIND OF MUSE

The song was written in 1968 while the Beatles were in India, studying meditation with the Maharishi. The “Prudence” in question was Prudence Farrow—Mia Farrow’s sister—who had become so deeply absorbed in her spiritual practice that she isolated herself from the group. Lennon’s song was his invitation for her to rejoin the world, to step back into the light.

It’s a beautiful image—this tension between stillness and participation, solitude and reentry. But when I heard that line, I didn’t picture a reclusive woman in a room. I pictured the principle of discernment.

The one that hides behind hesitation.

The one we forget how to access in the frenzy of doing.

The one that doesn’t shout—but watches, weighs, waits.

In the song, Lennon begins with what is—light, sky, presence—and then turns observation into invitation.

Not a demand.

Not a push.

Just an invitation.

To emerge.

To engage.

To choose.

SINGING TO THE QUALITY, NOT THE CHARACTER

That's how Prudence began to live in me—not just as a Beatles footnote, but as a quality I wanted more of.

Not just in meditation or spiritual retreat, but in the thick of my daily life.

I'd play that song and think:

What if this is how I approached my choices?

What if I let the day greet me with gentleness?

What if I stopped confusing action with alignment?
And more importantly:

What if I stopped treating pause as weakness?

I had to learn that in real time.

Not long ago, I found myself drowning in overlapping commitments—content deadlines, community events, a writing schedule that looked good on paper but left no space for breath. My instinct was the same as always: push through, keep producing, prove I could hold it all together. But the more I forced it, the messier everything became. My writing grew thin. My patience wore down.

So I tried something different. I paused. Not dramatically—just long enough to step back from the noise. I let one project sit untouched for a week. I postponed a workshop. I created

space that felt, at first, like losing ground. But it wasn't. That pause clarified what mattered, what could wait, and what didn't belong on my plate at all.

That's when Prudence clicked into place. The pause wasn't a retreat—it was a return. A way of choosing from awareness instead of adrenaline. And when I moved forward again, the work had more weight, more resonance, more *me* in it.

In this book, Prudence isn't about caution or restraint alone. It's about discernment—the wisdom to know when to act and when to wait. It's less about hesitation and more about harmony: choosing with awareness, not anxiety.

THE CREATIVE ACT OF PRUDENCE

In *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, Rick Rubin writes that “the audience comes first.”

Not in the sense of chasing approval,

but in remembering who the work is for.

Creation, he suggests, is an act of awareness—

a conversation rather than a confession.

That idea lives close to what I mean by Prudence.

It's not hesitation.

It's consideration.

PRODUCTIVENESS

When I imagine (pun intended) Lennon writing to Prudence
rather than about her,

I see the same gesture Rubin describes—

an artist reaching outward instead of inward,

offering the song as an invitation, not an explanation.

The artist who creates with the audience in mind

isn't diluting their work;

they're shaping it to be received.

If I were overly concerned about what you might think,

I'd probably call that idea a bridge too far.

But the fact that you're still here—that you didn't scoff and
close the book—proves the point.

Prudence doesn't suppress boldness.

It refines it.

It's what allows risk to resonate.

Prudence doesn't dull the edge;

it decides where the blade belongs.

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THE PRINCIPLE OF PRUDENCE

Prudence isn't restraint for the sake of safety.

It's the space that lets wisdom speak.

It doesn't shrink you. It steadies you.

It's not about perfect timing or bulletproof logic.

It's about thoughtful timing. Intentional motion.

It asks:

"Are you moving forward with care—or just moving?"

That's where the heart of this principle lives.

In the breath before the yes.

In the soft "no" that comes from clarity, not fear.

In the refusal to rush toward ruin—just because you can.

Prudence isn't panic. It's presence.

THE THREE REALMS OF PRODUCTIVENESS

Prudence doesn't live at the extremes.

It lives between them.

But the extremes are tempting—loud, shiny, and familiar. We spend much of our time pulled between two poles:

1. THE RUTHLESS REALM

This is where productivity becomes performance. Where systems turn rigid and people turn brittle.

You know this place.

It glorifies hustle.

It tracks every metric.

It rewards urgency over alignment.

Here, the calendar isn't a guide—it's a whip.

You might meet someone like Jordan here:

Jordan wakes up at 5 a.m. Journals at 5:15. He colour-codes his calendar, tracks every habit, measures everything. He hasn't taken a vacation in three years.

When his daughter asks for help with a school project, he responds:

"Let's schedule it for Saturday between 2 and 3."

He's admired. Efficient. Relentless.

And deeply tired.

The Ruthless Realm doesn't ask if the work is meaningful. Only if it's done. It says:

"You should've already finished this."

And if you haven't? It implies something's wrong with you.

Jordan doesn't need more optimization. He needs permission to pause. He needs Prudence—the kind that whispers:

“What is this pace protecting you from feeling?”

2. THE RECKLESS REALM

This one feels like freedom. Until it doesn't.

You meet people like Sienna here:

Sienna has seventeen notebooks. Five project management apps. Twelve open tabs. And six half-finished courses she swears she'll finish “soon.”

She's not lazy. She's full of ideas. Big ones. Bold ones. She just can't pick a lane. Each new possibility feels like the one. She says things like:

“I do my best work under pressure.”

“Structure kills my creativity.”

“I need to feel it before I do it.”

But she's tired of waiting to feel it. Tired of starting strong and disappearing midway. Sienna doesn't need more pressure.

She needs more perspective.

She needs Prudence—the kind that says:

“Not everything exciting is aligned.

Not everything urgent is important.”

3. THE REASONED REALM

This is where Prudence lives.

Not in perfection.

In presence.

There’s a reason this isn’t called the Reason Realm or the Reasonable Realm. Reasonable describes something moderate—acceptable to others, rarely daring. But reasoned carries motion. The “-ed” matters. It means shaped by reason, not ruled by it.

The Reasoned Realm is where thought and feeling have been tempered through experience—decisions not just made, but matured. It’s reason lived, not reason imagined.

You’ll meet someone like Dev here:

Dev doesn’t wake up at 5.

He doesn’t run on chaos either.

He sets three clear priorities for the week—and gives each one room to breathe.

He builds routines around values, not vibes.

He can pivot when life asks him to, without unravelling.

When something urgent hits, he doesn't react.

He breathes. Then chooses.

He says no with kindness.

He says yes with care.

The Reasoned Realm isn't balance—it's anchored choice.

It's not about avoiding the ruthless or the reckless.

It's about knowing when you've strayed too far—and finding your way back.

REASON LIVES WITHIN PRUDENCE

Reason lives within Prudence the way calm lives within breath—always present, waiting to steady you when the air grows thin.

If logic and emotion are the two hands that shape decision, reason is where they meet. Not neutrality, but translation—the space where sense and feeling inform one another.

Prudence gives that meeting rhythm. It's the quiet sense of when to lean into logic and when to let emotion speak. Without Prudence, reason hardens into position; with it, reason moves—a dance between clarity and compassion.

That's the pulse of the Reasoned Realm: thought learning empathy, emotion learning restraint. Prudence keeps time, reminding you when to shift—and that you can.

PRUDENCE AS YOUR COMPASS

You won't live in the Reasoned Realm all the time. That's not the goal.

There will be ruthless days.
There will be reckless nights.
You're human.

Prudence isn't perfection. It's the practice of return—the compass that steadies you when the map gets blurry.

It reminds you that clarity is something you come back to, not something you conquer. Some days you'll wake up in the Ruthless Realm, ruled by urgency and expectation. Other days you'll drift into the Reckless One, chasing every spark that lights your mind.

You won't always notice right away, and that's okay. Prudence doesn't demand flawless balance. It asks only that you notice where you are, pause without punishment, and choose your way back to what matters.

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GRACE HELPS YOU MOVE. PRUDENCE HELPS YOU SEE.

These realms aren't problems to solve.

They're places you pass through.

Grace allows you to move through them without shame.

To course-correct gently.

To return to your centre without collapsing from the weight of being off-track.

Prudence is the one who points to the signs and says:

“You've been here before.

You know how this one feels.

Let's shift.”

You don't force your way into the Reasoned Realm.

You return to it.

Through practice.

Through presence.

Through permission.

And the more often you do that, the more easily you'll recognize the signs.

THE MAP ISN'T FIXED—BUT YOU CAN STILL FIND YOUR WAY

This is what productiveness asks of you:

Not to always get it right.

But to move with care when you know what's right—for now.

To stay rooted in rhythm, not rigidity.

To navigate with intention—not just instinct.

Prudence is not control.

It's discernment.

And in a world that will try to convince you that speed is wisdom,

Prudence is the one that quietly reminds you:

“Wisdom knows when to wait.”

JUST LONG ENOUGH

The world doesn't make it easy to pause.

It rewards the rush.

It prizes the loud.

It pushes you to choose quickly, act decisively, move faster.

But Prudence doesn't work that way.

She doesn't push.

She doesn't demand.

She waits—just long enough for you to see clearly.

To feel fully.

To choose wisely.

In the song's closing moments, Lennon circles back on himself—urging attention outward, then inward.

Not to distract—but to widen.

Not to decorate—but to orient.

The invitation wasn't just to act.

It was to notice.

That's what Prudence does.

She gives you just enough time to hear what's beneath the noise.

Just enough space to choose what matters.

Just enough clarity to see that the world isn't black and white.

Prudence truly is, as Lennon sings, beautiful.

It's also nuanced. And that's where we go next.

INTERLUDE: TIME

click.

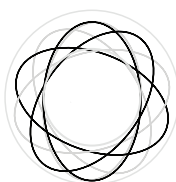
click.

click.

a reminder: time moves,
even when we don't.

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NUANCE



“What we are witnessing right now is the death of Nuance.”

Terry Crews said this on *The Rich Roll Podcast*, lamenting a cultural moment where dialogue has been replaced by shouting, and understanding has been replaced by performance. He wasn’t just talking about politics or daytime television—he was naming a broader condition of our age. Too many of us reach for absolutes when what life really requires is the courage to live in the grey.

Crews is the perfect messenger for this reminder because he resists being one thing. Long before he became a household name, he was on the football field, playing as a defensive end and linebacker in the NFL. That career, like that of many pro athletes, was short-lived, and when it ended, he pivoted to acting. At first, nobody expected much. But then *White Chicks* happened—a movie not remembered for critical

acclaim but which undeniably put Crews in the spotlight. He leaned into comedy, lampooning his own tough-guy image, and in doing so, carved out a distinctive place in popular culture. From there, he built a career that has ranged from sitcoms like *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* to hosting *America's Got Talent*. And yet acting is only part of his story. He is also a painter, a musician, and an advocate for vulnerability and healing. He contains multitudes.

I saw this firsthand. I was on the set of *White Chicks* as a background performer. If you pause the film during the auction scene, you can actually spot me: no glasses, makeup piled thick, my collar still giving away just how pale I really am. On a film set, the rules are clear—background performers don't engage with the leads. You keep your head down, you do your job, and you fade into the background. Unless, of course, they approach you first.

And Crews approached. He was kind, generous, endearing. He treated background performers as people, not scenery. That may sound small, but anyone who's spent time on sets knows how unusual it can be. Many stars observe the rules of separation with strictness. Crews didn't. He understood Nuance. The rule said one thing—don't engage. The spirit of the work, the humanity of the moment, said something else—if connection is invited, step into it. He chose the middle path.

That openness reminded me of another set I worked on, *Lucky 7*, where Patrick Dempsey was shooting. At that time, he was already known for *Grey's Anatomy*, though for me, he had always been "the guy from *Can't Buy Me Love*." We were

walking together between locations, down Waddington Alley in Victoria. It was a short walk, maybe a few minutes, but we struck up a conversation about improv. He admired it—the creativity, the spontaneity. That brief exchange stuck with me, not because of what was said, but because he took the time. Once again, Nuance was at play. The rule of separation was there, but so was the opening for connection.

THE LEADERSHIP OF NUANCE

These small encounters taught me something about leadership. Leaders understand Nuance. They know that rules are necessary but not sufficient. They know that absolutes can guide us but cannot solve everything.

Take the famous Star Trek scenario: the Kobayashi Maru. It was a no-win test designed to measure a captain's ability to face certain defeat. James T. Kirk refused the premise. He reprogrammed the simulation to make victory possible. Some saw that as cheating. But in truth, it was leadership. Kirk saw the false binary—win or lose—and chose a third way. He embraced Nuance.

That's what Nuance is: not compromise for compromise's sake but creativity in the face of false choices. It's the recognition that absolutes often lock us into corners, while Nuance opens doors we didn't know existed.

When Terry Crews laments the “death of Nuance,” he's pointing to this danger: the erosion of our ability to think in layers, to see possibilities beyond the loudest extremes.

But productiveness—the lived experience of a meaningful, sustainable, human life—depends on Nuance.

THE SEDUCTION OF ABSOLUTES

Why, then, are we so tempted by absolutes?

Because absolutes feel safe. They give us the illusion of certainty. They let us believe the world can be carved cleanly into categories: good or bad, right or wrong, productive or unproductive. Absolutes are efficient, at least on the surface. But they come at the cost of accuracy and depth.

Look at how productivity has been flattened into efficiency alone. “Did you do more? Did you do it faster?” That’s the only metric many workplaces care about. It’s easy to measure tasks completed per hour, but harder to measure the quality of the work, the sustainability of the pace, or the meaning of the outcome. Absolutism thrives in what is countable, even when the countable is not what matters most.

Time suffers the same distortion. We treat it like money—something to be saved, hoarded, or accumulated. But time doesn’t work that way. It flows, whether we acknowledge it or not. You can’t stockpile an hour to spend later. Yet productivity advice is filled with the illusion that if you just optimize enough, you’ll “gain” more time. That illusion is comforting. But it’s false.

This tendency to flatten complexity is what I call Nuance Blindness: the failure—or refusal—to see shades of grey.

Sometimes it's a choice; sometimes it's simply the cultural default. And then there's its more deliberate cousin: Nuance Erasure, which happens when systems actively suppress Nuance because absolutes are easier to control, easier to market, easier to enforce. Both forms rob us of agency.

THE MIDDLE IS VAST

One of the biggest lies of absolutism is that the middle is small, a narrow compromise between extremes. But the truth is, the middle is vast. Between black and white, there are infinite shades of grey.

George Harrison demonstrated this in his paradoxical views on wealth. On one hand, he criticized materialism and excess. On the other, he complained bitterly about the high taxes that cut into his earnings. Some called that hypocrisy. I call it humanity. He could see that money could corrupt and yet also feel the sting of losing so much of what he had earned. Both perspectives were valid. To live with Nuance is to hold paradox without forcing it into a single, simple answer.

Even in everyday life, we know this instinctively. Think of adjusting the shower dial. Nobody expects to hit the perfect temperature instantly. We move it back and forth, tolerating too hot or too cold until we find something close to “just right.” That's not failure—it's Nuance. Productiveness requires the same: not rigid answers, not total drift, but responsiveness.

Sometimes Nuance doesn't whisper—it body-slams.

BETWEEN THE ROPES

For decades, professional wrestling ran on absolutes. Heroes in white trunks fought villains in black hats. The good guys—the faces—stood for justice, while the heels broke every rule in sight. The stories were clean. The cheers predictable.

Then the '90s hit, and simplicity stopped selling. Audiences wanted something murkier, more human. The “Attitude Era” blurred the boundaries: Stone Cold Steve Austin flipped off his boss and got a hero’s ovation. The Rock turned arrogance into charm. The supposed villains got cheered; the clean-cut heroes got booed. The crowd stopped asking who was right—they started asking who was real.

But when wrestling tries too hard to imitate reality, it loses the honesty of its own artifice. During the first Gulf War, the WWF turned the patriotic Sergeant Slaughter into an Iraqi sympathizer to feud with the all-American Hulk Hogan. It worked for a while—the crowd booed on cue—but over time, people grew uneasy. The story hit too close to home. The roles were too rigid, too moralistic, too obvious. And the irony is that, outside the ring, the “villain” often came off as humble and kind, while the “hero” carried an ego the size of his own action-figure line. Depending on who you asked, their real-life roles were reversed.

That’s the thing about Nuance: it refuses to stay in costume. The more you insist on pure good or pure evil, the less believable either one becomes.

Few people understand that balance between performance and truth like Rick Rubin. A bearded, barefoot producer who helped shape everyone from Johnny Cash to Jay-Z, Rubin once quietly funded Smoky Mountain Wrestling—a small regional promotion known for its storytelling and grit. Whether in a recording studio or a wrestling ring, his focus was the same: strip away the spectacle until what's left feels real.

In *The Productivity Diet*, I wrote that absolutes offer the comfort of certainty but the cost of growth. The moment a rule hardens into a law, it stops serving you. The same holds true beyond productivity—in art, leadership, and even the stories we tell about heroes and villains. Wrestling's shift away from moral absolutes mirrored that truth. What kept it alive wasn't its certainty but its capacity to evolve.

The most compelling performers, like the most productive lives, don't live at the extremes. They live in motion—adjusting, adapting, revealing new shades as they go.

Maybe that's why I've always seen wrestling as a kind of mirror. It's theatre that admits it's theatre—and somehow, that honesty makes it truer than most things that claim to be real.

THE QUANTUM ANALOGY

Science gives us another metaphor. Classical physics is built on absolutes: an object is here or there, moving at one speed or another. But quantum mechanics shattered that picture.

At the smallest scales, particles exist not in absolutes but in probabilities, in states of uncertainty.

Life is much the same. It doesn't unfold neatly into binaries. It unfolds in spectrums, probabilities, and paradoxes. Productivity, too, is not a matter of "done" or "not done." It is about degrees of progress, states of engagement, layers of meaning.

To embrace Nuance is to live more like a quantum physicist: accepting uncertainty not as failure but as possibility.

PRACTICING NUANCE

It's one thing to understand Nuance as a concept, but another to live it out. Too often, we nod our heads at the idea of Nuance and then rush back into the comfort of absolutes because they feel easier to manage. Practicing Nuance is about cultivating habits that allow us to stay with complexity rather than retreat from it.

So how do we practice Nuance in daily life?

HOLD CONTRADICTIONS.

Allow yourself to be both disciplined *and* flexible, both ambitious *and* content. When I'm writing, I'll often start the day with a plan for what I want to tackle. But as the words take shape, the real work might lead me somewhere else entirely. Some days require structure;

others require surrender. The Nuance is in allowing both to coexist.

EXPAND YOUR METRICS.

Measure quality, meaning, and sustainability alongside output. For me, this means checking more than whether I “finished the chapter.” I also ask: *Did the work feel true? Did it move something forward inside me? Can I return to this pace tomorrow without resentment?* These aren’t numerical metrics—but they’re trackable. I’ll jot a simple mark in the margin (“+ / = / -”) to capture whether the session felt aligned. Over time, those marks form a kind of map: a pattern of when I’m forcing the work and when the work is inviting me in.

PAUSE BEFORE JUDGING.

When you catch yourself in binaries—success/failure, productive/unproductive—ask: *What lies between?* Some of my best insights appear on days when the output is unusually small. Nuance lets those days count, too.

VALUE RESPONSIVENESS.

Like adjusting the shower dial, treat productivity as iterative. TimeCrafting itself grew this way. I didn’t design the framework in one sweep; it shifted with each season of my life. New themes emerged. Old ones fell away.

The method strengthened because it stayed responsive—not rigid.

DEFEND NUANCE.

Push back against cultures and systems that erase it. Sometimes it's choosing not to work at the pace expected of you. Other times it's asking for clarity instead of assuming urgency. Nuance lives when we protect the space around it.

These practices are simple to name but challenging to sustain, especially in a culture that rewards absolutes and speed. But they're worth it. The more we practice Nuance, the more resilient we become—not just in how we manage our time, but in how we navigate relationships, decisions, and setbacks. Nuance isn't just a mindset shift; it's a daily discipline that shapes how productiveness takes root in our lives.

THE ARTISTRY OF NUANCE

Let's return to Terry Crews. His lament about the death of Nuance wasn't just a complaint—it was an invitation. An invitation to see people, and ourselves, as layered, paradoxical, complex. To resist caricature. To refuse false binaries.

Crews embodies this by being more than one thing: athlete, actor, painter, advocate. My own memory of him on set confirmed it: the way he engaged with people he didn't have

PRODUCTIVENESS

to. That's artistry. Not just in paint or performance, but in how we live.

If we want lives of productiveness—not just output, but meaning—we must reclaim Nuance. We must learn to see in shades, to live in paradox, to find paths beyond false choices. Because Nuance isn't the enemy of productivity—Nuance is where productiveness lives.

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TOLERANCE



If Nuance teaches us to see beyond binary thinking, Tolerance gives us the capacity to live in the middle.

Nuance opens up a world of possibility. It shows us that productivity isn't just about being efficient or ineffective. It invites us to reflect, to resist extremes, to ask better questions. But Nuance on its own can be overwhelming. If you don't know how to operate inside that in-between space, you can fall back into absolutism out of sheer exhaustion.

That's where Tolerance comes in.

Tolerance is what makes Nuance usable.

But we need to be clear: Tolerance isn't about putting up with bad behaviour or lowering standards. It's not about moral relativism. In the realm of productiveness, Tolerance is about how much variation we allow in pursuit of what matters. It's about range. About resilience. About knowing the difference between a miss and a meaningful deviation.

And I didn't learn this from a textbook.

I learned it from watching *Ted Lasso*.

THE DART GAME AND THE WALT WHITMAN QUOTE

There's a scene in the first season of *Ted Lasso* where Ted challenges Rupert—one of the show's central antagonists—to a game of darts. Rupert accepts with arrogant glee. He assumes Ted is clueless. Ted seems outmatched—until he isn't.

As Ted calmly begins landing shot after shot, he delivers a quiet monologue. He recalls seeing a quote once—attributed to Walt Whitman:

“Be curious, not judgmental.”

People had spent their lives judging him, assuming he was naive or incapable, when really they just hadn't asked questions. They hadn't been curious. And in that moment, we realize: Ted isn't just good at darts—he's surgical. Precise. But also ... smart. Strategic.

As I watched, that quote stuck with me—but what really caught my attention was how Ted played.

Because if you didn't grow up playing darts, you might assume—as I did—that the goal is to hit the bullseye. It's in the centre. It looks like success.

But that's not the target seasoned players aim for.

In competitive darts, the most strategic target is the triple-20: a small sliver of space worth the most points. It's not in the centre. In fact, aiming for the bullseye over and over again is inefficient. It's the wrong goal.

That realization hit me hard. Not just because I'd misunderstood the game—but because I saw myself in it. How often had I aimed for the “centre” of something, thinking it was the point when it wasn't?

How often had I exhausted myself chasing the wrong kind of precision?

PRECISION, ACCURACY, AND TOLERANCE: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

This is where we need to slow down. Because people often use words like precision, accuracy, and Tolerance interchangeably—but they are not the same.

Let's define them:

- **Accuracy** is how close a result comes to a known or desired value. It's about correctness.
- **Precision** is how consistently you can replicate a result, even if it's not accurate. It's about repeatability.

- **Tolerance** is the acceptable amount of variation from a desired value. It's about range—what's good enough, safe enough, effective enough.

You can be precise but not accurate—like someone who always hits the same wrong spot on the dartboard. And you can be accurate without being precise—occasionally landing on the target by chance but without control.

But Tolerance? Tolerance asks: How far off can we be and still call this a success?

In productivity, that might mean:

- Finishing a task an hour later than planned ... but still within the day.
- Delivering a project that meets expectations ... even if it doesn't exceed them.
- Missing a theme day ... but capturing the spirit of it in another block of time.

Precision restricts. Tolerance widens.

Precision demands repetition. Tolerance allows resilience.

WHAT ENGINEERS (AND GOLDRATT) KNOW THAT WE FORGET

If you've read Simon Winchester's *The Perfectionists*, you know just how central Tolerance is to engineering. Machines that function flawlessly aren't just "perfect"—they're built to tolerate imperfection. Microns of wiggle room. Measured leeway. Defined ranges.

Too much precision and things seize up. Too little, and they fall apart. The genius is in the calibration.

This is echoed in *The Goal* by Eliyahu Goldratt. In that book, a manufacturing plant is focused on optimizing every single station—each department trying to maximize its own productivity.

But the system doesn't work.

Why?

Because precision in one part of the system can create a bottleneck elsewhere. They were aiming for the wrong thing. The "goal" of the system wasn't maximum output at each station—it was throughput. Flow. Forward motion.

Once they recognize that, they stop obsessing over local precision and start accepting broader ranges—more Tolerance—across the system. And that's what allows them to improve the whole.

What gets measured gets managed, yes. But what gets misunderstood gets misaligned.

And misalignment is the enemy of Efficacy.

TOLERANCE ISN'T JUST FOR MACHINES

So here's the thing: we already embrace Tolerance in everyday life. Especially when it comes to art.

Take music.

Lately, I've been listening to "Let Down" by Radiohead. But not just the original—a beautiful cover by Mack Loren. It's haunting. Slow. Spacious. And undeniably different from the original.

But it's still "Let Down."

It's not a precise replica—and it shouldn't be. Because when an artist tries to replicate a song too precisely, it becomes hollow. It becomes tribute. Karaoke. A shadow.

What makes Loren's version special is its divergence. It honours the soul of the song without copying its body. It stays within range of the original—but widens the emotional landscape.

We love this in music.

We celebrate reinterpretation in cuisine. We honour remixes in design.

So why do we punish ourselves for deviation in productivity?

Why do we think missing a self-imposed target means the day was a failure?

Why do we ignore what's working just because it didn't match the plan exactly?

The world gives us examples of Tolerance everywhere. It's time we give ourselves the same Grace.

THE PATIENCE WITHIN TOLERANCE

Patience is where Tolerance meets time. It's the willingness to give something both the space and the duration it needs to take shape.

Robert Grudin called patience “the wisdom of time—the only channel through which time’s expansiveness and quiet power can become properties of human Will.” He saw it as the bridge between Will and time, the way quiet, deliberate work turns intention into endurance. He even described it as “the moral virtue which most nearly approaches pure pleasure,” because it’s not about waiting; it’s about working in rhythm with what you’re making.

When you widen your Tolerance, you create room for patience to grow. You stop forcing the moment. You stop measuring every beat. And in doing so, you allow time to do its part.

Patience doesn't mean idleness. It means returning with steadiness. It's the Trust that depth takes repetition, that understanding needs return visits. The spider doesn't weave the web by rushing. She weaves because the act itself holds her focus.

Writing this book is an act of patience. So is any long arc of meaningful work. You return to the same material, the same questions, the same doubts—and each time, something small refines. The threads strengthen. The picture widens.

Every principle in this book carries an inner companion—something that gives it life. Reason lives within Prudence, guiding it toward clarity. Gratitude lives within Grace, keeping it humble. And patience lives within Tolerance, anchoring it in time.

Tolerance without patience becomes fragile. It snaps at the first sign of delay. But when patience is present, Tolerance becomes durable. It can absorb change without losing integrity. It understands that precision takes time to reveal itself, and that time itself is part of the craft.

Tolerance gives things room to move.

Patience gives them time to mature.

Together, they turn effort into craft and process into practice.

When patience steadies Tolerance, what emerges isn't restraint—it's rhythm. The quiet confidence that what's within range will, in time, find its form.

Productiveness depends on this kind of Tolerance—not just of people or outcomes, but of pace. The ability to stay steady while the result takes the long way home.

Because meaning, like mastery, rarely arrives on schedule.

We recognize Tolerance in what we hear and see. But living it—holding that same measured openness inside ourselves—takes something else entirely.

WHAT TOLERANCE LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

In the context of productiveness, Tolerance looks like:

- Accepting that themed days won't always be perfectly executed—but that showing up for the theme in some capacity still builds momentum.
- Understanding that every system has a margin of error—and instead of trying to eliminate it, designing around it.
- Choosing what matters most to hit precisely—and allowing the rest to land within range.

This is not about settling. It's about strategic flexibility.

You're not abandoning standards. You're aligning with reality.

You're not making excuses. You're building endurance.

You're not saying, "Whatever happens, happens." You're saying, "I know my range—and I Trust it."

Tolerance allows you to recognize when something is good enough to move forward. It trains your instincts. And it protects your energy so that when precision is necessary, you're not too depleted to deliver.

FROM TOLERANCE TO EFFICACY

And that's what leads us to Efficacy.

Because once you stop chasing perfection for its own sake, you can start channeling your attention into what actually works.

You begin to evaluate based on outcomes—not optics.

You shift from impressing to impacting.

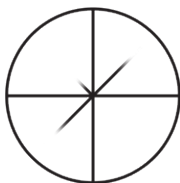
You become productively human—not just efficiently robotic.

Tolerance gives you the room. Efficacy shows you how to move within it—with purpose, with awareness, and with results that matter.

We don't need to be perfectly productive. We need to be productively effective.

And now that we understand the strength of Tolerance, we're ready to explore what Efficacy really means.

EFFICACY



In *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, author James Gleick chronicled how the modern world mistook speed for progress. “We are in a rush because we are in a rush,” he observed—a self-perpetuating feedback loop where acceleration becomes its own reward. We build faster machines, send faster messages, and live on faster timelines, yet somehow feel more behind than ever. Efficiency, Gleick warned, was supposed to save time, but it mostly taught us to fear wasting it.

Gleick’s fascination with time didn’t end there. In *Time Travel: A History*, he explored how the very idea of stepping outside time—slipping backward or forward—reveals our unease with living inside it. The fantasy of time travel isn’t just about adventure; it’s about control. We want to undo, redo, and pre-do. But, as Gleick points out, time doesn’t bend

to willpower or speed—it unfolds. It requires participation, not escape.

And that's where Efficacy comes in.

Efficiency and effectiveness chase control. Efficacy works with reality—it asks how we can shape time, not outpace it.

EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Let's start by clarifying what these words—efficiency and effectiveness—*actually* mean.

Efficiency is about ratios—output versus input. It's measured in numbers. We see it in government departments and corporate mandates: cut costs, streamline processes, trim time. Efficiency makes sense when you're running a machine. It falls short when you're running a life.

Effectiveness seems like an improvement. It asks whether you achieved your intended result. Did the marketing campaign hit its goal? Did the workout deliver fitness gains? Did the meeting solve the problem? But effectiveness still keeps us tethered to outcomes and optics—it's focused on whether you hit the target, not whether it was the right target in the first place.

Both efficiency and effectiveness are valuable, but neither is sufficient.

EFFICACY DEFINED

Efficacy is different.

Efficacy speaks to the power to produce a desired result. It doesn't obsess over ratios like efficiency does, nor does it merely check boxes the way effectiveness does. Efficacy is about capacity. It's about potency. It's about creating the conditions where the right results can actually happen.

This is why Efficacy belongs as a principle of productiveness.

Productiveness is about more than doing things right (efficiency) or even doing the right things (effectiveness). It's about ensuring that the way you work, live, and choose creates real possibility. It means fostering the conditions that make your results not just possible but probable.

COSTCO AS A MODEL OF EFFICACY

I know Costco well—not just as a shopper but as someone who worked there from 1995 to 2006. During that time, I learned that Costco's strength wasn't just efficiency or effectiveness. It was Efficacy.

Let me give you an example.

When I was in charge of the service deli, we'd occasionally have visits from the head office executives—what we called a “walk.” Before they arrived, our warehouse manager would want everything to look perfect. If they were coming on a

Tuesday, I was told to make sure the coffin coolers—those deep refrigerated bins where people grab items like chicken pot pies and shepherd's pies—were completely full.

So that's what I did. As a new supervisor, I filled them to the brim. It looked great. It was efficient because I did exactly what I was told, and it was effective in the sense that the executives saw full displays.

But there was a problem. Products like chicken pot pies and shepherd's pies had limited shelf lives. If I loaded the cooler on Tuesday, much of that stock would be approaching expiry by Friday—just as we were heading into the weekend, our busiest sales period. That meant I was not only overstocking on a slow day but also undercutting our ability to sell fresh product when demand was highest.

And the cost wasn't just in food waste. It was in payroll. We had staff making product that wasn't going to sell—work hours devoted to the illusion of productivity. In trying to look efficient for the executives, I was burning resources twice: wasted food and wasted labour. From top to bottom, the system wasn't working.

That's efficiency and effectiveness working against the bigger picture.

As I grew more seasoned, I realized there was a better way. Instead of stuffing the coolers, I raised the bottom racks so the bins still looked full but held less product during the slower early part of the week. By the time Friday came, we'd stock more heavily, knowing weekend traffic would move

the product. (That's clearly not a problem now, as I've seen in visits to my old stomping grounds—the stores are busy all the time. But back then, in a newer building, weekdays were quieter.)

If questioned about the change, I could point to sales data: early-week numbers didn't justify full coolers, and waste hurt the bottom line.

That wasn't just efficient. That wasn't just effective. That was efficacious.

It created the condition for success—the warehouse looked good for the executives, we reduced spoilage, we avoided unnecessary payroll costs, and we aligned production with actual customer flow.

And that's the essence of Efficacy: knowing the system well enough and having the Prudence and flexibility to shape it so that results are not just immediate but sustainable. Costco as a company thrives because its systems create those kinds of conditions—whether it's the Trust built with members, the consistency of the rotisserie chicken, or, yes, a supervisor raising a rack in a coffin cooler on a Tuesday to ensure fresh prepared foods were available when they were needed most.

THREE CLASSIC TACTICS, THREE DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

When it comes to personal productivity, a few classic methods stand out. Each one is useful. Each one has endured for a

reason. But each also reveals the limits of chasing efficiency or effectiveness without embracing Efficacy.

THE IVY LEE METHOD: EFFICIENCY ON PAPER

In 1918, Bethlehem Steel president Charles Schwab hired productivity consultant Ivy Lee. Lee suggested a simple ritual: at the end of each workday, executives should write down the six most important tasks for tomorrow, rank them, and then work through them one by one.

The Ivy Lee Method is efficient—no wasted time deciding what to do next. It is effective—if the six tasks are well chosen, progress is inevitable. But is it efficacious? That depends entirely on the quality of the choices. Without Prudence or reflection, you risk being very efficient and very effective at the wrong six things.

MOTION THEORY: FROM STOPWATCH TO CHOICE

Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, pioneers of time-and-motion studies, spent the early twentieth century filming workers and breaking tasks down into basic motions, which they called “therbligs.” Their goal was efficiency—to shave seconds, eliminate wasted effort, and optimize output.

Their story became famous in *Cheaper by the Dozen* (the 1948 book written by two of their twelve children, not the later Steve Martin film). The Gilbreths treated life as an experiment in optimization.

At first glance, Motion Theory looks like a blueprint for efficiency. But its deeper value is in choice. When you use it not just to go faster but to understand the kind of motion you're making—forward, lateral, oscillating, or even pausing—it becomes a tool of Efficacy. Motion isn't just about speed—it's about choosing the right kind of motion at the right time.

THE EISENHOWER MATRIX: EFFECTIVE BUT MISLEADING

Then there's the Eisenhower Matrix, a decision-making tool popularized by Stephen Covey but attributed to US President Dwight D. Eisenhower. It divides tasks into four quadrants:

1. Urgent and important (do now).
2. Important but not urgent (schedule).
3. Urgent but not important (delegate).
4. Neither urgent nor important (eliminate).

The Matrix is powerful because it clarifies effectiveness. It helps you focus on what truly matters instead of what merely screams for attention. But it has a blind spot: urgency can be seductive. Many people fill their days with “urgent” tasks that feel productive but don't contribute to potency. Efficiency can creep back in, disguised as urgency.

To make the Matrix efficacious, you need Nuance and Prudence. You need to ask not just what's urgent or important, but what creates enduring capacity?

The Ivy Lee Method, Motion Theory, and the Eisenhower Matrix are all useful. They make us efficient. They make us effective. But they don't automatically make us efficacious.

Efficacy asks the deeper question: are we building the conditions for meaningful, sustainable results?

TIME AND SPACE

John Cleese once observed in his famous talk on creativity that truly great work requires both time and space.

Time alone isn't enough. Space alone isn't enough. You need both.

Cleese explained that when we're pressed only for time, we default to the quickest solution—efficient, perhaps effective, but rarely creative. When we give ourselves both time and space, we allow ideas to gestate, possibilities to unfold, and originality to emerge.

Efficacy works the same way. It isn't about squeezing the most output into the least time. It's about creating both the time and the space for simplicity, flexibility, durability, and sustainability to thrive—not just cling to life.

THE BEATLES AS AN EXAMPLE

You can see this in art as well.

In *Get Back*, Peter Jackson's documentary on the Beatles, we watch the band forced to create an album in a compressed timeframe. They were efficient—they laid down tracks quickly. They were effective—the sessions produced “Let It Be.” But their most efficacious moments came not from rushing, but from lingering in play. The song “Get Back” started as a loose riff, a joke almost, before evolving into one of their defining tracks.

Contrast that with *Abbey Road*, created with more space and more time. It is arguably their most potent and enduring record—a testament to Efficacy.

The Beatles' story reveals what Cleese meant: time and space aren't luxuries—they are prerequisites for Efficacy.

EFFICACY AND THE PRINCIPLES OF PRODUCTIVENESS

Efficacy doesn't stand alone. It leans on other principles.

- **Humanness** ensures Efficacy doesn't collapse into cold systems—it reminds us Efficacy is for people, not at their expense.

- **Prudence** keeps Efficacy from slipping into recklessness, reminding us to choose wisely where we aim our potency.
- **Nuance** helps Efficacy resist the binary traps of “success” or “failure,” showing us that Efficacy exists across shades of possibility.
- **Tolerance** gives Efficacy the patience to allow ideas to mature and results to unfold.
- **Will** fuels Efficacy when conditions are tough, sustaining the capacity to produce when it would be easier to quit.

Even the realms of productiveness—reckless, ruthless, and reason—point us to Efficacy. Recklessness wastes potential. Ruthlessness strips humanity. Reason makes Efficacy possible.

Maybe that’s why Gleick’s books still resonate. *Faster* warned us what happens when speed replaces sense. *Time Travel* reminded us that our obsession with manipulating time is really a search for meaning inside it. Together, they form a quiet paradox: the faster we try to escape time, the more deeply we’re caught in it.

Efficacy invites the opposite move. It slows just enough to regain proportion—to make time an ally instead of an adversary. And that’s what Cadence teaches next: how to live in rhythm with time, not against it.

FROM EFFICACY TO CADENCE

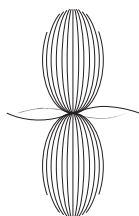
If Efficacy is about creating conditions for the right results, then Cadence is about sustaining them.

Efficacy gets you to the starting line with the right gear, in the right frame of mind, on the right track. Cadence keeps you moving forward with rhythm, resilience, and consistency.

That's why Efficacy needs to come first—because without potency, rhythm is just motion. But with Efficacy in place, Cadence transforms motion into momentum.

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CADENCE



In the spring of 2015, Russell Westbrook was on fire.

He was carrying the Oklahoma City Thunder through the end of the NBA regular season with a level of intensity rarely seen in the modern era. A scoring title was within reach—he was leading the league in points per game. But with the playoffs on the horizon, there was a dilemma: Should Westbrook rest to preserve energy for a deeper run? Or keep playing to maintain the rhythm he'd found?

Coaches debated. Analysts debated. Fans debated.

What was at stake wasn't just points—it was Cadence.

Westbrook wasn't just "on a roll." He was locked into something deeper. A rhythm. A tempo. A sequence of preparation, effort, recovery, and repetition that had become second nature. Pull him out of that flow, and you risk more than

fatigue. You risk severing the thread that keeps everything in motion.

And that thread—that rhythm—that's what Cadence is.

Not consistency. Not pacing. Something deeper. Something truer.

CADENCE VS. CONSISTENCY (AND WHY IT MATTERS)

We often confuse Cadence with consistency. But they're not the same.

Consistency is about showing up. It's the reliable beat of habit. The checkbox ticked. The calendar filled. It's valuable, but it's mechanical. It's what a machine does.

Cadence, on the other hand, is musical. It breathes. It pauses. It accelerates and decelerates. It accounts for tone and timbre. It's not just when you show up, but how. And more importantly, why.

Pacing tries to manage energy. Consistency tries to enforce presence.

Cadence moves with both—on its own terms.

When the Oklahoma City Thunder were torn between the thought of choosing rhythm over rest for Westbrook, it wasn't just to chase a scoring title. It was to stay in rhythm. Because once Cadence is broken, it's hard to get back. Even for a pro.

That's true for you, too.

THE MUSICAL METAPHOR: A SCORE WORTH STUDYING

In music, a Cadence is a harmonic resolution—a sequence that brings a phrase to a close. It's not just about hitting the notes. It's about how they resolve. How they land. Cadence is what makes music feel complete, even if only for a moment.

In life and work, we're constantly composing. We write our days like musical phrases. And yet we rarely pay attention to how they resolve.

- Do you end your days abruptly, crashing into evening without exhaling?
- Do your weeks blur into weekends without a coda or pause?
- Are you even playing in your key—or just mimicking someone else's score?

Cadence brings intentionality to motion. It connects rhythm to rest. It resolves action into alignment.

Where productivity asks, "What can I do faster?" productiveness asks, "How does this rhythm serve me over time?"

THREE FORMS OF MOMENTUM (AND WHERE CADENCE LIVES)

Momentum isn't a monolith. It has forms. And each one interacts with Cadence in its own way.

1. **Go-mentum**—The initial spark. The firestarter. It's what launches a project, wakes you up early with excitement, or gets you through a flurry of tasks. But without Cadence, go-mentum burns out quickly. It's intensity without rhythm.
2. **Flow-mentum**—The rolling middle. The hum of a well-tuned engine. Flow-mentum builds from repetition, from resonance. But it's fragile. It can be disrupted by fatigue, resistance, or overcommitment. Cadence helps sustain it.
3. **Slow-mentum**—The quiet, nearly invisible kind. It doesn't feel like progress until you look back. This is where Cadence thrives. It's 200 words a day. It's showing up gently but consistently. It's walking instead of running—but never stopping. It's sustainability, not speed.

Cadence isn't the flash. It's the follow-through.

CADENCE AND THE PRINCIPLES OF PRODUCTIVENESS

Before we dig into how Cadence interacts with the principles of productiveness, it helps to pause and see that Cadence isn't just about outcome. It's about form. It's about sustaining structure in uncertainty—and choosing rhythm even when results are mixed. Because that discipline in Cadence is exactly what allows the other principles to thrive.

HUMANNESS

Machines don't need Cadence. They need fuel and input. But humans? We need rhythm. We need space. We need days that breathe.

Cadence honours our biology, our energy, our emotion. It's not just about being productive—it's about being human while producing. It allows us to show up as we are, not as an idealized version of ourselves.

It's Humanness, felt in motion.

GRACE

Grace isn't about perfection—it's about permission. Cadence makes space for Grace. For off days. For resets. For the stumbles that come when you're dancing, not marching.

It's the moment a musician misses a note but keeps playing anyway—because the music doesn't stop. Cadence forgives. Grace allows. Together, they keep you in flow even when the beat skips.

EFFICACY

Efficiency asks how fast. Effectiveness asks how well. But Efficacy—the ability to produce a desired result—asks if it's working at all.

Cadence is what makes action effective over time. Without it, we sprint and stall. With it, we stride and sustain. Cadence turns intention into integration.

It's the secret ingredient that makes your efforts stick.

NUANCE

Cadence lives in Nuance. It's not binary. Not black or white. It's the shaded in-between: the half-step, the syncopation, the silence between notes.

A rigid schedule may look productive on paper, but Cadence brings subtlety. It helps you adjust, adapt, and respond with finesse—not force. It's how you stay agile without unravelling.

Cadence is Nuance embodied.

TRUST

To live by your own Cadence is to Trust yourself.

It means resisting external rhythms—other people's calendars, algorithms, expectations—and tuning into your own. Trust grows when you can honour your own energy, not override it. Cadence helps you hear that internal music and Trust that it's enough.

Over time, Cadence builds reliability. And reliability builds Trust—both with yourself and others.

PRUDENCE

Prudence hones your timing.

Cadence moves in step with it, guiding not just what to do—but when to push, when to pause, and how long to sustain. It turns reactive impulse into intentional rhythm.

Cadence invites Prudence. It's not just about doing the right thing—it's about doing it at the right time, in the right way.

It doesn't ignore emotion or override logic—it tunes both. It becomes the quiet metronome of reasoned action.

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TOLERANCE

Systems with no Cadence break under pressure. They snap. But Cadence introduces slack—the kind of flexibility that allows for fluctuation without collapse.

Cadence cultivates Tolerance, not in the moral sense, but the structural one. You become more resilient, more adaptable. You're not thrown off by interruptions—you absorb them, shift slightly, and return to tempo.

Cadence is the buffer that keeps the system intact.

WILL

Raw willpower is a burst. It's go-mentum with grit. But over time, even the strongest Will runs dry without rhythm.

Cadence gives Will its footing. It breaks big efforts into steps. It gives structure to commitment. It allows you to keep going, not just because you must, but because you can—and you know how.

When Will and Cadence align, devotion becomes doable.

RHYTHM AND REST: A RETURN TO WESTBROOK

Here's what we actually know: Westbrook locked into a rhythm that season—his scoring soared. He won the 2014–15

scoring title, averaging 28.1 points per game. Yet despite that personal momentum, the Oklahoma City Thunder did not make the playoffs. A tie with New Orleans wasn't enough—tiebreakers went the other way.

So was the rhythm a failure just because the team didn't go deep in the postseason?

Not at all. It showed something else: that Cadence can matter deeply—even when the outcome isn't the one everyone hoped for. Because maintaining rhythm meant showing up under pressure. It meant preserving flow in the face of setback. It meant establishing a pulse you could return to—even when the scoreboard didn't say you won.

And this lesson wasn't just about sports.

It was about life. About knowing when to rest and when to rise. About finding a beat you can move to—and protect. About knowing that the long game is never played at one speed.

You don't need to be an elite athlete to experience this. In fact, I've felt it firsthand ...

COUCH TO 5K:

CADENCE IN PRACTICE

Not long ago, I started the Couch to 5K program—not because I had dreams of running races or shaving minutes off a personal best. I simply wanted to take better care of myself.

I knew that diving straight into sprints or daily high-intensity runs would be a recipe for burnout or injury. What I needed was something more ...measured. More humane.

The brilliance of the Couch to 5K approach is its built-in Cadence. It doesn't expect you to go from sedentary to superhero. It starts where you are. Walk for ninety seconds. Jog for thirty. Walk again. Bit by bit, you build endurance. Bit by bit, you shift your rhythm. Not through force, but through pattern. Through pacing. Through Trust.

The origins of the program reflect this philosophy. It was created in 1996 by Josh Clark, who—like many of us—wanted to get in shape without hating every second of it. He designed it for beginners who needed structure, encouragement, and—most of all—permission to go slow. To build a relationship with movement that wasn't rooted in shame or punishment.

That's Cadence.

It's not about hitting top speed—it's about building a rhythm that's yours. One you can stick with, return to, and improve upon over time. Just like productivity.

WHY CADENCE IS RARE (AND WHY IT'S ESSENTIAL)

Cadence doesn't show up on dashboards.

You can't track it in spreadsheets.

It doesn't trend.

That's why it gets ignored. But that's also why it matters.

Because Cadence is felt, not just measured. It's lived, not just logged. And in a world obsessed with metrics, we need principles that restore rhythm. We need a return to tone over tempo, flow over friction, music over noise.

We need Cadence.

Cadence isn't a calendar trick.

It's the felt rhythm of attention—the tempo your work keeps when you're not forcing it.

It's the pulse beneath productiveness itself, reminding you that the best progress is often the kind you only notice once you've stopped to listen.

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INTERLUDE:

THE SPACE BETWEEN

This is not a pause.

It's a presence.

The space between principles is not empty.

It holds what hasn't yet been named.

A breath between verses.

A moment between heartbeats.

The silence that sharpens the sound.

Before you reach for the next principle,
sit here.

Not to wait.

But to notice.

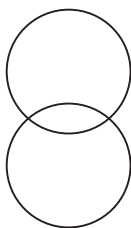
The shift.

The weight.

The invitation.

This is the space where reflection becomes readiness.

TRUST



Blue Rodeo once sang about the courage it takes to Trust yourself—to stop mistaking comfort for truth.

Beyond Canada, their name rarely surfaces. But here, they're woven into the country's musical fabric—spoken of with the same quiet reverence reserved for The Tragically Hip and Rush.

Blue Rodeo's longevity is staggering. Decades of touring, recording, and staying relevant in an industry that tends to chew up and spit out artists every few years. But even they weren't immune to friction. Greg Keelor, co-founder and co-frontman, quit the band at one point due to hearing issues that had become unbearable. His departure was startling at the very least—at worst, a betrayal. Jim Cuddy was hurt. That was made clear in *Lost Together*, the band's 2025 documentary.

And yet when Greg returned, something remarkable happened. There was no awkward reacclimation. No rebuilding of rapport. The band simply ... played. Their Trust—damaged but not destroyed—held firm beneath it all.

That's the power of Trust.

It's not just about stability. It's about recovery. It's what lets you fall out of step and still find your rhythm again.

Blue Rodeo's story captures something essential about Trust: that it is not a fixed state but a living thing. A beat. A bond. A belief.

And just as it lives between people, it must also live within.

THE ROOT OF THE WORD

Trust and truth are kin. Both spring from the same ancient root—*deru-*, meaning firm, solid, enduring—the same source that gave us *tree*.

To Trust is to root yourself in what's strong enough to hold. To be true is to live from that rootedness.

That's why the two so often intertwine.

When you say "I Trust you," you're really saying, "I believe you'll hold steady."

When you say "I know this to be true," you're standing on that same ground.

Productivity leans toward the objective—things that can be seen, counted, verified.

Productiveness lives in the subjective—the things you sense, feel, and stand firm in.

One relies on evidence. The other, on essence.

But essence isn't less real. It's just less measurable.

And that's where Trust becomes essential.

It's the bridge between what's objective and what's true.

Between what must get done and what makes it worth doing.

To work with productiveness is to Trust that bridge—to let what's true guide what's due.

THE LANGUAGE OF TRUST

Like many principles of productiveness, Trust has been diluted through overuse and abstraction. We've inherited terms like “trusty,” “trustworthy,” and “trustworthiness”—but do we even know what they mean anymore? Is something trusty the same as something worthy of Trust? Not exactly.

The word *Trust* has ancient roots in the idea of protection and strength. It comes from the Old Norse *traust*—which meant not only confidence but also support. Its verb form, *treystan*, meant “to rely on” or “to make strong.” That's the DNA of Trust: something we lean on. Something that fortifies us—even when we feel uncertain or unsteady.

Over time, the language evolved.

Trusty suggests reliability—with a touch of sentimentality.
The old pen that still works. The worn jacket that still fits.

Trustworthy carries more weight. It implies earned belief,
rooted in character and action.

And then there's trustworthiness—not a descriptor, but a
state. Not just what you do, but who you are.

That distinction matters. Just like productiveness is not the
same as productivity, Trustworthiness is not simply a moment
of dependability—it's a sustained presence. Something
embodied over time.

We also live in a culture where the word "Trust" gets applied
in binary ways. We Trust apps. Platforms. Devices. But that
kind of Trust is transactional. On or off.

Human Trust is anything but. It bends. It breaks. It rebuilds.
It forgives.

And true Trust—lasting Trust—doesn't live in slogans
or systems.

It lives in character.

In consistency.

In the way you show up.

In your willingness to be seen—even when you're not at
your best.

THE FRAGILITY AND RESILIENCE OF TRUST

One of the hardest parts about Trust is that it's relational. You can't truly control it. You can only invite it. You can act in a way that's worthy of it, but you can't force someone else to feel it.

Which makes it fragile.

But it also makes it powerful.

Especially when you learn to extend it inward.

Because here's the truth: you can have a trustworthy system, and you can be surrounded by trustworthy people, but if you don't Trust yourself, you're not lost together—you're just lost.

And the longer you stay in that state, the harder it is to remember what it feels like to be at home within your own mind and body.

Trust, then, is more than just a practice.

It's a return.

THE QUIET COMPANION

Being productive has long been framed as a system of doing: tasks to complete, boxes to check, actions to track. But underneath all of that—beneath every workflow, every method, every routine—sits something more foundational.

Something invisible, but essential.

Trust.

Not just in your tools.

Not just in your time.

But in yourself.

Trust is the quiet principle that holds everything together. It doesn't shout. It doesn't sparkle. It doesn't reward you with a dopamine hit when you complete a task.

But it's always there—or at least, it needs to be.

Because without Trust, even the most elegant system collapses under the weight of doubt.

Without Trust, every task feels heavier.

Every decision becomes a question mark.

You stop reviewing your lists.

You start keeping everything in your head.

You convince yourself that nothing will hold unless you personally hold it.

And that's not just inconvenient.

It's exhausting.

But when Trust is present—when it's been tested, tweaked, and built into the way you operate—it becomes one of the most liberating forces in your relationship with time.

It gives you space to focus.

To breathe.

To release.

And most importantly ... to return.

THE SPACE TO RETURN

Trust doesn't mean perfection.

It means resilience.

It means your systems are built with enough give that when life bends them—or when you break from them—they don't snap. They stretch. They hold. They invite you back.

That's why Trust is a principle of productiveness, not just a best practice of productivity. Because productiveness is a state—something you are, not something you do. And once you can Trust yourself, you can begin to Will yourself forward.

It's the feeling that when you step off track, there's still a path to come back to.

You Trust that your future self will know what to do.

You Trust that your past self left breadcrumbs.

You Trust that your present self doesn't need to sprint to make up for lost time.

This is why journaling works.

Why reflection works.

Why stillness and silence matter.

Each reinforces Trust—not just in systems, but in self.

If you're unsure where to begin, start with prompts that open rather than direct. Prompts that don't chase answers but invite attention. A few that have helped me include:

- What am I noticing right now—without trying to fix it?
- Where did Trust feel easy today? Where did it feel fragile?
- What pulled my attention, and what does that pull reveal?
- What did I carry that wasn't mine to carry?
- What softened today? What stayed tight?

These aren't tasks. They're invitations—ways of listening to your interior world with more patience than pressure. They help build Trust not by producing insight on demand, but by showing up to yourself regularly, gently, honestly.

A MELODY OF TRUST

There's a reason Blue Rodeo's music surfaces here, in the later movements of this book. Their longevity is a kind of Trust in itself. A band that's remained together—not always unchanged, but always in tune with something deeper—for decades.

A band whose songs evoke both certainty and search, sorrow and strength.

You don't last that long without Trust:

Trust in each other.

In your craft.

In the audience you're singing for—even when they don't always show up.

"Trust Yourself" is a declaration. A defiant reclaiming of confidence in a world that constantly pulls you away from it.

"Til I Am Myself Again" is a whisper from the other side. The acknowledgment that sometimes you lose yourself—and that returning to self isn't just possible, but necessary.

That's the shape of Trust in productiveness.

It's not a straight line. It's a spiral.

You'll drift.

You'll doubt.

You'll disconnect.

And then ... you'll return.

WHEN I FORGOT TO TRUST MYSELF

There was a time when I'd lost that belief.

I had built a framework to help me get the right things done—TimeCrafting, as I came to call it. It gave me structure. Scaffolding. Something “trusty” I could rely on. And for a while, that Trust held.

But then I started pushing it too far.

I trusted the system more than I trusted myself.

I figured the system could weather any storm. But I forgot there was a human being—me—on the other side of that structure. With every missed deadline and every piece of work I delivered that didn't feel aligned or finished or fulfilling, my Trust in myself began to erode.

I became fragmented.

My attention splintered.

I overcommitted. I overstretched. I overdid everything.

Eventually, I didn't recognize who I was anymore. And the system I'd built started to feel like scaffolding around someone else.

It wasn't until I walked home from seeing the Blue Rodeo documentary that things snapped into focus. I remember it vividly—walking through the streets of Victoria, in tears, listening to “Till I Am Myself Again.” That wasn't just a lyric. It was a calling.

I knew what I had to do.

Write. Return to what brought me back to myself.

That's the irony of Trust: it isn't just about what holds you up.

It's about what brings you home.

TRUST LEADS TO WILL

In a world that constantly tries to pull you into panic, Trust offers presence.

It invites you to let go of urgency and live inside sufficiency.

It's what allows you to stop managing every moment and start inhabiting it.

Trust doesn't shout for your attention.

It holds space for it.

And once you've built it—once you've tested and tweaked and returned to your systems enough times—it becomes the quiet throughline of your work.

You don't have to Trust everything.

MIKE VARDY

Just enough.

Enough to try.

Enough to pause.

Enough to come back.

And from there ... Trust gives Will the ground to stand on.

WILL



Trust steadies you. Will moves you.

If Trust is the ground beneath your feet, Will is the step you take.

It's not mere determination or grit. It's not the glorified willpower we hear about in self-help books or New Year's resolutions. Will, in the context of productiveness, is subtler—and stronger.

It's what turns Trust into traction.

It's what transforms intention into motion.

It's what carries you when the spark of momentum has faded, and all that's left is the next step.

Will doesn't always roar. Sometimes it whispers. Sometimes it's nothing more than the quiet choice to begin again. To sit back down. To pick up the pen. To make the call.

And because this principle comes last, it carries a unique weight: it's not just about doing, but about enduring. Not the sprint, not even the marathon—but the life lived in rhythm, step by step, through seasons of both scarcity and abundance.

Will is what makes productiveness durable.

It's what makes return possible.

And it's what keeps you moving, even when the destination isn't yet clear.

YOU ARRIVE AT WILL

People try to begin with Will.

They try to power through.

To force momentum.

To push past doubt.

But in the world of productiveness, Will is not where you begin.

Will is where you arrive.

You arrive at Will through experience—not force.

In this book, Will isn't about sheer determination or stubborn drive.

It's about alignment—the quiet strength to act from intention rather than impulse.

PRODUCTIVENESS

It's the steady follow-through that comes when desire, choice, and meaning all point in the same direction.

Every principle before it helps shape that arrival.

Through Humanness, you realize you are not a machine.

Through Grace, you learn how to return.

Through Prudence, you learn to choose instead of react.

Through Nuance, you learn to stay open in the grey.

Through Tolerance, you learn how much give you can give.

Through Efficacy, you learn to direct your energy wisely.

Through Cadence, you learn when to move and when to rest.

Through Trust, you learn what holds you—and what you can hold.

And then ... when you've touched these—not mastered, not perfected, but simply encountered—Will arrives.

Not as a clenched fist.

But as a quiet readiness.

THE CUNNING KIND OF WILL

Anthony Bourdain—chef, writer, wanderer—once admitted there was “a guy in [his] head” who wanted to stay in bed, get

high, and watch cartoons. His life, he said, became “a series of stratagems to avoid and outwit that guy.”

That confession isn't bravado; it's craft. Will, in its truest form, isn't a clenched jaw—it's strategy. It's the quiet readiness to design around the part of you that leans toward ease.

Sometimes that's what strength looks like: not force, but fit.

Will doesn't always roar. Sometimes it hums underneath routine. Sometimes it hides in repetition. It's not about winning every moment—it's about staying in motion, even when the motion feels small.

Fear often tries to disguise itself as reason. It whispers, “Wait.” It lists every risk. And yet the more we listen, the quieter Will becomes. That's when the other principles—Prudence, Trust, Grace—step in to steady it.

Most people misunderstand Will because they confuse it with willpower.

Willpower is resistance.

Will is resonance.

You don't generate Will from nothing.

You find it in connection.

You don't get real power until you've given something the power to shape you.

That's why Will waits.

It doesn't demand to go first.

It knows its strength lies in what came before.

You can't sustain Will until you've acknowledged—if not respected—the principles that temper it.

PERSISTENCE:

DEVOTION VS. DOMINATION

Much like how reason lives within Prudence and Patience lives within Tolerance, there's something that lives within Will—Persistence.

It's the muscle memory of motion—the steady hum that keeps you moving once belief begins to fade.

Persistence can look noble from a distance. We admire those who refuse to quit. But persistence without devotion often turns ruthless.

Ray Kroc was fifty-two when he stumbled onto a small hamburger stand run by the McDonald brothers in San Bernardino, California. He was a milkshake machine salesman—tired, restless, and convinced he'd found something scalable. What followed was relentless: a lifetime spent franchising, systematizing, and eventually seizing control of the brand itself. Kroc called it persistence. Others called it obsession.

His drive built the McDonald's empire—but also erased the people who started it. He persisted through domination: expansion at any cost.

Anthony Bourdain's persistence lived in another key.

His relationship with food wasn't about replication—it was about revelation. He chased meaning, not margins. His Will wasn't to conquer the world's kitchens, but to understand them.

Both men were unrelenting. One sought control; the other sought connection.

One scaled sameness; the other celebrated difference.

Both persisted. Only one seemed at peace with what he made.

Persistence without devotion drains.

Persistence with devotion endures.

That's the quiet test of Will: not just whether you keep moving, but what keeps you moving.

When persistence serves devotion, it becomes sustaining.

When it serves domination, it consumes.

Devotion gives persistence its aim. Without it, motion becomes drift. And that's where the next question lives: what, exactly, are you willing toward?

YOU MUST FIRST KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WILLING TOWARD

You can't summon Will without knowing what you're giving it to.

That's what the other principles teach:

- **Humanness** reminds you that you're not here to optimize yourself into oblivion.
- **Prudence** shows you how to pause, not out of fear, but intention.
- **Grace** teaches you that every return is a beginning in disguise.
- **Nuance** warns you not to chase clarity at the cost of truth.
- **Tolerance** tells you that strength includes softness.
- **Efficacy** redefines progress as aligned action.
- **Cadence** introduces rhythm where rush once lived.
- **Trust** teaches you how to be held—by systems, people, and yourself.

You may not have mastered these.

You don't need to.

But you do need to have met them.

Touched them.

Allowed them to touch you.

NOTICING, AWARENESS, FOCUS, CONCENTRATION

In *The Productivity Diet*, I talk about the Spheres of Attention:

- **Noticing:** You've brushed against the principle.
- **Awareness:** You've seen how it lives in your life.
- **Focus:** You've chosen to spend time with it.
- **Concentration:** You've stayed with it long enough to be shaped by it.

Will lives in the innermost sphere: concentration.

It requires all the others.

I felt this most clearly while writing this book. At first, I simply *noticed* the idea of productiveness resurfacing in my thoughts. It would tap at me in quiet moments—on walks, in the shower, when I wasn't trying to form anything at all. Then came *awareness*: I began to see how the principle appeared in my own days, how I was craving substance over speed, depth over drive.

When I finally sat down to write, that noticing and awareness turned into *focus*. I carved out time for the work, returned

to the questions again and again, and let myself stay with the ideas long enough for the shape of the book to emerge. But Will didn't fully arrive until concentration set in—the sustained, disciplined staying-with that carried me through uncertainty, second-guessing, and the seductive pull of easier work.

That's the arc of Will.

It rarely shows up in a single moment.

It gathers. It deepens.

It reveals itself only after you've walked through the other spheres and remained long enough for something inside you to move.

A MURAL IN BOISE

I was reminded of Will's behaviour years ago while in Boise for a conference. I went looking for a mural of Bourdain painted behind a small restaurant called *Petite 4*. A friend and I ate at the counter—two stools in what felt like a diner—and the meal was remarkable: simple, deliberate, quietly excellent.

I couldn't see the mural from where we sat, so I stepped out afterward to find it. There it was, on the back wall: Bourdain's face beside words drawn from *Heart of Darkness*, his favourite book.

I've thought about that image ever since—how I sat inside savouring the hum of willful craft, then walked out into something that spoke of darkness and endurance.

Even now, that pairing stays with me: creation and collapse, appetite and ache—both parts of what it means to keep choosing.

WILL:

A POWER YOU CARRY

If fear is the enemy of Will, then the Green Lanterns are its greatest counter.

Not just Hal Jordan. Not just the ring.

But the idea: that willpower—your capacity to act in spite of fear—is something that can be chosen, trained, and Trusted.

HAL JORDAN: THE ARCHETYPE OF AUDACITY

Hal Jordan is my favourite Green Lantern. He embodies a kind of fearless confidence. He charges headlong into battle. He's brash, headstrong, and relentless. His Will comes from belief—belief in possibility, belief in people, belief in himself.

But that's not the only way Will works.

JOHN STEWART: THE ENGINEER OF PRECISION

John Stewart is deliberate. Measured. He constructs with precision. His Will manifests as structure and

intentionality. He doesn't just act; he considers. His constructs are architectural—reinforced, stable, planned.

Stewart's Will is steady. It's principled. It doesn't rattle.

And that kind of Will—the quiet, consistent kind—is no less powerful than Hal's fire.

GUY GARDNER: THE CONTRARIAN WITH GRIT

Guy Gardner is divisive. Loud. Unapologetically blunt. But there's a reason he's often said to have the strongest Will of any Lantern.

It's not refinement. It's resilience.

His Will is raw, messy, and at times off-putting—but it endures.

There's something deeply human in that. You don't always have to look good while enduring. You just have to endure.

KYLE RAYNER: THE ARTIST OF EMOTION

Kyle Rayner's Will comes from creativity. He sees possibilities others don't. His constructs are imaginative, poetic, even chaotic at times. His power is deeply emotional—often tied to grief, empathy, and expression.

Kyle reminds us that Will doesn't have to be stoic.

It can be soulful.

It can come from caring deeply—maybe even too much—and still choosing to act.

SOJOURNER "JO" MULLEIN: THE WATCHER OF THE LONG ARC

Jo Mullein—Green Lantern of Far Sector—is different.

Her ring doesn't need to be recharged daily like the others. It recharges itself.

But only for a limited time.

She's been granted a special year-long assignment—far from the Corps, far from support, far from everything familiar—and the ring is designed to last for the duration of that mission. Once that year is over, it stops recharging.

Her Will is calibrated to sustain that stretch.

Not just to fight.

But to stay.

To endure.

To observe without immediate resolution.

Her resolve is strategic.

Her patience is intentional.

She doesn't just expend Will—she stewards it.

That's the kind of Will we rarely glorify.

It's the kind that knows the mission isn't to burn bright—it's to last.

And that's the kind of Will we don't talk about enough.

WILL—DIFFERENTLY

Every Green Lantern brings their own version of willpower to the table.

And that's the point.

Will isn't a fixed force.

It's not always loud.

It's not always fast.

It's not always creative or calculated or gritty or graceful.

It's yours.

Sometimes your Will looks like starting.

Sometimes it looks like resting.

Sometimes it looks like saying no.

Sometimes it looks like showing up again ... after you didn't.

Even Bourdain, whose life looked like motion incarnate, wrestled with inertia. Will isn't the absence of that struggle—it's what carries you through it.

Business Will try to hijack this.

MIKE VARDY

It Will sell you willpower as a hustle.

As a badge.

As a battery you're supposed to recharge for more output.

But productiveness doesn't demand that kind of Will.

It doesn't ask you to pretend you're fearless.

It just asks you to keep going anyway.

Productiveness always has to be personal.

Because it flows from your values, your energy, your rhythm.

That's what makes it so durable. So meaningful.

You don't wield Will in a vacuum.

You carry it in context.

And when you forget that—

when you start trying to be all the Lanterns at once—

you burn out.

THE RING CHOOSES YOU

In the comics, the ring finds those with great Will.

But in real life?

Will is something you find in yourself.

Moment by moment.

Choice by choice.

It's not bestowed. It's built.

Sometimes it looks like Hal's fearlessness.

Sometimes it looks like Sojourner's patience.

Sometimes it looks like Guy's defiance, or John's order, or
Kyle's imagination.

But it's always yours.

And when the day is long ...

when the doubts get loud ...

when fear starts to whisper that you can't—

You don't need to crush it.

You just need to carry it.

WILLING, NOT FORCING

Will doesn't show up at the starting line.

It shows up when the path vanishes.

When maps fail.

When meaning blurs.

Will is not the fire.

It's what walks through it.

Not unscathed.

But unchanged at the core.

It is the force that keeps you tethered to who you are—

especially when the world asks you to forget.

I think back to that mural in Boise. The paint may have faded, but the question it asked still holds: can you keep choosing to move, even when the voice in your head begs for stillness? That's Will—not the fire but what walks through it.

Because in the end ...

Will is not what powers the journey.

It's what makes the journey yours.

EPILOGUE:

THE SPACE THAT HOLDS

This book is not an instruction manual.

It was never meant to be.

There are no checklists here.

No blueprints.

No “ten steps to peak performance.”

Because productiveness isn't something you install.

It's something you cultivate.

It's not a system.

It's a stance.

A way of being in time—not just doing with it.

You've met the principles.

You've seen how they speak to one another.

How they hold each other up.

But now comes the part no book can do for you:

Living them.

Not perfectly. Not permanently.

But in practice.

In awareness.

In rhythm.

You'll forget some of them.

You'll overuse others.

You'll misread a signal and push when you should pause—or
pause when you should press on.

That's not failure.

That's what it means to be in relationship—with time, with
energy, with yourself.

Because productiveness isn't a fixed state you reach.

It's a living practice you return to.

And return is the rhythm.

Sometimes you'll need more Humanness.

Sometimes you'll call on Will.

Sometimes you'll forget Trust until it breaks.

PRODUCTIVENESS

But if you hold these principles loosely enough to bend
with you—

and closely enough to shape your days—

they Will walk with you.

Quietly. Steadily. Faithfully.

Not to hurry you. But to hold you.

Because you are the one shaping this life.

Not an algorithm. Not a hustle culture. Not a machine.

Just you.

A human, in time.

Becoming. Still becoming.

And that—

That is plenty.

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CODA:

THE MEASURE BEYOND MEASURE

Most books end with an appendix: notes, sources, next steps—a quiet corner for the extra things that didn't fit.

But this isn't that kind of ending.

An appendix adds something.

A coda integrates it.

The word comes from the Italian *coda*—"tail." In music, it's the final passage that gathers the themes, resolves the tension, and lets the song end on purpose. It isn't a bonus track or an encore; it's the moment when everything that's been played finally lands in the same key.

That's what this section is meant to do—not to extend the book, but to bring it home.

WHAT TIME FORGIVES

When Marc Maron ended *WTF*, his long-running podcast, he didn't just stop recording one day and vanish. He gave the show a kind of coda. The second-to-last episode was a solo—him alone at the mic, telling the story, acknowledging what the show had meant, tracing its beginning through to its end. The final episode brought Barack Obama back, the guest who had helped define WTF in its early years. Reflection, then return.

It felt like music—two movements closing a loop.

Maron has always carried a musical mind. He's played guitar on and off for years—dabbling in bands when he was younger—and still leans into rhythm, both in speech and in silence. You can hear it in how he talks, how he lands a line. His best-known film role was in *Almost Famous*, Cameron Crowe's story about art, ambition, and the ache of chasing meaning through music. Crowe also wrote the *Jerry Maguire* manifesto—a different kind of coda, really, a declaration of values that turns reflection into motion.

And Maron himself has changed. The early version of him—the one fuelled by anger and caffeine—couldn't have made the kind of work he's doing now. He's become more deliberate, more spacious, more open to silence.

I understand that evolution.

I've moved through my own variations: from productivity enthusiast to specialist, then strategist, and now something

else entirely—whatever kind of “-ist” stands at the intersection of time, meaning, and philosophy. The tempo has slowed, but the sound’s fuller.

That’s what this coda represents: a final movement that doesn’t repeat the melody but reframes it. The nine principles have been the score; what follows is the rhythm you can carry forward.

We still live in a world that insists on counting things.

How many hours you worked.

How many tasks you finished.

How many minutes you “saved.”

It’s not that measurement is bad—it’s just incomplete. The metrics we’ve inherited tell us what we’ve done but not why it mattered. They tally output, not outcome. They track efficiency, not Efficacy.

That’s why this coda exists: to give a different kind of measure. One that honours meaning as much as motion.

THE CROSSROADS OF CHOICE

Elle Luna explored something similar in *The Crossroads of Should and Must*. She described how our lives split between the expectations of others—should—and the callings that rise from within—must. The first asks us to comply; the second invites us to become.

Productiveness lives in that space between.

It helps us move from *should* to *must* without losing our footing along the way.

And to navigate that space, we need a language for motion—a way to sense when we're exploring possibility, when we're gaining capability, when we're called to commitment, and when it's time to act.

That language takes shape in four words: might, Can, Must, Will—mCMW:

- **might** is curiosity—the spark of what could be.
- **Can** is capability—the recognition that it's within reach.
- **Must** is conviction—alignment between desire and value.
- **Will** is commitment—the decision to move.

You'll notice that might is the only word that doesn't carry a capital letter. That's intentional. Can, Must, and Will are degrees of commitment — each one asks something of you. But might asks nothing yet. It's the kernel: the pre-commitment possibility that holds open a door without walking through it. In mCMW, might isn't lesser — it's different in kind.

Even so, you can move through them like steps. But they also form a circle.

Every act of Will eventually leads to a new might.

And if you've read closely, that last word Will sound familiar.

Will is the ninth principle of productiveness—the one that ties all the others together.

Here, it echoes again as the final stage of the mCMW rhythm: thought becoming motion, intention finding form.

RETURN ON INTENTION

Still, even with movement, we need reflection.

So after Will comes another question: what did that motion yield?

That's where the Productiveness ROI comes in.

ROI usually stands for Return on Investment—a way of measuring what you got back for what you put in. But in the context of productiveness, it means something quieter: Return on Intention.

To see how your days are truly composed, the Productiveness ROI uses mCMW as its score.

In practice, it works like this: each verb—might, Can, Must, Will—carries weight. You assign it to the things you choose to do.

might = 0 points—curiosity kept open, not yet a claim on the day.

Can = 1 point—capacity and readiness, where resources align.

Must = 2 points—obligation and alignment, where pressure meets purpose.

Will = 3 points—decisive commitment, where intention becomes action.

Add up the points from a set of tasks or choices, then divide by the number of items. The higher the average, the more your time reflects deliberate commitment rather than scattered motion.

But don't chase a perfect score. Some days should be full of might. Others will lean heavy on Wills. The goal isn't to win—it's to witness. The number is simply a mirror for how your attention and intention are meeting.

If you want a sense of how that witnessing feels in practice, imagine a day when your list includes a mix of mights, Cans, Musts, and Wills. A quick scan of the average gives you a sense of your posture toward the day—not as judgment but as reflection. Some days the number will be low because you protected space for thinking. Others will be high because you followed through on what mattered. Either way, the score isn't the story. The story is what the score reveals.

Traditional ROI—return on investment—counts profit, time saved, resources gained. But Productiveness ROI looks for subtler returns: clarity, energy, alignment, momentum, fulfillment.

It's a score, not a scoreboard. A reflection, not a race.

You don't track it to win—you track it to learn.

THE FINAL NOTE

A coda doesn't end the music so much as release it. It gathers the themes, lets them breathe, and hands them back to you.

That's what this moment is meant to do.

The frameworks and reflections here—mCMW and the Productiveness ROI—aren't destinations. They're ways of listening to your days. You can use them to notice where your energy is going, where your intentions align, and where they drift. They'll help you see whether you're living by reaction or reflection.

If you'd like to go deeper—to explore exercises, enhancements, and extensions of each principle—you can find them at <https://mikevardy.com/productiveness>. There you'll find:

Expanded explanations of might, Can, Must, and Will

A guided walkthrough of the Productiveness ROI

Recommended readings, including *The Crossroads of Should and Must* by Elle Luna

Companion practices for each principle of productiveness—small ways to keep this work alive beyond the page

None of it's required. The book you've just finished is complete in itself. The rest is optional—resources for resonance, not obligation.

MIKE VARDY

Because productiveness isn't something to master. It's something to return to.

Each moment offers another chance to compose it differently.

A coda, after all, doesn't stop the song.

It teaches you how to listen once the music stops ...

POSTSCRIPT:

LIVING WITH THE MIX

I didn't expect *The White Album* to help me write this book.

At first glance, the Beatles' 1968 double LP doesn't exactly signal principled productiveness. It's sprawling. Contradictory. A little chaotic. It thrives in the spaces between the notes—the same spaces where we do our real living.

And that's exactly what I needed.

When I began writing *Productiveness*, I realized I wasn't crafting a neat argument so much as learning to stand on the desk—shifting my vantage point, seeing the work from a different angle, letting perspective reshape the structure. What emerged wasn't a straight line—it was more like a mixtape: sequenced, contrasted, textured.

That perspective shift—that willingness to look again, to look differently—is what shaped this book far more than any single influence or reference.

Then came *The Grey Album*.

For the uninitiated, *The Grey Album* is Danger Mouse's 2004 mashup of Jay-Z's *The Black Album* and the Beatles' *White Album*. It wasn't a commercial release—it couldn't be. It was technically unauthorized, controversial, and fiercely original. Using only the vocal tracks from Jay-Z and instrumental samples from the Beatles, Danger Mouse created something that felt familiar and rebellious at once.

He didn't just remix—he reimagined. And in doing so, he made something that resonated far beyond genre or generation.

"I was obsessed with the whole project; that's all I was trying to do," he said. "Once I got into it, I didn't think about anything but finishing it."

That hit me. Because in the process of assembling this book, I wasn't merely writing it—I was living with it. Moving ideas around like stems on a mixing board. Letting some sit for days in silence before bringing them back with a beat that felt just right. Rearranging not just for logic, but for feel.

Danger Mouse didn't ask if he should combine Jay-Z and the Beatles. He asked how to make it work. That's what I did with *Productiveness*. I didn't ask whether existentialism and time management belong in the same space. I just brought them into the room and started listening for harmony.

This book isn't a clean system or a unified theory. It's a collection of vantage points—a series of places to stand so you can see your relationship with time differently. Some views offer

PRODUCTIVENESS

clarity. Others ask you to tilt your head, shift your posture, or climb up on the metaphorical desk just to catch the shape of things from a fresh angle.

Productiveness lives in those shifts. In the quiet reorientation. In the small, repeated decision to look again.

Like any good mix, it's best experienced more than once. Flip to a random track. Loop the ones that hit. Let others grow on you. And if it helps you find your own rhythm—your own relationship with time and meaning—then every scratch and splice was worth it.

Because in the end, we all remix the same thing: the stories we tell ourselves in order to keep living.

Thanks for “listening.”

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LINER NOTES & SOURCES

These notes gather the works, references, and inspirations woven throughout the book. They're arranged by chapter, echoing the way a record's liner notes reveal what shaped each track.

They aren't citations in the academic sense. They're acknowledgements of lineage—the works, voices, and stories that helped this one find its shape.

PREFACE

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Think of these notes not as a map but as a set of breadcrumbs—the influences, references, and sparks that helped me shape this work. Some appear as clear signposts; others linger quietly in the background. Together, they trace the conversation that unfolded behind the scenes as this book was written. If productiveness is ultimately about living inside time with intention, then consider these notes small reminders of the many voices that helped me listen more closely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wife, Anne—you were beside me on the train from Lisbon to Porto as I began writing the piece that eventually became the catalyst for this book. I remember glancing at you in between paragraphs, feeling both steadied and stirred. Your presence has always done that—grounding me while encouraging me to keep going.

Your patience through the years—especially as I built this book—has been inspiring, motivating, and galvanizing. You are the most remarkable person I've ever met. What's most remarkable is how quietly you carry that remarkability. It's not performative. It just is.

When I think about productiveness, about the *ness* of things—kindness, steadiness, Humanness—you are all of them.

If productivity is the activity of producing and productiveness is the state of being productive, then I couldn't have the relationship with time that I do without the relationship I have with you.

Every principle in this book was filtered through that truth. Through you.

To my daughter, Grace—you might wonder why you aren't mentioned directly in the chapter that bears your name. The truth is, words can't hold the way you embody Grace. You move through the world with a resolve I never had at your age—a kind of quiet power that makes things happen without fanfare. You don't just march to the beat of your own drum—you *are* the beat. And it's one I'll always follow with awe.

To my son, Colton—you are a powerful example of potential in motion. You've surprised me at every turn—not just with your talent, but with your heart. There's a wonder about you that I can't quite name ... so I won't try. I'll just say this: you've helped me return to something I love—music—and in doing so, returned me to a deeper part of myself.

To my mom, Patricia—thank you for encouraging my love of singing. And for standing by that encouragement through every odd twist and turn my life has taken. Your support—even when it was quiet—was never small.

To Alan—our conversations about music have done more than fill time. They've helped us know each other better. That's a gift I don't take lightly.

To the men in my family who shaped me in ways both spoken and silent—I carry that complexity forward.

To my nephews, Austin and Brayden—our conversations always bring laughter and a welcome sense of grounding.

Austin, your passion for football keeps our chats lively, and following our teams—the Bengals for me and the Falcons for you—has given us both a fair share of highs and lows. Brayden, our talks about superheroes remind me of the power of imagination and how stories keep us connected to possibility. Both of you remind me of what it means to stay rooted in the real world while still holding room for wonder. Being your uncle is something I'm deeply grateful for—know that I'm always here when you need me.

To Lynne, my mother-in-law—thank you for your steady encouragement and for offering guidance that extends well beyond my work. Our conversations, whether during visits or calls, have provided warmth and perspective in ways that always seem to arrive when most needed. Your quiet care and generosity mean more than I can say.

To the rest of my family—though various distances keep our paths from crossing often, I'm grateful for every moment we've shared. The laughter, hospitality, and openness you bring into those moments linger long after, and they're part of the rhythm that keeps life rich and real.

To the friends and colleagues who've shaped my thinking and offered encouragement along the way—thank you for the conversations, collaborations, and reminders that the work we do is never done alone. Whether we've shared a stage, a screen, or a simple exchange that left me thinking differently, your presence has mattered more than you know.

To those who've shaped my musical life:

To the members of Blue Rodeo—especially Jim Cuddy—for taking time to reminisce about that McMaster University show in Hamilton, Ontario, where you opened for Game Six of the World Series and Joe Carter walked it off. That story stayed with me.

Speaking of McMaster University, to my former colleagues at 93.3 CFMU—thank you for the space to stretch my musical taste and share what I found. You gave me a mic—and a mission.

To the entire Discord and Rhyme podcast team—your deep-dive album analyses (especially on *The White Album*) reminded me how much meaning lives behind the music.

To Chris Dalla Riva (*Uncharted Territory*), Linus Denault (whose lyric-sharing TikToks are like gut-punch poetry), and Rick Rubin (whose philosophy on creativity made its way between these pages)—thank you for helping me see music through new lenses.

To Graham Voddén—for the record player that became the steady soundtrack of this book.

To George Harrison, James Taylor, Jim Croce, Nick Drake, Jeff Buckley, and even Seth MacFarlane—for being sonic threads in the fabric of this work. *Secret O' Life* at the end of *The Orville*? That was a wink from the universe I didn't know I needed.

To Sara Hayes McMinn—my right hand, anchor, and gentle accountability. Your ability to balance precision with patience is a rare gift. You've kept me organized, encouraged, and on

track—often just by asking the simplest question: *Where are you at with the book?* Thank you for your insight, for your humour, and for going above and beyond in ways that extend far beyond your role. This book exists in no small part because you helped me keep it alive.

To the members of my online community—your questions, reflections, and support helped refine the very essence of this book. You are, in many ways, its living embodiment—and proof that a thoughtful practice grows stronger when it's shared.

To Braden and the team at FriesenPress—thank you for helping this idea become a book. Your patience, precision, and partnership have been essential at every step.

And finally, to you—the person holding this book.

You've given me your attentiveness. Your openness. Your willingness to linger in these ideas and let them take shape in your own life. That's no small thing. My hope is that these pages have met you where you are—not to tell you how to live, but to remind you that you already are. If this book has helped you see your relationship with time a little differently—with more gentleness, more spaciousness, more Humanness—then it's done what it set out to do.

Thank you for reading and for choosing to duck out of the day-to-day to spend a little of your time—and yourself—here with me.

Now, let the next moment be yours.

Since 2008, Mike Vardy has been immersed in the study and practice of productivity — as a writer, speaker, and teacher. He has coached individuals, organizations, and creatives around the world, and his work has appeared in Fast Company, Lifehacker, Forbes, and The Globe and Mail. His previous books include *The Front Nine*, *The Productivityist Playbook*, and *The Productivity Diet*.



Vardy's expertise is grounded in lived experience — testing, refining, and evolving ideas until they become practical. Over the years, he's uncovered a widening gap between busyness and fulfillment, leading him to explore a more sustainable path toward focus, creativity, and family rhythm. That exploration forms the heart of *Productiveness*.

He lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with his wife, Anne, and their two children. The rhythm of family life and the natural cadence of the Pacific Northwest continue to shape his work. To learn more about his writing, speaking, and community, visit mikevardy.com

Our approach to productivity is broken. The common principles and tools often improve the numbers, sure — but the numbers don't tell the full story. Many have mastered the mechanics of productivity yet feel hollow in their success. The ceaseless pressure for endless growth, for maximizing every minute, for commodifying every ounce of energy and time — it's crushing. It feeds a voice of panicked stress that doesn't quiet when the clock strikes five. There has to be a better way to bring work and life into balance than forcing them further apart.

Thankfully, feeling stuck isn't the same as being stuck. We can experiment with new ways of working — ways that reconnect our professional ambitions with our human needs, our struggles and strengths, our desire for meaning. If you're a professional or creative who's tired of the culture of constant optimization, who values structure but craves depth, who's reached a stage where "getting things done" is no longer enough — **PRODUCTIVENESS** offers a way forward.

PRODUCTIVENESS reclaims what it means to be productive in a world that confuses busyness with value. Where productivity has become a relentless pursuit of quantity, productiveness restores balance between quantity and quality — between output and outcome, doing and being.

Drawing on a lifetime of curiosity and practice in time management and creative focus, Mike Vardy explores nine enduring elements of productiveness — humanness, grace, prudence, cadence, nuance, tolerance, efficacy, trust, and will — principles that help readers reorient their relationship with time and attention. Through reflective essays and grounded practices, Vardy offers a path toward wholeness in work and in life.

PRODUCTIVENESS isn't a manual for managing time — it's an invitation to partner with it. A guide to rediscover the art of being productive without losing your humanity in the process.

