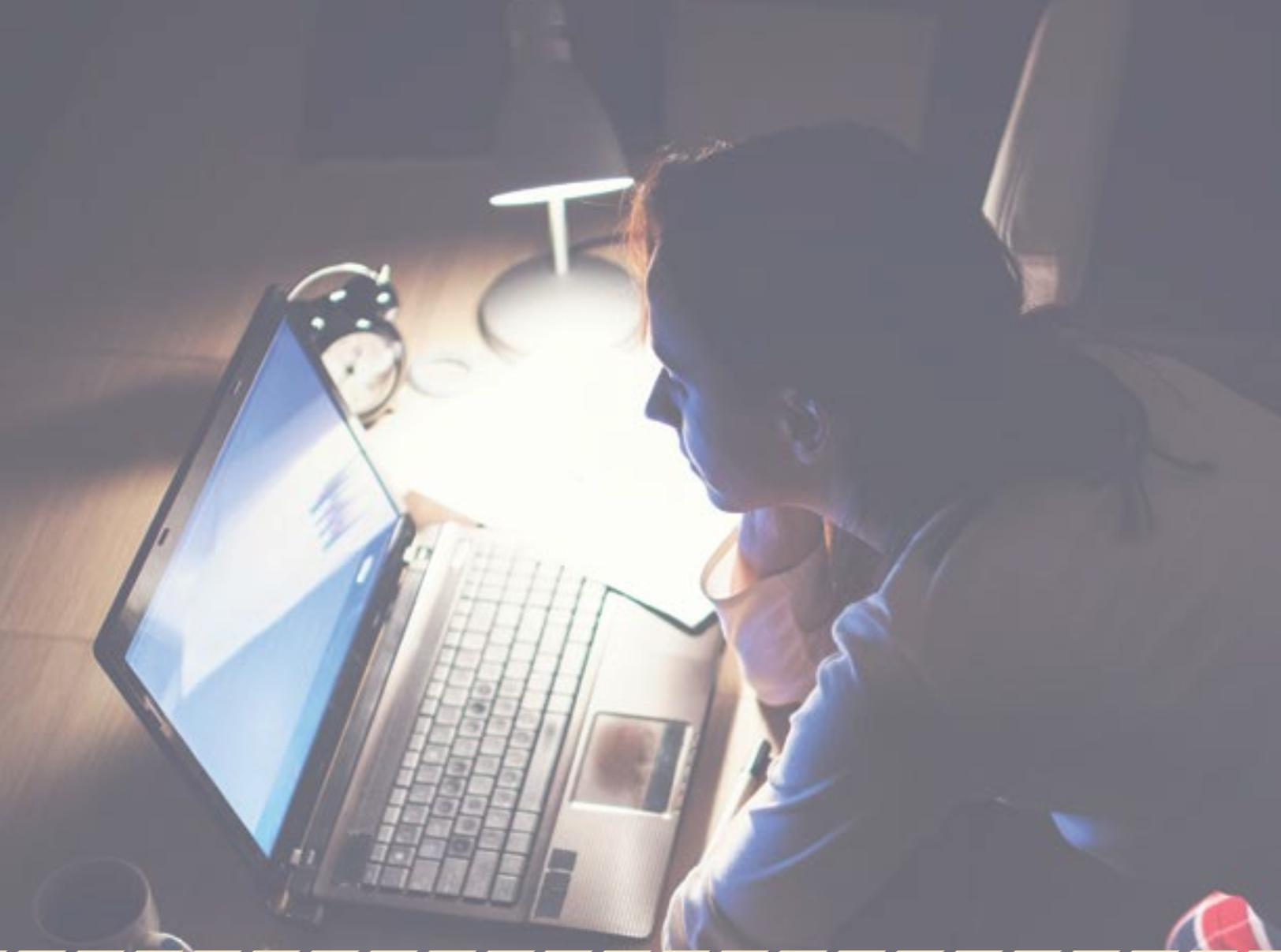




5 Simple Steps to Reclaiming Your Weekend

It's time to unplug,
recharge, and connect



Do you ever get to Sunday night and find yourself feeling even more stressed and exhausted than you did mid-week?

Long weekend hours can easily disappear into errands and shuttling the kids around to their various activities and parties. And when we do find ourselves with free time, we often default to checking our phones or catching up on the latest TV show. Very few of us seem to re-emerge from the weekends feeling rested and ready to take on a new week.

New Dream can't wave a magic wand and erase all your commitments and obligations—but we can provide simple steps to help you avoid defaulting to screens when you find yourself with a short burst of free time. Unplugging from your devices can have a huge impact on how you feel. Here are a few reasons why:

- **Screen time is not actually relaxing or rejuvenating.** In *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explains that there's a major distinction between active and passive leisure. Hobbies are about two-and-a-half times more likely to produce a state of heightened engagement ("flow") than television does, and active games and sports about three times more.
- **Most of us suffer from information overload and decision fatigue.** In her research for *Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*, author Brigid Schulte learned that, every second, the world's email users produce messages equivalent in size to more than 16,000 copies of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. And that's just email! Trying to even decide what to pay attention to in all that noise is exhausting.
- **Finally, constant screen interruptions make a hash of our time.** As Schulte notes, "All those stolen glances at the smartphone, the bursts of addictive texting and e-mail checking at all hours with the iPhone, Android, or BlackBerry by the bed, the

constant connection—even taking electronic devices into the toilet to shop—don't show up in time diaries. Yet that activity splinters the experience of time into thousands of little pieces. And living in an always-on technological haze leads to mental exhaustion."

Why, then, do so many of us default to screen time when we have a free moment? First, it's convenient. Second, once you own the screens, it's cheap. Plus, many of us experience our leisure time in chunks too small to do much else of consequence. Taking an art class may be invigorating, but we don't usually have the block of time required. Finally, true leisure often takes discipline. Signing up for the art class and getting the supplies require an initial investment of energy. So we tend to settle for less.

Not this time, though. Our hope is that you've downloaded this guide because you want more from your weekends. These simple steps are designed to help you unplug, recharge, and connect with what's most important to you and your family.

A couple of notes before we start:

- **Simple does not necessarily mean easy.** Think about the idea that happiness is a choice. But if this is true, then why isn't everybody happy? The reason is that, while happiness may be simple to understand, it may not be easy to implement. In fact, it can be downright challenging at times.

For this weekend exercise of reclaiming time, it may be especially challenging if you have a strong screen habit. But don't get discouraged! These steps are designed to set you up for success in a way that we hope you'll find enjoyable.

- **Don't try to force the rest of your loved ones to join you in this exercise.** We believe you'll make much more headway if you can first practice what you preach. Plus, it will seem less threatening if you don't force their involvement, but instead let them observe you. Once they see how much fun you're having, they may willingly come along for the ride.

Step 1:

Design Your Best Possible Weekend

Five years ago, New Dream staffer Edna Rienzi did an exercise that's had a profound impact on her life. It's called "The Best Possible Self" exercise, and the idea is that you write for 20 minutes a day—for four days in a row—about your life in the future as if everything has gone as well as possible and all your goals have been achieved.

For the purposes of this guide, we're going to tweak the exercise. Just write for 20 minutes (for one day) about your *best possible weekend*—a weekend where everything goes as well as possible for you. The kind of weekend that makes you smile just thinking about it.

But don't just think about it! The key is to **write it down** in the present tense. If you just do it as a thought exercise, it's likely nothing will happen. But by writing for 20 minutes a day (even for just one day), the results can be astounding. There is power in the act of writing.

You may be more inspired to attempt this type of exercise if you read a real-life example. Here's how Edna described her ideal weekend in her "Best Possible Life" exercise:

I wake up in the morning to a peaceful, soothing room. There's lots of natural light, and the artwork on the walls makes me happy. The bed is comfortable, and the room is clutter-free. I start the day off with meditation. Then, I write in my journal and read before the kids wake up.

When everybody's awake, we head downstairs and have our traditional Saturday morning chocolate chip waffles. After breakfast, we hop on our bikes down to the farmer's market and spend the morning in town. After we bike back from town,

we have lunch—made from our farmer's market purchases—on the deck. We're mildly productive in the afternoon. We either do a little work on a school project, get something done around the house, or volunteer for a favorite charity. Then, friends come over for a potluck dinner.

On Sunday mornings, we attend church, and the whole family is inspired to be our best possible selves. For Sunday lunch, one of our kids gets a turn having a one-on-one date with me or with my husband. We do this three Sundays a month. On the fourth Sunday, my husband and I go on a lunch date. The rest of the afternoon is unhurried and open for whatever we feel like doing that day. In the evening, my parents come over for Sunday night dinner. By the end of the weekend, we all feel relaxed and rejuvenated for the week to come.

That's Edna's best possible weekend. It doesn't happen every weekend—the vision is blurred by birthday parties and Girl Scout events and last-minute errands. But, since doing this exercise, Edna has found that it happens much more often than it used to. And many of the ideas (the bike rides in warm weather, the waffles, the one-on-one dates, the Sunday night dinner) have become weekend rituals for her family. That's a huge change from before.

Please don't skip this step! Some of you may be tempted to move on because you're impatient to get to the part where you actually *do something*. But knowing your *why* and visualizing *how the change will make you feel* is key to motivating yourself to change your habits.

Step 2: Set Yourself Up for Success

With your best possible weekend in mind, what specific goal do you want to set for yourself with regard to your screen time? Do you want to go big and aim to go screen-free from Friday night to Sunday night? Or would you like to target one particular type of screen entertainment—maybe no social media over the weekend?

Perhaps no Netflix or Amazon Prime? Maybe staying connected to work email is a particular problem when you're trying to prioritize family time. Think about how you want to feel on Sunday night. What level of unplugging do you think will help you get there?

Once you have your goal in mind, structure your environment for success. Depending on your goal, you may need to:

1. Set up an auto-responder on your work email.
2. Turn notifications off on your phone.
3. Use a program like [Freedom](#) to lock the Internet away for certain blocks of time.
4. Let your loved ones know your plan, and ask for their help and support.
5. Print out driving directions. Dig up your old camera. Plan ahead.
6. Create a list of screen-free activities based on your "best possible weekend" exercise. Then, when you're tempted to default to screens, you'll have a handy list you can use. Just make sure some of the activities are short, for those small bursts of time that pop up.
Some ideas:
 - Try a new recipe
 - Take a nap
 - Write a letter to your grandparents
 - Read a book
 - Call your mom or dad

- Go for a walk

7. Print out an inspirational message to leave on top of your computer or television, or even tucked in with your phone. You can use one of

"The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it."

Michelangelo

"Do not wait until the conditions are perfect to begin. Beginnings make the conditions perfect."

Alan Cohen

Step 3: What to Do When the Urge to Plug In Hits

First, don't be hard on yourself. Your devices are [designed to be addictive!](#) Rather than beating yourself up over your urge to check your phone or log into Facebook, get curious instead.

What are your triggers? Think about your food triggers, for example. Hunger should be the trigger for eating, right? But sometimes the trigger is stress. Sometimes it's boredom. Sometimes it's fear. The same goes with screen use. Chances are you don't just pick up your phone when you need to get information or connect with someone. Many of us default to screens out of boredom. Or because we're procrastinating. Or because it's become a habit, and we don't even think about it.

In [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#), Stephen Covey describes how there is a space between the trigger event or feeling and our reaction. Most of us don't act that way. We respond immediately and unthinkingly to a trigger. This weekend, the goal is to try to create a space between your trigger feeling—the urge to plug in—and actually plugging in.

Whenever you're tempted to default to screen time, think about *why* you reached for the screen. And then, decide whether there's another response that you would prefer in that moment. Think about your "best possible weekend" exercise. Did you want to devote more time to reading? Pick up that book that's been sitting on your nightstand for months. Do you want to be more mindful? Count your blessings instead of logging into Facebook. Want to be more connected with your partner? Start a conversation instead of looking down at your phone.

Each time you feel the urge to plug in, remember that you have the freedom to choose your response. Make a conscious choice based on your true wants and not just on your old habits.



Step 4:

Take Time to Reflect

On Sunday night, take the time to reflect on your experience.

How close did your actual weekend line up with your vision of the best possible weekend?

What felt really good about unplugging?
What were your trouble spots?

Did the benefits of unplugging outweigh the costs for you?

How did your loved ones feel about your experience?

Do you want to take this exercise to the next level?

For some, this may mean scheduling screen-free time throughout your week. Or maybe the idea of unplugging completely for one day a week appeals to you. What about one day a month? Maybe you realized that you didn't miss certain screens or websites at all, and it's time to drop them. Maybe you really missed certain sites, and you realized that these do add value to your life.

The goal of this weekend is not to convince you to go totally screen-free forever, but instead to be more intentional about the technology we bring into our lives.



Step 5: Celebrate!

Regardless of whether you accomplished your goal or fell short of it, celebrate the progress—big or small—that you made.

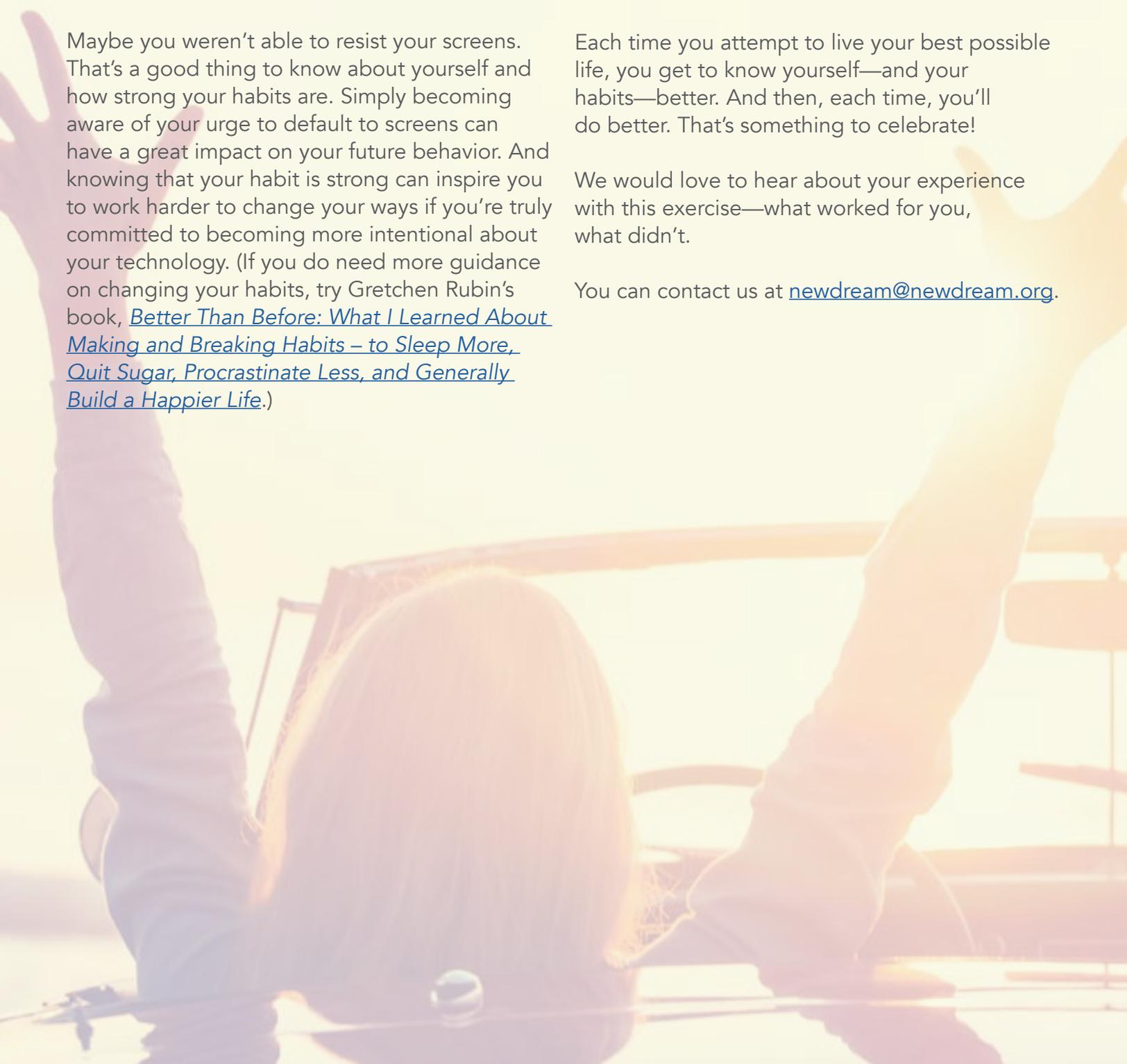
Maybe you weren't able to resist your screens. That's a good thing to know about yourself and how strong your habits are. Simply becoming aware of your urge to default to screens can have a great impact on your future behavior. And knowing that your habit is strong can inspire you to work harder to change your ways if you're truly committed to becoming more intentional about your technology. (If you do need more guidance on changing your habits, try Gretchen Rubin's book, [Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits – to Sleep More, Quit Sugar, Procrastinate Less, and Generally Build a Happier Life.](#))

Maya Angelou said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, you do better."

Each time you attempt to live your best possible life, you get to know yourself—and your habits—better. And then, each time, you'll do better. That's something to celebrate!

We would love to hear about your experience with this exercise—what worked for you, what didn't.

You can contact us at newdream@newdream.org.



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New Dream's mission is to empower individuals, communities, and organizations to transform their consumption habits to improve well-being for people and the planet.

We work with individuals and communities to conserve natural resources, counter the commercialization of our culture, and support community engagement. We seek to change social norms around consumption and consumerism and to support the movement of individuals and communities pursuing lifestyle and community action.

New Dream's overall goal is to change behavior, attitudes, and social norms to reduce consumption and build community. We envision a society that pursues not just "more," but more of what matters—and less of what doesn't.