KESTON SCHOOL

WORK & WEALTH · FREE SAMPLE

Pick What Matters Most

Cut the overloaded list and put your time where it counts

CHAPTER 1 + WORKBOOK SECTION

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book

By the last page you will know how to see your whole workload at once, cut it down to what actually matters, choose a small set of priorities each week, and talk about trade-offs with your manager and colleagues without sounding unwilling or difficult.

1. Read one chapter at a time. Each one gives you a single idea and a single action.
2. Open the Pick What Matters Most Workbook and complete the matching section while the chapter is fresh.
3. Do the “Try this” action within seven days. Reading changes what you know; the action changes what you do.
4. Finish with the checklist in chapter 12 and come back to it whenever you slip.

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01

CHAPTER 1

Everything Feels Urgent

Why your to-do list keeps winning, how to recognize the overload pattern in your own week, and why working faster or longer does not fix it.

It is Thursday afternoon. You have answered forty messages, sat in four meetings, fixed a spreadsheet someone else broke and reviewed a draft that was not really yours to review. Every one of those things felt necessary at the time. Now you look at the one piece of work you promised yourself you would finish this week, the proposal that could actually change something, and it is exactly where it was on Monday.

You stay late to make a dent in it. Tomorrow, three new requests arrive before nine.

If that sounds familiar, this book is for you.

The list that only grows

Most overloaded people do not have a time-management problem in the usual sense. They are not lazy, disorganized or bad at their jobs. Often they are the opposite: reliable, quick and willing. That is exactly why work keeps finding them.

The pattern looks like this. New tasks arrive faster than old ones leave. Each one is reasonable on its own. A quick favor, a small fix, a meeting that “only takes thirty minutes.” Nothing ever gets formally removed, so the list becomes a record of everything anyone has ever asked of you. You work through it from the top, or from whatever is loudest, and the work that matters most keeps sliding to the bottom because it is big, quiet and nobody is chasing it today.

The result is a strange kind of exhaustion. You are busy all day and still feel behind. You get a lot done and still cannot point to what you achieved this month.

Four signs you are in it

You may recognize some of these:

- **Your best work happens at the edges.** Early mornings, late evenings, Sunday nights. The workday itself is full of other people’s priorities.
- **You say yes before you check.** A request arrives and you agree, then look at your calendar and realize you have no idea when you will do it.

- **Things drop quietly.** Not because you decided to drop them, but because there was no time left. You feel a small jolt of guilt when someone follows up.
- **Everything is "top priority."** When you try to rank your work, every item seems equally important, so you rank nothing and react to whatever comes next.

None of these make you a bad worker. They are signs that your workload has no filter. Things get in easily and almost nothing gets out.

Think of a kitchen sink with the tap running and the drain half blocked. You can bail water out with a cup as fast as you like, and you will still be bailing tomorrow. The useful questions are about the tap and the drain: what is flowing in, and what is allowed to flow out. Most productivity advice hands you a bigger cup. This book works on the tap and the drain.

It also helps to notice that overload is rarely spread evenly. Usually a few sources create most of the pressure: one demanding project, one person who sends requests at all hours, one recurring meeting that spawns follow-up work. Your snapshot at the end of this chapter will help you spot yours.

Why working faster fails

The usual advice for an overloaded list is to get more efficient. Batch your email. Use a better app. Wake up earlier. Some of that helps at the margins. But it rarely solves the problem, for a simple reason: when you get faster, you usually get more.

People notice who delivers. A colleague who turns things around quickly becomes the person everyone asks first. Speed creates spare capacity for a week or two, and then that capacity fills up again, often with lower-value work than before. You end up doing more things, but not more of the things that matter.

Working longer has the same limit, plus a cost. Extra hours come out of sleep, family, rest and the energy you need to think clearly. For a short crunch, that can be a fair trade. As a permanent strategy, it tends to make your work worse, not better.

> **Key idea:** An overloaded list is not fixed by doing more, faster. It is fixed by deciding, on purpose, what you will not do.

What this book gives you

The chapters ahead follow a simple path. First you will see why workloads swell and what that costs you. Then you will build on one principle: every yes is a trade. From there you get three practical tools. You will sort your whole list into what to keep, shrink, delay or drop. You will choose three outcomes each week and protect time for them first. And you will learn how to talk about trade-offs with your manager and colleagues in a way that sounds responsible, not reluctant.

After that, you will apply the tools to common overloaded weeks, deal with the hard cases, build a short weekly routine and look at how all of this adds up over a career.

This is everyday workload practice. If your overload comes with persistent exhaustion, poor sleep or a feeling that you cannot cope, that deserves more than a better list. Talk to a doctor or a qualified professional, and consider involving your manager or HR.

Try this

Before you change anything, get an honest picture. For the next three workdays, keep a simple workload snapshot. It takes about five minutes at the end of each day.

1. Write down everything you worked on, including small things like messages, favors and unplanned calls.
2. Next to each item, note where it came from: you, your manager, a colleague, a client or “it just appeared.”
3. Mark the one or two items that actually moved something important forward.
4. At the end of day three, count. How many items in total, and how many of them did you mark?

Do not judge the numbers yet. Most people are surprised by how much of their day comes from requests they never consciously chose. That gap is where this book starts.

Next, you will see why the list keeps growing, even when you are trying hard to keep it under control.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A list that only grows is a design problem, not a character flaw.
- Working faster usually attracts more work, not more breathing room.
- Seeing your whole workload on one page is the first step to cutting it.

→ Workbook, section 1

01 Everything Feels Urgent

Keep a three-day workload snapshot. Five minutes at the end of each day.

FILL IN

My three-day workload snapshot

Day	What I worked on	Where it came from	Moved something important?

CHECKLIST

Signs I recognize (tick all that fit)

- [ ] My best work happens at the edges of the day
- [ ] I say yes before I check my time
- [ ] Things drop quietly
- [ ] Everything feels like top priority

RATE IT

How in control of my workload do I feel right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 · Not at all
10 · Fully

After three days: total items, items I marked, and what surprised me:

YOUR NEXT STEP

Want the whole book?

You just read chapter 1 of Pick What Matters Most and tried the first workbook section. The full e-book has 12 chapters, a complete workbook and a final checklist. Here is everything inside:

01 Everything Feels Urgent

02 Why the List Keeps Growing

03 The Price of Doing It All

04 Every Yes Is a Trade

05 Sort the Whole List

06 Pick Your Weekly Three

07 Talk About Trade-Offs

08 Four Overloaded Weeks

09 When It's Still Too Much

10 A Weekly Priority Reset

11 Known for What Counts

12 Mistakes & Checklist

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