

Slack



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1. Introduction

What is slack?

- Dictionary definition of slack: *not tight; not busy*
- Tom DeMarco is:
 - A management consultant in the software industry
 - Author of several well-known books, including *Slack*
- In his book *Slack*, Tom DeMarco:
 - Redefines slack as *the degree of freedom required to effect change*
 - Discusses several issues that hinder change
- Slack is important to anyone who wants to change the world
 - This chapter discusses some issues that hinder slack
 - And suggests ways to combat them

Example of why slack is important

- Consider the following scenario:
 - You work 80 hours a week at minimum-wage to earn enough to live
 - The work is physically tiring and stressful
- You would like to make a change. Either:
 - Campaign to improve working conditions and pay, or...
 - Find a better job (fewer hours, more money, less stress)
- However:
 - Working long hours means you have very little time to campaign or search for a new job
 - Even if you do have some time, stress and exhaustion means you don't have the energy
- Put simply: a lack of slack makes it difficult to effect change
 - This applies to changing your own life or changing the world

Oppressive systems eliminate slack

- An oppressive system removes slack from those it oppresses
 - This makes it difficult for the oppressed to make changes to end the oppression
- Examples of how an oppressive system removes slack:
 - Removing freedom (through slavery, threat of imprisonment or threat of eviction)
 - Removing money (very low wages or slavery)
 - Removing free time due to hard work and long hours
 - Reducing morale due to continual stress

Creating slack

- If you want to make changes then you need to create slack:
 - There is no universal best way to do this
 - But the rest of this chapter suggests some possibilities

2. Ways to create slack in your life

Analyse how you waste time

- Taken from *The Lifelong Activist* by Hillary Rettig
 - Chapter 10 in Part II
- For one week, record how you spend your time:
 - Technique:
 - Write a list of tasks on a page, one task per line (everything from work-related tasks to entertainment and chores)
 - Set a timer to go off every 15 minutes (easy to remember what you were doing in such a short time period)
 - When the timer goes off, put a tick beside the task you were doing during the previous 15 minutes
 - Afterwards, analyse the ticks to find unexpected wastes of time
 - Many people discover 20+ hours of wasted time per week
 - Staring out the window, aimlessly surfing the Internet, ...
 - Working on unimportant tasks
 - Eliminating such wasted time can create a lot of slack

Act on the analysis

- Taken from *The Lifelong Activist* by Hillary Rettig
 - Chapters 11–13 in Part II
- Hillary Rettig explained how recording time usage helped her:
 - She kept track of her time in 15-minute increments and discovered:
 - She was spending a lot of working time on personal calls, web surfing, video games, coffee breaks and so on
 - She did just 25 hours of productive work in a 70-hour week
 - She resolved to do “a little better”:
 - Next week, she did 35 hours of productive work in a 60-hour week
 - Next week, she did 40 hours of productive work in a 55-hour week
 - Eventually, she did 40 hours of productive work in a 45-hour week
 - Result: she has a more productive work week and more relaxation time

Live more frugally

- Some common attitudes are:
 - “Work more to earn more money to buy more things”
 - “Buy with credit rather than buying only when you have the money”
- Such attitudes reduce slack in your life:
 - Working more reduces time slack
 - Buying on credit creates a financial obligation, which reduces freedom
- If you can live more frugally then:
 - You won't need so much money, so...
 - You can reduce overtime work, or perhaps even work only part-time
- Many books provide tips on living cheaply
 - Look in a local bookstore or in an Internet bookstore such as Amazon

Relevant quote

- The following quote sums up the lack of slack in the lives of many people:
 - Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work, driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for — in order to get to the job that you need so you can pay for the clothes, car, and the house that you leave empty all day in order to afford to live in it.
— Ellen Goodman, American journalist and author

3. Summary

Summary

- Definitions of *slack*:
 - Dictionary: *not tight* or *not busy*
 - Tom DeMarco: *the degree of freedom required to effect change*
- An oppressive system removes slack from those it oppresses
 - This makes it difficult for the oppressed to make changes to end the oppression
- You need slack in your life if you want to change the world
- It is up to you to find ways to create slack in your life