



'You've let the technology companies invade your discipline. Why is it that you allow something to encroach on your thinking?' You have to be disciplined. You have to win back your time.

Dan Pontefract

Strategies for cutting through the clutter and thinking more clearly

In his book "Open to Think," Dan Pontefract offers strategies for "resurrecting thinking" and making better decisions. His prescription: be more deliberate with your time.

Editor's note:

In the following interview, Jeff Ostrowski asked Dan Pontefract, author of "Open to Think: Slow Down, Think Creatively, and Make Better Decision," about the importance of leading a disciplined life in the age of many distractions. Ostrowski is a journalist and freelance writer for getAbstract. Visit journal.getabstract.com for the original source of the interview.

Q: Congratulations on the *getAbstract International Book Award, Dan*. Since your book was published in 2018, it seems people have only gotten busier and more distracted?

A: We thought technology would save hours in the day. It has actually expanded the amount of content we have to sift through — the societal whims of Instagram, cats playing piano. What happened to the white space of creative thinking and critical thinking? We've seen countless examples of quick decisions and decisions not based on facts. I've seen it creep up over the last 10 years or so.

I'm sort of like the curmudgeonly Muppet in the balcony. But there are pockets of hope. People have come up to me or written to me and paid very kind homage to how the book gave them a slap in the head about their time.

Q: For example?

A: I had someone say that just because the default in Microsoft Outlook is a 60-minute meeting, you don't have to do 60-minute meetings. You can schedule 45-minute meetings and give everyone an extra 15 minutes. But the busy-ness factor at work is going up, and stress is going up. The continued elevation in distracted driving is outpacing drunk driving. It took us a while to learn not to drive drunk, I suppose, but it's still OK to drive with a phone.

In Victoria, British Columbia, where I live, there was a record number of tickets for distracted driving this summer. That should tell you something. "I can't waste my time at a stop sign — there are people who like my Instagram post."

There's this addiction to dopamine, this need to be loved.

Q: Given that brain chemistry, how do you force yourself to tune out the distractions?

A: It's about discipline. It's about self-discipline. People really need to extricate themselves from the noise and the nonsense that's out there. I do 50 keynotes a



Dan Pontefract is an acclaimed keynote speaker, poet, leadership strategist and best-selling author of three books. He founded The Pontefract Group and is an adjunct professor at the University of Victoria, Gustavson School of Business.
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year, and invariably during my speech, a phone will go off. I call them out on it. "You've let the technology companies invade your discipline. Why is it that you allow something to encroach on your thinking?" You have to be disciplined. You have to win back your time.

Q: How do you manage your own schedule to have time to think?

A: Me time is very important. Ever since 1998, I have refused to take meetings on Friday afternoon. In my calendar, it's called "DP think time." It's from 12pm to 5pm. I might go on a bike ride. I might be on a plane somewhere. I might be at my home office. I might be at my place of work. But I don't talk to anyone during that time. I've been doing that for 20-plus years.

If you're not loyal to your own calendar, if you let people steal your time, then you'll ultimately be busy.

Q: You're saying we're so busy we don't take the time to reflect or absorb?

A: That's precisely it. It's kind of sad. It's not that we weren't busy in the past. In the buildup to World War II, we were busy preparing for the war.

The length of an hour hasn't changed, but we're trying to jam more in those 60 minutes than we used to, and there's a cost to that.

My three kids play soccer, and I can't tell you how many times I watch parents

watch their phones instead of watching their kids. Their kid scores a goal, and they look up from their phone and say, "Did Jimmy just score?"

Q: Do you use social media?

A: Of course. I love it. I love the interaction. I love the camaraderie. But I try to be disciplined. If I have to go to my kid's soccer match, and there's a 30-minute warmup, I'll sit in my car and post something, because I don't care about the warmup. But once the match starts, the phone goes away. You have to make a judgment call about your own use of time.

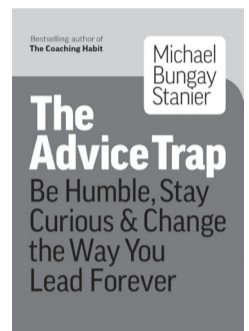
Q: Are you working on another book?

A: Sadly, yes. I'm a bit of a masochist. My first book was about culture. My second book was about purpose. I had an epiphany as I finished up "Open to Think" about leadership. It's not about leading others. It's about leading yourself. You're not the smartest person in the world. Admit you don't know everything and become a lifelong learner. It's titled "More Than Leadership." It's scheduled to be published in September 2020. So the book focuses on things like stop being an ass. Admit your mistakes. Be kind.

getAbstract has summarized three of Dan Pontefract's books — the award-winning "Open to Think," plus "The Purpose Effect" and his first work, "Flat Army."

Business Books TOP FIVE US

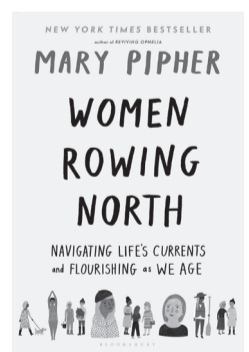
1 Stillness Is the Key
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