Deep Work (Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World) by Cal Newport

Book Summary:

In _Deep Work (Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World)_, author Cal Newport makes an argument that will resonate with many an officer. Put simply, he claims, you're too distracted. You're too distracted by shallow work—emails, meetings, and even your open door policy—to do the deep work required as a knowledge worker. For Newport, knowledge workers, or high-skill workers, must meet the 21st century's "New Economy" head-on by producing high-quality work to thrive amid stiff competition. This, however, is increasingly difficult, argues Newport, as the workplace's embrace of connectivity and busyness makes allocating time for this necessary deep work paradoxically difficult. Newport, then, dedicates the book to four strategies that don't just negate this deep work deficit, but render it a profound opportunity for their subscribers.

Rule #1, unsurprisingly, is to "Work Deeply," specifically by adopting not only a personalized deep work philosophy, but building rituals that facilitate its regular adoption. The following rule, Embrace Boredom, is focused, then, on improving the quality of this deep work when we're not working deeply, or are just bored. According to Newport, techniques ranging from memorizing a deck of cards to walks or runs can vastly improve our brain's ability to analyze and focus. "Quit Social Media," Rule #3, is just that simple, quit. It may have some benefit, but it rarely outweighs its distraction, and, accordingly, for almost all of us, it's just got to go. The final rule "Drain the Shallows" concludes Newport's advice by suggesting we budget our time, and push back on distractions, to maximize deep work time. For Newport, however, these aren't just tips to clear your schedule, but rather, a transformative mindset to ultimately do work that truly matters.

Suggested Questions for Moderators:

1. What do you think deep work looks like for the junior officer? Do junior officers produce deep work, or, is it possible that they aren't quite knowledge workers at all?
    a. _Encourage participants to consider the concrete things junior officers, especially lieutenants, could accomplish as a form of deep work. Could they earn a masters degree? Could they learn a language? Just because deep work doesn't occur during a junior officers' workday, doesn't mean they can't find deep work to do._
2. A key theme for Newport's book is a distinction he draws between shallow work and deep work. In terms of the Army in general, and junior officers specifically, what would you characterize as deep work and what would you characterize as shallow work?
3. In Chapter 2, Newport decries busyness and connectivity for displacing time for deep work. Do you think the Army would benefit from more whitespace to foster creativity?

a. *Reference this [article](#), in which SMA Grinston discusses the importance of whitespace and not scheduling training for the sake of training.*

4. What deep work philosophy—monastic, bimodal, rhythmic, or journalistic—best applies to your approach to deep work? Do you think there is one style of deep work most compatible with the junior officer experience?
   a. *Encourage participants to consider when junior officers could find the most uninterrupted time to engage in a form of deep work. Is it early in the morning before PT (rhythmic)? Or is it on the weekends or four-day weekends (bimodal)?*

5. As a component of Rule #2 "Embrace Boredom," Newport encourages readers to meditate productively to solve their thornier problems. Do you believe morning PT could be structured to function as a form of productive meditation? Are there any productive strategies you use that the author did not mention?

6. Quitting social media is an obvious solution for all of us. But are there hidden, work-related uses of the internet that are draining our productive times that we could quit?
   a. *Could junior grade officers resolve to check email just a few times daily, instead of hardly being able to get away from it?*

7. In the chapter for Rule #3 "Quit Social Media," Newport cites the Law of the Vital Few, or 80/20 rule, commonly known as the [Pareto principle](#). As a junior officer, do you think the 80/20 principle applies to you work? What can you do to better utilize it to enhance your productivity?
   a. *Encourage participants to think about when they do their best work. Is it between when PT ends and the duty day starts? Is it during the lunch hour? Push participants to consider what they can do to enhance the unique productivity of this time.*

8. In the chapter for Rule #4 "Drain the Shallows," Newport enthusiastically cites the example of Google encouraging their employees to work on projects they choose. Do you think that could be replicated at the junior officer level?
   a. *Encourage participants to consider what [good idea fairies](#) lieutenants could take to fruition given the chance. Could they improve the motor pool process or the S3?*

9. Newport's book is seemingly directed at knowledge workers, a type of economic agent that needs to engage in deep work to thrive economically. Would you put soldiers into that class? Officers and enlisted above a certain rank? Is it possible that this book doesn't apply as much to our profession of arms?
   a. *Encourage participants to consider the case that deep work in the Army is done by [functional areas](#) or higher ranks, and company-grade officers largely execute.*
   b. *Consider, as well, this quote by Thucydides, "The society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting by fools."*

Follow-on Reading and Resources:

- [Cal Newport takes on "Quiet Quitting" as it relates to deep and short work](#)
- ["What It Takes to Put Your Phone Away"](#) by Cal Newport
- [*Walden* by Henry David Thoreau](#)

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