



University Hospital of Wales

mmorgan@bmj.com Follow Matt on

Twitter @dr_mattmorgan

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2022;376:n3140<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n3140>

Published: 04 January 2022

CRITICAL THINKING

Matt Morgan: Your 1800 weeks of work

Matt Morgan *consultant in intensive care medicine*

As another year ticks silently into the next, along with the resolutions broken, I reflect on my place as a speck on this Earth. My Christmas gift of a brilliant book by Oliver Burkeman, *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals*,¹ has helped to make this seemingly morbid festive activity feel life affirming.

With just 4000 weeks or so in an average human life, Burkeman—a self-confessed recovering productivity geek—argues that we concentrate too much on getting more and more done while forgetting what it is in life that really matters. In any life there will always be too much to do, and, with the whole of documented human civilisation contained within the span of just 60 centenarian lifetimes in a row, you are really no big deal. Instead of denting the universe, Burkeman argues, what really matters is “making some tiny contribution to the betterment of the environment, or your neighborhood, or the political culture.”

It struck me that those 4000 weeks of my life will contain 1800 weeks of caring for patients. Eighteen hundred weeks of work. Boiling your entire career down to these simple numbers may help you to move from last year to the next with a different view of how you relate to time, to people, and to yourself.

In any career in healthcare there will always be too much to do. As the whole of medicine’s documented history could be contained within the span of just 20 centenarian human lifetimes, you can make a big difference. Not in an Elon Musk, dent-the-universe kind of way, but by making tiny improvements for patients, for your colleagues, or to the health systems people rely on.

These seemingly insignificant gestures are not only enough—they are the ones that really matter. And, while the 24 hour news channels batter us with gloom, not everything that weighs us down is ours to carry. Allow the good days to bring you happiness; the bad ones will bring experience of this short life and even shorter career.

So, when making resolutions for the next 52 weeks of your life in medicine, remember that the true value of any time management strategy lies in it helping you to neglect the things that don’t really matter.

Competing interests: I have read and understood BMJ policy on declaration of interests and declare that I have no competing interests.

Provenance and peer review: Commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

Matt Morgan is an honorary senior research fellow at Cardiff University, consultant in intensive care medicine, research and development lead in critical care at University Hospital of Wales, and an editor of *BMJ OnExamination*.

1 Burkeman O. *Four thousand weeks: time management for mortals*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021.