

READTOSUCCEED

Take Your Time Back

The 1% systems to win back your time, focus, and freedom. Without willpower.

I Lost 76 Days Last Year to My Phone

Five hours a day, every day. That's 35 hours a week, and over a year it adds up to 76 full days out of 365. Gone. Not on my businesses, not on my kids, not on the books I love, just staring at a screen I wasn't even enjoying. I wasn't choosing to pick it up, my hand just did it.

I tried willpower. I deleted apps. I made rules. Every time, I was back to square one within two weeks.

Then I figured out why. It wasn't a discipline problem. It was a design problem.

HERE IS WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU

A team of engineers spent months on the exact shade of red for a notification badge, not because it looked nice, but because that specific red made you check your phone more.

Another team ran thousands of experiments on autoplay timing until it hit the sweet spot where stopping felt harder than continuing.

This is what your attention is worth to them: billions of dollars, thousands of engineers, years of research, all pointed at one thing, keeping you on the screen for one more second.

You're not weak. You never had a fair fight.

The average adult spends 7 hours a day on screens.

That's 20 years of your life. Gone.

The numbers are brutal. Over a lifetime, roughly 20 years of waking hours disappear into a screen, most of it not chosen, not enjoyed, just reflex. That's why you can't focus. That's why you feel tired before the day starts. That's why the book sits on the nightstand unread for three months. You're not lazy. You're running on an operating system that was hacked.

Now Flip the Math

This is a guide about screen addiction. About the invisible pull that keeps you scrolling past midnight, reaching for your phone before your feet hit the floor, checking nothing in particular twenty times an hour. About the slow, quiet theft of your attention by products designed by the smartest people in the world to be impossible to put down.

It's also about what's on the other side. Because the hours are still there, they're just occupied. Take them back and you don't just feel less distracted, you get your actual life back.

Get two hours back every day. That's 14 hours a week, 60 hours a month, 730 hours a year.

What would you do with 730 hours?

Start the business you keep putting off. Read 40 books instead of 7. Learn a language. Run a marathon. Sleep properly. Have real conversations at dinner. Watch your kids grow up with your eyes, not through a screen.

Not about extremes

I tested everything, including the extreme options: grayscale, a dumbphone, deleting every app. Some of it worked. Some of it just made me miserable.

You don't need to delete everything, and you don't need to become a monk. You still want your phone for what it's genuinely good at: maps, music, camera, messages from people who matter.

This guide is about the 1% of changes that give back the most time for the least sacrifice. The ones I tested, kept, and still use. Not a list of a hundred things to try, the systems that actually work.

None of this runs on discipline.

You set it up once. Then it works.

Each section below has a short list of top systems, a set of reinforcers if you want to go further, and a few extreme options if you want to go all the way. Take what fits, skip what doesn't.

THE ATTENTION WAR

How to beat the system that's beating you.

A team of fifty engineers spent three months on the exact shade of red in a notification badge. Another team tuned the timing of an autoplay feature until it triggered an irresistible "might as well" response. They didn't guess at those numbers, they tested them on millions of brains, including yours. Most of their levers sit in one menu. You can switch them off in under an hour.

Kill Every Non-Human Notification

A notification is a hijack. Your brain can't ignore a chime, it's wired to investigate every alert in case it matters. Apps know this, which is why they send you eighty a day: each one buys back a sliver of your attention.

The red badge is the worst of them. It uses a color your brain reads as danger, and creates a feeling of unfinished business that itches until you clear it. None of that was accidental. It was tested for weeks before it shipped.

Turn off every notification that isn't from a real person. Calls, texts, and direct messages stay on. Everything else goes.

How to: iPhone: Settings > Notifications > tap each app > toggle off. Android: Settings > Notifications > App settings > tap each app.

What you get: your phone stops calling you. The urge to check fades within a week.

Turn Off Autoplay, Everywhere

Autoplay is the single biggest time thief in tech. It's the default on video and social apps because choice kills viewing time. If the next thing just plays, you watch for another hour without ever deciding to.

Take the decision back. Every video should be a choice.

How to: most video apps have a toggle in playback or account settings, usually labelled "autoplay next" or "autoplay episodes." Turn it off in each one. If an app won't let you, that's a sign to delete it.

What you get: three hours of accidental watching become twenty minutes of intentional watching.

Make Your Phone Visually Boring

Color is the dopamine. Apps are designed to glow, because a bright, colorful icon gets tapped far more than a dull one. Loud logos aren't an accident, those colors are tuned to catch your eye the instant the screen lights up.

Take the color away and the pull weakens fast. Switch your whole screen to grayscale and every icon turns a flat, lifeless gray. Set a plain black wallpaper so nothing shimmers behind your apps. Suddenly the phone looks like a tool instead of a toy. Nothing is deleted, nothing is blocked, the apps are all still there, they just stop calling to you.

It feels strange for a day. Then you realize you're reaching for the phone far less, and you have no idea why. It's the missing color.

How to: iPhone: Settings > Accessibility > Display & Text Size > Color Filters > On. Set a triple-click shortcut so you can toggle color back for photos. Android: Settings > Digital Wellbeing > Bedtime mode > Grayscale, or Developer options > Simulate color space > Monochromacy.

What you get: half the urge to open apps disappears. You stop noticing the phone is there.

Delete the Apps You Hate Yourself for Opening

You know which ones. The ones you open without meaning to. The ones you check on the toilet. The ones you swore off last Sunday.

Willpower is unreliable. Friction is reliable. The deleted app is the unused app. The web version is slower, uglier, and requires you to log in every time. That's exactly the point.

If you truly need the app back, the app store still works tomorrow. Most people never reinstall.

What you get: the first day is uncomfortable. The second day you forget. By week two, you wonder how the app ever had a hold on you.

Reinforce the System

Four small moves that compound with the four above. None take more than a minute.

- ♦ **Phone face down, always.** A face-down phone can't pull you in. Make it the default position: on your desk, at dinner, in meetings.
- ♦ **Log out after every session.** Staying logged in is the silent killer. Logging in twice a day is a choice, the password barrier kills half the autopilot urges.
- ♦ **Disable red badges entirely.** Even with notifications off, some apps still show the red number. Kill those too, the little red dots are designed to make you anxious.
- ♦ **Hide notification previews on the lock screen.** Don't let a locked screen flash with message content. Hide previews so you have to unlock to see what came in, and check on your own terms.

Want to Go Extreme?

For when the standard moves aren't enough. Each one costs more. Each one also works better.

- ♦ **Permanent grayscale.** Don't toggle it on and off. Leave grayscale on for a week, your eyes adapt in two days, and apps lose their last grip on you.
- ♦ **Brick or Unplug.** A small NFC tag that locks your most dangerous apps. Leave the tag at the office and your phone becomes useless for distraction. Around 60 euros once, lasts forever.
- ♦ **Dumbphone weekends.** A basic phone costs around 40 euros. Calls and texts only. Swap your SIM into it Friday night and back Sunday evening. The first weekend feels naked, the second feels like vacation.
- ♦ **Permanent dumbphone.** A minimal phone with no browser and no app store, just calls, texts, maps, and music. People who make the switch rarely go back.

TOOLS THAT FIGHT FOR YOU

Not every tech company wants to keep you stuck.

While the big platforms spend billions to hold your attention, a small group of companies builds tools that do the opposite. They help you scroll less, most are free, and all of them run in the background once you set them up. Start with the first four, add the rest when you're ready.

Opal (iPhone) or AppBlock (Android)

These two apps do one thing well: they block other apps on a schedule. No social media before 10am, no social after 9pm, no social during work hours, ever.

Set the rules once. The app enforces them every day, forever. You don't have to remember, you don't have to decide, the system runs in the background.

What you get: the willpower fight ends. The blocks just happen.

Freedom

Freedom is the cross-device option. Block a site or app on one device and it's blocked everywhere: phone, laptop, tablet, no escape hatch.

Best feature: scheduled sessions. Set Freedom to block social media every weekday from 8am to 5pm, and you'll forget it's even running until you accidentally tap an app and nothing happens.

What you get: cross-device focus without any thinking.

one-sec

When you open a blocked app, one-sec makes you wait ten seconds and take a breath before it loads. Most people just close the app instead of waiting.

Published studies show app opens drop by more than half, from one tiny pause.

What you get: far fewer app opens, with no real restriction, just a moment of friction.

Screen Time and Digital Wellbeing

Already built into your phone. Free. Shockingly underused.

Set a daily limit on your worst app: thirty minutes for one, fifteen for another. When the limit hits, the app is gone for the day. Even better, put the Screen Time widget on your homescreen so you see your usage every time you unlock. The number alone changes behavior.

What you get: screen time drops noticeably in week one.

Add These to Your Browser

Free tools. Five minutes to install. Big results.

- ♦ **News Feed Eradicator.** Replaces your social feeds with a single quiet quote. The platforms still work for messages and search, the feed just doesn't exist anymore.
- ♦ **Unhook for YouTube.** Strips the homepage feed, sidebar recommendations, shorts, and end-screen suggestions. YouTube becomes a search engine again, not a casino.
- ♦ **StayFocusd or LeechBlock.** Set a daily time limit per website. When the time is up, the site is gone for the day. StayFocusd for Chrome, LeechBlock for Firefox.
- ♦ **ClearURLs.** Strips tracking parameters from every link you click. Weaker personalization means less effective rabbit holes.

Want to Go Extreme?

For deep work, hard limits, or breaking serious patterns.

- ♦ **SelfControl (Mac, free).** Free, open-source, and merciless. Block any site for any duration. Restart your computer, change the system clock, reinstall the app, the block holds, there is no off switch until the timer ends.
- ♦ **Cold Turkey Blocker (PC and Mac).** The heavyweight of computer blockers. Once locked, you cannot unlock until the timer is done.
- ♦ **DNS-level blocking.** Set your phone or router to use a family-safe DNS provider. Social media gets blocked at the network level, working on every browser, every app, every device, for free.

THE PHONE RESET

Your phone is the main battlefield.

If you change nothing else but the way your phone is set up, your screen time will drop within a week. The four moves below take about an hour, total. After that, you'll be doing nothing different except living with a phone that doesn't pull you in. Do all four, don't skip any, the combined effect is bigger than any one move on its own.

Delete Social Apps, Use Them on Laptop Only

This is the single biggest move you can make. Delete every social app from your phone, all of them.

If you still want to use them, log in through a browser on your laptop. The web versions are slower, uglier, and harder to walk away from. Most of the scrolling dies the moment you have to sit down to do it.

Your phone goes back to being a phone. Calls, texts, maps, camera.

What you get: often the single biggest screen-time reduction of any change in this guide.

Put the Screen Time Widget on Your Homescreen

When you see how much you used your phone today, you use it less tomorrow. The number alone changes behavior, no app block, no willpower, just visibility.

Drop the Screen Time widget right on your homescreen. Make it the first thing you see when you unlock the phone.

How to: iPhone: long-press the homescreen > tap the + in the corner > search Screen Time > add the medium widget. Android: Digital Wellbeing has the same option.

What you get: built-in self-correction. Average users see a 20 to 30 percent drop within two weeks.

Strip Your Homescreen Down to Tools

Your homescreen is the first thing you see every time you unlock your phone. If it's full of colorful apps that scroll, you'll open one before you remember why you picked up the phone.

So clear it. The only things that belong on your homescreen are tools you use with intent: calendar, notes, maps, camera, weather. Nothing that scrolls, nothing that feeds you an endless stream. A homescreen full of tools quietly tells your brain the phone is for doing things, not for killing time.

How to: move everything that isn't a simple tool off the first screen. On iPhone you can drag apps into the App Library, on Android into a folder on your last page. Keep the first screen almost empty.

What you get: you reach for your phone and see tools, not temptations. The idle unlock-and-scroll loop loses its starting point.

Get Social Apps Out of Sight Completely

Here's something almost everyone experiences but nobody talks about. You unlock your phone to check the time, or reply to one message, and thirty seconds later you're deep in a feed. You didn't decide to open it, your thumb just went there on its own.

That's not a lack of willpower. It's a trained reflex, and it was built on purpose. The app sits in the same spot every day, so your thumb learns the location the way it learns a light switch. The icon glows in a color your eye is drawn to, a red badge sits on top of it, and your brain treats that little red dot as a task that needs closing. Open, glance, scroll, gone. The whole loop fires before you're even aware it started.

You can't out-discipline a reflex, but you can break the pattern it depends on. The reflex needs the app to be in a predictable, visible place, so take that away. On iPhone, remove the social apps from the home screen entirely so they only live in the App Library. Now, to open one, you have to swipe to search and type the name. Those few seconds of friction are enough for the conscious part of your brain to catch up and ask: do I actually want to do this right now? Most of the time, the answer is no.

How to: iPhone: long-press the app icon > Remove from Home Screen (not Delete). It stays installed but only appears in the App Library, reachable by swiping left past your last page and searching. Android: long-press the app > remove from home screen, or bury it in a folder on your last page.

What you get: the automatic thumb-reach stops working. You open apps on purpose, not on autopilot.

Lock It Down Further

Settings that close the gaps the four moves above leave behind.

- ♦ **Disable Face ID for distracting apps.** Force yourself to type a passcode every time you open a distracting app. The two-second pause breaks the autopilot.
- ♦ **Auto-lock in 30 seconds.** Settings > Display & Brightness > Auto-Lock. Your screen turns off the moment you stop looking.
- ♦ **Dim the lock screen.** iPhone iOS 18+: Settings > Display & Brightness > Dim Lock Screen. Your phone doesn't flash brightly when notifications arrive.
- ♦ **Notification summary.** Batch all non-urgent alerts into one or two daily summaries. Settings > Notifications > Scheduled Summary.

Want to Go Extreme?

Settings most people never find. Each one is buried in a menu. Each one makes a real difference.

- ♦ **Reduce White Point.** Pushes your screen's minimum brightness lower than the slider allows. Combined with grayscale, the screen becomes almost uninviting. Settings > Accessibility > Display & Text Size > Reduce White Point.
- ♦ **Back Tap shortcut.** Set a double or triple tap on the back of your phone to instantly toggle grayscale or activate Focus mode. Settings > Accessibility > Touch > Back Tap.
- ♦ **Action Button to Focus.** On newer iPhones, set the Action Button to toggle a work focus instead of the camera or flashlight. One physical press kills every distraction.

HABITS THAT STICK

Settings change your phone. Habits change your life.

The systems in the first three sections remove the pull. These habits fill the gap. The trick is to make each one so small, and so attached to something you already do, that it runs on autopilot: no willpower, no reminders, just a new default. Pick a moment you already have, like waking up or sitting down for dinner, and attach the new behavior to it. The smaller the behavior, the more likely it sticks.

Screen-Free First Hour

No phone before breakfast. Coffee, sunlight, a notebook, a book. You set the agenda for the day before the world sets it for you.

This one habit changes everything else. It's the difference between a day you run and a day that runs you. Hard for the first three mornings, calmer than you've felt in months by day seven.

Make it stick: when your alarm goes off, leave the phone charging and walk to the kitchen. When you sit down with coffee, open a book instead of a screen.

What you get: better focus all day, less reactive, less anxious. Hard to overstate.

Screen-Free Last Hour

Phone in the kitchen by 9pm. Read, stretch, talk, sleep. The brain needs a runway to wind down, a screen is a runway light pointing the wrong way.

Three days in, sleep quality jumps. A week in, you won't want to go back.

Make it stick: when you go to bed, leave your phone in the kitchen. When you get into bed, read one page of a book.

What you get: sleep that actually rests you. Mornings that don't hurt.

Charge Your Phone Outside the Bedroom

Your phone is the last thing you see at night and the first thing you see in the morning. Those two moments set the tone for everything in between. Scroll yourself to sleep and you sleep worse. Reach for the phone before your eyes are open and you hand your attention to the world before you've had a single thought of your own.

The fix is physical distance. Charge your phone in the kitchen or the hallway, not on the nightstand. If it isn't within arm's reach, you can't grab it half-asleep. Buy a cheap alarm clock so the phone has no reason to be by your bed.

What you get: better sleep within a week. A morning that starts on your terms, not the algorithm's.

No Phones at the Dinner Table

Phones in a basket, away from the table. Adults included. Kids will copy whatever you do. The dinner conversation comes back fast.

Make it stick: when you sit down to eat, put your phone in the basket. When you eat alone, leave your phone in another room.

What you get: connection that was there all along.

The Tiny Habit Menu

Pick one situation below, pick one habit that fits, and attach it to something you already do every day. That's it. When the habit sticks, come back and add another.

Waking up

- ♦ When my feet hit the floor, I stretch for ten seconds before I look at any screen.
- ♦ When I open the curtains, I look outside for 30 seconds.
- ♦ When I brush my teeth, I leave my phone in the bedroom.
- ♦ When I sit down with coffee, I open my notebook instead of my phone.

Waiting

- ♦ When I'm in line, I scan five things I can see around me.
- ♦ When I'm waiting, I count ten slow breaths.
- ♦ When I wait at a red light, I take three deep breaths.

Commuting

- ♦ When I get in the car, I put my phone in the glove box.
- ♦ When I sit down on the train, I put my phone in my bag.
- ♦ When I get on public transit, I look out the window for two minutes.

Coming home

- ♦ When I walk in the door, I put my phone on its spot. It stays there.
- ♦ When I've put my phone down, I spend ten minutes with the people at home before anything else.
- ♦ When I get home, I change clothes. Then I pick up an instrument, a book, or a hobby.

Watching TV

- ♦ When I turn on the TV, I put my phone in another room.
- ♦ When I sit down on the couch, my phone goes face down out of reach.
- ♦ When I feel bored during a show, I grab a puzzle book instead of my phone.

On the toilet

- ♦ When I go to the bathroom, I leave my phone outside.
- ♦ When I go to the bathroom, I grab a magazine or book from the shelf instead.

Replace the Scroll

You can't quit a habit. You can only swap it for something better. Put the replacement within reach.

- ♦ **Keep a book in every room.** Couch, kitchen counter, nightstand, bathroom shelf. Make reading the easier reach, the phone fills empty moments because nothing else is there.
- ♦ **Do something with your hands.** Cook, draw, fix something, play an instrument, garden. A hobby that occupies your hands can't share space with a phone.
- ♦ **No phone on walks, ever.** Either walk to think, or walk to listen to one thing. Don't walk while scrolling. Phantom buzzes will haunt you for a week, then stop.

Want to Go Extreme?

Bigger rituals that change weeks and months, not just hours.

- ♦ **Sunday digital sabbath.** One day a week, phone off. Or in a drawer, or in the car. Whatever it takes. Even half a day works. The hardest habit on this list. The best one.
- ♦ **30-day social detox.** Delete every social app for 30 days. Not 7, not 14, thirty. Around day 12 something snaps, you realize you weren't missing anything.
- ♦ **Annual silent weekend.** Two days, somewhere quiet, no phone. Books, walks, journaling. The most life-changing entry in this guide for the people who try it.

THE CHECKLIST

One move at a time. Tick them off as you go.

Don't try them all in a day. Do one a week, or two. Within a month or two, you'll have ticked off the whole list, and your screen time will have dropped without you trying.

Start Here

- ☐ Turn off every non-human notification
- ☐ Turn off autoplay on every video app
- ☐ Switch your phone to grayscale
- ☐ Set a black wallpaper

Reset Your Phone

- ☐ Delete social apps from your phone
- ☐ Put the Screen Time widget on your homescreen
- ☐ Strip your homescreen down to tools only
- ☐ Get social apps off your homescreen and into the App Library

Install Your Tools

- ☐ Opal or AppBlock
- ☐ Freedom on phone and laptop
- ☐ one-sec
- ☐ Screen Time daily limits on your worst apps
- ☐ News Feed Eradicator and Unhook in your browser

Build the Habits

- ☐ Screen-free first hour every day
- ☐ Screen-free last hour every day
- ☐ Charge your phone outside the bedroom
- ☐ No phones at the dinner table
- ☐ Pick one tiny habit from the menu and attach it to your day

Go Further (Optional)

- ☐ Permanent grayscale
- ☐ Reduce White Point and Back Tap shortcut
- ☐ DNS-level blocking
- ☐ Sunday digital sabbath
- ☐ 30-day social detox
- ☐ Try a dumbphone weekend

One Last Thing

Don't try to do everything at once. Pick two things from the checklist. Set them up this week. Come back and add two more.

My screen time went from five hours a day to under 90 minutes. I didn't do it all at once, I just kept adding one system at a time until the phone stopped running my life.

The first week is the hardest. By week four, the phone is just a phone again.

| *Welcome back to your life.*

If you found this useful, you'll like the Read to Succeed newsletter. Every two weeks I share the best things I'm reading, one practical idea you can use tomorrow, and whatever's actually working in my own life. No fluff, no filler, just the 1% worth your time. Subscribe at readtosucceed.kit.com.