



The four day week



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Reviewed by an adaptive enthusiast

Great books stretch us. They broaden and deepen intellect, trigger emotion, create momentum, and generate hope.

The Four-Day-Week delivers that for anyone interested in a balanced way to live and work. Written by the founder of New Zealand's Perpetual Guardian [Andrew Barnes](#), it describes the journey he led, piloting, then permanently implementing a four-day week in his organisation, as a guide for others.

It's as much a story about the global mindset and behaviour change needed to have us thrive in the [fourth industrial](#) revolution, as it is about organisational and individual productivity, profitability and wellbeing. In both cases benefits from change are substantive.

I had an overwhelming desire to lead a peaceful rebellion to shorten the [adoption curve](#).

The following are my take-homes from a book replete with all the evidence you need to confidently do things differently to get a different result in your life and work, along with a 'how to' to get you started.

Disclaimer: written by someone who helps motivated people own their time; so a convert in 'old-speak; an adaptive enthusiast in the author's.

The context

A book about an organisational change project to lift productivity, profitability, and wellbeing, set in a global context evidencing substantive, interlinked benefits at the level of the individual, family, organisation, and community:

- » Reduction in mass commuting: *reduced carbon emissions*
- » Re-dressing the gender pay gap and glass ceiling; *outcomes delivered not hours worked*
- » A case for modernising employment law: *more active intervention to protect gig-workers' rights*
- » A competitive advantage; *especially for the early adopters*
- » A warning about profound, negative unintended consequences of the gig-economy; *with solutions*
- » An evidence-based solution for the work-related stress and anxiety pandemic

The proponents and protagonists

The book is balanced.

We're reminded that flexible working arrangements and policies are not new. There are countries and organisations globally that have implemented approaches to address the issues in today's workplaces, and to realise the flow-on benefits.

And that there will always be leaders and influencers within organisations who will resist any change out of fear, doubt or genuine scepticism, or applaud change for others, but not for them; they're unique.

Alternative approaches are shared such as Jack Ma and Elon Musk who believe the only way to effect change is to work longer and harder.

And some time is spent exploring the short, medium and long term impacts of our demands as consumers for immediacy and convenience in the context of the rise of the gig-worker. The latter becoming an increasingly large and vulnerable class of worker unprotected by labour laws and treated as a consumable in an effort to drive productivity and mega profits.

The Perpetual Guardian Model

The model is described in detail for anyone wanting to pilot it themselves.

Formally structured within an organisational policy, the objective is to enable people to be the best they can be at work and at home. The model has productivity, profitability and equity as the driver for substantive well-being gains for their staff. Its ethos, outcomes rather than hours worked.

It's worker-centric, incentivised and opt-in. In return for meeting collectively agreed productivity outcomes a gifted day off a week (which can be withdrawn if measures aren't met) is provided. There are no changes to any contractual conditions, including pay and leave provisions; 100% pay-80% time-100% agreed productivity.

It has been carefully structured to legally accommodate constraints in New Zealand's employment legislation.

The implementation

Anyone involved in successful institutional change will spot tell-tale signs of good practice in the approach:

- » pilot before permanent, clarity of purpose, practical and flexible (not pie-in-the-sky), authentic partnership;
- » evidence-based frequent communication, research-backed case-study, data driven benchmarking and reporting;
- » learn as you go, continually reflect, share insights
- » Don't overthink it.

And anyone involved in helping people to own their time will spot the tell-tail signs of an enabling culture:

- » Embrace time as a scarce resource
- » Identify and address personal behaviours and habits that are barriers to productivity
- » Identify and support changes to organisational systems, and ways of working, that impede progress towards agreed outcomes
- » Work smarter not harder

Pilot learnings

A non-exhaustive snap shot of learnings:

- » A flexibility or productivity policy is primarily a test of leadership; intellectual resistance by company leaders is the biggest internal obstacle to the four-day week
- » There'll be a range of reactions which opt-in (or out) accommodates:
 - » When can we start!
 - » I'm not giving up collegial interaction, it's part of my social construct
 - » What do you mean, I can complete my work in four days not five?
 - » What on earth would I do with a gifted day off a week?
- » The success of a four-day week trial includes the willingness of staff in an open-plan environment to collaborate on low-noise, no interruption plans; *library rules*
- » Know your starting point; key measures pre-trial.
- » Not everyone will opt-in and that's ok so long as they are productive
- » A great way to understand obstacles to productivity whether the model is instituted or not.

Interesting statistics

- » A 2019 UK study of businesses operating a four-day week who collectively generated an estimated annual savings of 92 billion pounds.
- » A German study (1985-1998) comparing long (two hour) and short (40 minute) commutes with levels of happiness; the satisfaction difference was so great it would take a 40% pay rise to compensate for the longer commuters' unhappiness.
- » A study by the Institute of Psychiatry in London found persistent interruptions at work caused a 10-point drop in the IQ of the person being distracted – twice the decline found in studies on the impact of marijuana use.
- » A 2014 Furman University study of flexible working from a gender perspective found sexist discrimination persists; men more likely to be granted flexibility.
- » Using the time-tracking productivity app DeskTime, Draugiem Group found the 10% of employees with the highest productivity had regular breaks; 17 minutes for every 52 minutes worked.

The extraordinary equation of the four-day-week is that by putting productivity first, and incentivising staff to do the same, the value ripples beyond the boardroom and the balance sheet to the home lives and personal well-being of workers

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